NEC Voice Department Prescreening Recording Guidelines 2021

We have created this document to help you prepare for your prescreen video recording session. You do not need to spend thousands of dollars on equipment or hire a professional videographer. Following these recommendations will save you time and energy and help us see what matters the most: your artistry.

Recording setting
We want to hear how your voice sounds in a space and learn how you sing when you know your voice is filling that room.

Ideally, you will:
- Select a large room with a high ceiling (church sanctuary or fellowship hall, school auditorium, large space in your home, etc.)
- If you must record in a smaller space, please place the microphone as far from walls or windows as possible. Please keep in mind that the closer you are to a wall or corner, the warmer and louder your voice will sound.
- Listen quietly in the space and turn off any devices or machines that are adding noise
- Close doors and windows
- Silence all electronics
- Select lighting that illuminates from the front rather than above or behind
- If you have the flexibility of a two point lighting set up, light from the front on the left and right. Make one light brighter than the other.
- If you have the flexibility of a three point lighting set up, add an up light from behind
- Do not discount the value of natural light, and consider what time of day you will record
- Consider your background. Remove unnecessary visual clutter if possible.

Important:
- Do not sing in a dead studio space, sing directly into a studio microphone, or add reverberation digitally
- Do not use more than one camera (please use only one camera in a fixed position)
- Do not edit the audio or video in any way (you may record audio and video with separate devices for combination later). Only complete takes per song or aria are acceptable.

Microphone and Camera Placement
An all-in-one video and audio recorder can be used for this recording. Yet, please keep in mind that the ideal camera placement is never the ideal microphone placement. Generally speaking, microphones sound better further away than we prefer cameras to be placed.

The best way to find the ideal microphone placement is to use your ears:
- Mark out a line on the floor with masking tape starting a few feet in front of where you will stand, and extending into the “audience” space perpendicular to the downstage line of your “stage.”
- Mark increments every 3 feet (1 meter) on the tape.
- Place the microphone in the closest position and set your microphone level so it does not distort
- Record a short excerpt from your repertory
- Move the microphone to the next 3 feet (1 meter) mark and announce it on the recording (e.g., “second position,” or “6 ft (2 m) back”); record the same short excerpt.
- Continue to do this until you have checked four or five positions
- Plug headphones into your device and listen back
- There will be a position that is too much direct sound, and a position that is too much room sound. Place the microphones between these extremes. Reset your microphone level in this new position.
- Please keep in mind that the further back the microphones are, the quieter you will be on the recording. Turn the playback volume up to compensate for this. We often prefer louder sounds, but this exercise is about the sound of your voice in the room. You will make your voice louder later by setting your microphone input level.
The best camera position is:

- If using an all in one video and audio recording device, the best place for the camera is where the audio sounds best. All in one devices are inherently limited in this way.
- If using a separate camera, please avoid both zooming all the way in and also zooming out to the point that you waste space in the frame
- Ideally both you and the pianist are fully in the frame so that we see you performing with your entire self

Singer Placement
Please take the time to experiment with where you stand relative to the piano. Microphones capture sound differently than human ears do. Sometimes taking a step forward or a step back can dramatically improve the balance between your voice and the piano. If you are singing with a track, take the time to test the balance and placement of the speaker and your voice. Generally speaking, the further a sound source is from the mic, the quieter it will be and the more room sound will be captured.

Setting Audio Levels
Digital audio recorders offer a dynamic range based on the bit depth. At 16 bits (commercial CDs), you have a range of about 96 dB. This is a huge dynamic range, appropriate for most audition videos. Your goal is to make sure that your loudest moments are less intense than the top of that range, and that your quietest moments are more intense than the bottom of that range.

Most audio recording devices have an input volume or gain setting. Please adjust this until your loudest moments (may not be your highest notes) fall somewhere between -12 and -18 dB on your input meter. If your device is only color coded, this usually corresponds to somewhere between the top of the green and the start of the yellow. You can always increase the overall audio level (normalize) after the fact in Audacity or another digital audio workstation. This does not count as editing. We suggest normalizing no louder than -6 dB. It is very challenging to fix a distorted recording (input level hit above the red). Avoid using a recording device that uses automatic gain (input volume) control. If you are not sure whether your device does this, sing a crescendo that starts very quiet and peaks at a high intensity. Listen back and evaluate whether the automatic gain control changes your crescendo or not.

If Recording Audio and Video Separately
Some applicants record video on a separate device than their audio and later combine the results. This can work well. Please make sure to record your audio at 48 kHz rather than 44.1 kHz. In Audacity, this is set in a dropdown in the lower left corner of the project window. In Logic, this is set in File  Project Settings  Audio  Sample rate. Other audio software will offer this option and you may need to search online for a walkthrough. Please note that Garageband only records at 44.1 kHz. Please include a clap at the beginning of each take. This will help you line up the audio on your video device and the nicer audio you recorded separately (a clap appears as a sudden spike in the audio waveform; line up both spikes visually). There are numerous video editing apps that will allow you to combine the audio and video after the fact. Popular options include iMovie, Davinci Resolve, Adobe Premier, Screenflow, and Final Cut Pro. When you export the final video, please select a preset that prioritizes audio quality.

Final Details
If you are able, please put a title slide or text overlay at the beginning of each video indicating your name and the name of the work. If this is challenging, please say your name and the name of the work before you sing. Please make sure that you listen back to all of your videos before submitting. Mistakes happen when exporting videos.

We have no specific dress requirements, but we will assume that the way you present yourself reflects your current understanding of how professionals present themselves in the music industry. Please feel free to dress in accordance with your gender expression or identity regardless of your voice type or fach.

We know you have worked very hard for many years to get to the point when you will make this video. Please know that we want you to succeed, and that we want to hear everything you have to offer. This is not a do or die moment. This is a chance to show us who you already are as an artist. We know you’ll be great!