

A Musicians Guide to Freelancing

Freelance performance experiences provide students with valuable opportunities to develop professional and career related skills.

What is a gig?

Gigs are paid and non-paid performance opportunities. The performance you present is viewed as a service to “clients” that can be purchased at a rate designated by you, the performer. Typical gig opportunities include weddings or receptions, corporate functions, and “atmosphere” entertainment.

On occasion, you may be asked to perform at no fee for local and community events. These are volunteer gigs and may be declined if you are unable to perform due to other commitments. However, you are doing a service to the community and yourself by accepting occasional volunteer gigs. You may increase the likelihood of other paid opportunities by participating in the occasional unpaid performance.

Your Responsibilities

As a student, you are representing the Conservatory during on and off-campus gigs; therefore it is imperative that all communications with clients be handled in an exceedingly professional manner. Remember to be courteous, polite and professional at all times.

For example:

- Phone messages/manner – Does it sound professional? Is the name of the ensemble or group mentioned in the greeting? Do you state the number the individual is calling?
- Preparation – Preparation includes a number of things. All of the music you plan to perform should be in order before the gig, as well as clean, 3 hole-punched, etc. If you are performing outdoors remember to bring something to secure your music.

- Transportation is up to you as the performer, so be sure that you have a reliable directions as well as a map. Inevitably you will get lost at least once... Be prepared!
- Dress – Do you and your group members look professional? Be sure to ask the client if the event is casual or formal, but remember that casual means different things to different people. Always clarify if you have a question.
- Behavior – If you are doing weddings, remember that brides (and often grooms) and their parents tend to be nervous about “the event” and will want to be reassured that all arrangements are made before the date and that everything will be handled in a professional manner. Be pleasant and easy to work with. Flexibility, to an extent, can allow for a good performer/client relationship.
- Follow up – Make sure that all of your communication occurs in a timely fashion. Return any phone calls within 48 hours and make sure that contracts are mailed to the clients as quickly as possible.

A ‘no show’ for a gig or last minute cancellation by the performer is unacceptable. Once you have accepted a gig and a contract has been signed, it is your responsibility to make sure the event occurs. If you are suddenly unable to perform, you must find a replacement. If unexpected conflicts arise it is still your responsibility to find a substitute.

Details, Details

There are some things that should always be settled *before* agreeing to a gig.

Date and time

Be certain of the exact date and time including starting and stopping times. You must be able to assuredly say that all members or your group are available for the dates and times indicated. You should also plan to arrive at least a half an hour before the agreed upon start time.

Contact Information

One person in an ensemble should handle all of the dealings with the client, including how to reach each other as well as the correct spelling and pronunciation of names and addresses.

Set-up

This is crucial and should be nailed down before agreeing to the gig. Find out where you’ll be playing, and ask about whatever your specific group needs - including lighting, seating, piano tuning, etc.

Bios

Bios are a critical part of marketing yourself and explaining to your audience and client who you are, what your previous experiences and accomplishments are and what kind of performance you or your ensemble can provide for them. You should give your bio to the client as soon as they express interest in you for a gig.

Repertoire

In advance of participating in gigs be aware of what type of music you or your ensemble perform. It is important to be able to give your client various examples of the repertoire that you have at your disposal. Ask about specific requests by the client including range, genre and type. However, if the client requests something that you absolutely cannot or will not deliver it would be best to decline the gig. In doing so you will not disappoint the client or compromise your character or reputation.

If you still have questions you might want to speak with your teacher or coach.

Be sure to have plenty of music prepared in the event you are asked or want to play “overtime” and make sure to review the intended order of play.

Contracts

Yes, a contract is a must. It ensures that you and the client have a clear understanding about the exact requirements/expectations of the job. Upon verbal agreement, send two signed copies of your contract to the client. The client will then sign both, retain one and send the other copy back to you. (Please see attached example.)

Negotiating Fees and Payment

It is your responsibility to set your rates and negotiate with the client. All musicians should have an hourly rate to quote potential clients. Be flexible, but always have a rock bottom fee. It is important to take into account the market and quality of services provided. Don’t forget to include compensation for traveling distances. (The suggested rate for Oberlin students is *approximately* \$75 a person per gig.)

Typically, musicians ask for a deposit (approx. 50%), so that if the gig is cancelled you at least get half of the fee. However, if **you** cancel the gig, the deposit must be returned to the client in full. Additionally, make sure you know by whom, when, and how you will be paid. Immediately after the gig is usually the best, but be sure to specify in the contract how payment will be received (cash, check, or money order).

Also, you may want to include or at least think through “overtime” pay. It is possible that you may be asked to continue past your end time.

Additional Considerations

- Arrive early and get explicit directions to the gig, allowing time for getting lost, and have a good and trustworthy map on hand at all times. Don’t forget the client is always right and you may have to deal with anxious clients who are worrying about a million other details.
- Be flexible and easy to work with. It is customary to call the client a week before the gig to make a final confirmation and deal with any last minute details.

- It is not unusual for prospective clients to expect to hear a sample of your work before they engage you, so you may want to be able to provide them with a tape or cd of your playing. Marketing yourself is a major part of freelancing.
- For ensemble members: open, constant, and predetermined means of communication is highly suggested. It is also recommended that you create a collective/joint calendar. Begin by first eliminating the dates people are unavailable to perform. This cuts down on the time needed to contact all members to see if their schedules work for a particular event.
- It is highly recommended that you accept or decline a gig within 48 hours of its offer. **It’s ok to say no!** You do not have to feel obligated to accept a gig. Take the ones that are relevant to your style and genre, and those that fit your schedule.

If you have questions (what music is appropriate, what fees are fair, how to improve your bio, etc.) you may want to speak with your studio teacher or contact the Office of Career Services Conservatory Resource Center.

Finally, enjoy yourself and project that image to the event attendees.