



# HAVE YOU RECORDED YOUR STUDENTS YET?

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**M**any music teachers record their students only during performances. With the widespread availability of recording apps for phones, tablets, and laptops, recording your music students can (and should) be a frequent activity. Many older students carry devices with recording capability. Depending on the policy at your school, you can capitalize on your students' attachment to technology, and use this digital power to help them become stronger musicians.

## *Why Record Your Students?*

### **Documentation for SGO's**

Since we are required to track and document student progress toward defined benchmarks, recording pre- and post-assessments can make life easier. Not only will you have this audio resource to document areas of growth, but you will have the option to score the performance assessments without having the students in the room. The audio or video archive you are building can provide the basis for a multi-year digital portfolio of each student, and can serve as an excellent resource during parent-teacher conferences.

### **Practice Tracks**

Not so long ago, many educators spent hours developing practice tracks outside of class time. Now, with the push of a button, you can record part of a rehearsal, then post it online for independent student practice with just a few clicks. In a "Bring-Your-Own-Device" (BYOD) environment, you can permit students to record the rehearsal for themselves. El-

ementary teachers should feel empowered to use recording technology to post folk songs they are singing with general music students. Parents will reinforce the music students are learning in school if they have easy access to it.

### **Progress Recordings**

Every teacher or conductor has heard moments of incredible beauty, as well as agonizing musical problems and errors. You have the power to share those moments with your students by pressing the record button. Playing back musical errors can paint a picture that illustrates clearly for students the imperative for correction and improvement. By recording repertoire in progress, students can hear for themselves the tremendous progress made from the first weeks of rehearsal until the days leading up to the concert.

### **Assessment**

Most of us have students who perform well in a group, but freeze up when performing solo. Digital recording tools can capture performance for assessment in an authentic way--when students are in their regular musical setting. By placing a recording device on a music stand in the middle of the ensemble or a quality microphone centrally located in a general music class, we can capture authentic music performance. With younger students, passively recording the class allows the teacher to assess individual progress through singing and rhythm games without the specter of the grade book interrupting the natural flow of class.

## *How To Get Started*

Start with the technology tools you have, and start small! Record one class, and use it for your own reflection and planning. Or play it back for the students, then solicit feedback. Perhaps start by assigning a simple recording task to a small set of students as a trial run, like during a sectional. Try using a few devices (like phones, tablets or laptops) to record from different places in the room simultaneously while students are positioned in sections.

### **Audio Or Video?**

Audio recording is a great starting place, and an essential tool for music teachers. The decision to record video depends on your situation. For instrumental teachers, video may be key in assessing technique like fingering or bowing. For vocal teachers, video captures facial expression and details on vowel formation. One major consideration in capturing video is student privacy. Refer to your school policy before capturing video to ensure student privacy & confidentiality.

### **Handheld Digital Recorders**

There are many fine choices of audio or "field recorders" available. Most high quality hand-held digital recorders have very good stereo microphones built in, and will encode as both .wav and .mp3. These recorders connect to a computer via USB cable, and some have removable SD cards. Several models to check out include: Tascam DR-05 about \$85; Yamaha Pocketracker PR 7 about \$140; Zoom H4N - under \$200.

## USB Microphones

By connecting a quality USB microphone to any computer (even an old Windows computer) you can record using the free Audacity software. Audacity is simple to use for recording and editing. With the free LAME plug-in, exporting to mp3 is one click away. Programs like GarageBand or Mixcraft can give you even more editing and production capabilities. If you record an entire class using software, you can easily see how much time was spent making music vs. teacher talk time. Scroll through the visual representation of the waveform—the music making time will have a much taller waveform due to the higher volume level. If you choose to record an entire rehearsal, editing out samples to share with students requires only simple editing skill. Recommended USB mics: Blue Snowball (\$50), Samson Meteor (\$70), Blue Yeti (\$110).

## Mobile And Web-Based Tools

Practically every current cell phone or tablet has audio and video recording capability. With access to any computer and the Internet, anyone can use a free online service like Vocaroo.com or a subscription service like *MusicFirst* to capture, save, email, or embed a basic recording. The built in microphones on most devices are not very high quality, but are acceptable for most progress and assessment recordings.

Students can hold or place their own device on a music stand in front of them, and record during class or rehearsal. This method will give you an authentic recording, with the student submitting the recording louder than the surrounding ensemble. If you use a subscription-based online classroom like *Moodle*, *Edmodo*, *Google Classroom*, or *MusicFirst*, students can upload directly to that website. As an alternative, ask students to save to *Google Drive* and share with you, or save to a dedicated *Dropbox*.

If you're looking for better sound quality than the mic built into most mobile devices, consider getting an external microphone. Check out the Zoom iQ7 (\$99), Shure Motiv mics (starting at \$149), and iRig Mic Studio (\$149).

## Video Recording

Strategies for video recording are much like those for audio, though protecting file security and student identity are even more important. Guard against asking students to post videos on a public *YouTube* channel. If you or your students do not have a dedicated video camera, start with the camera built into a phone, tablet, or laptop. Many students are comfortable using their own phones to make “selfie” videos, and welcome the idea of recording one another in a practice room, corner of the music classroom, or outside of school.

Teachers of ensemble classes can assign performance assessments to be completed outside of class time. Students can make the recordings at home or in a school practice area. By requiring a video rather than just an audio file for an assessment completed outside of class time, you can be assured that the student in the video is making the accompanying audio, and gain valuable information about technique.

Looking for an easy to use, not-too-expensive video camera? Check out the Sony Handicam HDR-CX240 (\$180), Zoom Q4 (\$300), or Canon Vixia HF R300 (\$375).

## Speakers

Recording your students in class for immediate feedback, reflection, and self assessment is pointless without some decent speakers. Depending on the size of your room, a standard stereo system will suffice as long as you have a 1/8-inch stereo cable to plug into the headphone port on the recording device. Hopefully, you will already have an audio system in your classroom. If not, check with your supervisor, principal, or A/V person about gear that might already be available. Some easy options if you do need to make a funding request: Behringer Eurolive BC205D single speaker/mono (\$199), or JBL EON612 two-way speaker system (\$399). In the event that you need a classroom system that will work as a portable system for larger spaces too, consider the Fender Passport series (starting at \$399).

## File Storage/Management

File storage and security must be a top priority. You must be able find the recordings of the students when you need them, and keep them on a secure server or external hard drive. Having students email you files needs to be a last resort! Ask them to save to dedicated school server space or to a cloud based service like Google Drive or Dropbox to share the files with you. The best option is to use an online classroom like GoogleClassroom, Moodle, Edmodo, or MusicFirst. This way, you will be able to access their work in a secure environment that you can control. One huge added benefit to MusicFirst: the audio recording tool is built into the online classroom.

### *You're The Teacher!* *Set Clear Expectations.*

Find ways to bridge the digital divide using as many school-owned recording devices as possible. You may be pleasantly surprised by the response you receive when asking a principal or media specialist for help locating devices, especially when you mention that they are needed for assessment, SGO's, and for your professional reflection and planning.

As in all situations, use your professional discretion. You call the shots about when to record, which recordings to share with students and parents, and when to play recordings for the entire class or ensemble. In a BYOD environment, you still can control when students may or may not have their devices out and available for use. Your students are digital natives who can provide valuable assistance. Value their tech savvy and empower them to find ways to make capturing recordings easier. But remember, you are the teacher. Clarity of purpose, class management, and an atmosphere of respect are key to success at all times.

