

A photograph of two women in the foreground, smiling and raising their arms in celebration. They are wearing black sequined halter-neck tops with a colorful beaded belt and full, bright red skirts. The woman on the left is holding a flute. In the background, other orchestra members are visible, including a man playing a violin and a woman playing a harp. The setting is a concert hall with warm lighting.

TSO Toronto Symphony
Orchestra

Toolkit & Workbook

Moments

HOW TO PREPARE

BEFORE YOUR PERFORMANCE

- 1 Identify Your Goal
- 2 Plan & Practise
- 3 Motivate Yourself
- 4 Visualize Success

DURING YOUR PERFORMANCE

- 5 Be Your Own Champion
- 6 Manage Stress & Anxiety
- 7 Focus on Now
- 8 Trust Your Hard Work

AFTER YOUR PERFORMANCE

- 9 Celebrate & Review

STEP ZERO

START ON THE RIGHT NOTE

This Toolkit & Workbook will help you build the skills you need to perform at your best, but this can only be done with a solid foundation. Here is a checklist of important habits. If you aren't able to check all of them, consider establishing these as your first priority!

- ☐ I regularly get the sleep I need.
- ☐ I regularly eat healthy foods.
- ☐ I regularly exercise.
- ☐ I regularly take time to relax.
- ☐ I regularly talk with family or friends.

Ready? Here we go!



Daniel Bartholomew-Poyser
TSO Barrett Principal Education Conductor
& Community Ambassador

STEP ONE

IDENTIFY YOUR GOAL

“I was a bit scared by how many fast notes there were, and how many acrobatic, virtuosic passages there were, and my first thought was, ‘Oh boy, am I going to be able to do this? I need to start working on this as soon as possible.’”

– Eric Abramovitz
TSO Principal Clarinet

EVERYONE has upcoming challenges that make them feel nervous – even professional musicians at the TSO. You might feel the same way before a test, a sports competition, a job interview, or an important performance. It’s normal to feel anxious when we put ourselves in a position to be judged, but thankfully, there are ways to prepare for these situations.

Let’s look at a moment in your life!

1

What is an upcoming challenge that will test your skills?

For example: a school exam, a driving test, a sports competition, a job interview, a performance...

2

What specific skills do you need to succeed?

For example: understanding a math concept, being able to parallel park, having good accuracy, being professional, memorizing my part...

3

Circle the three skills where you have the most room for improvement. These are your major goals!

IDENTIFY YOUR GOAL

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Believe you can improve with practice.
 - Accept that mistakes are part of learning.
You can either focus on avoiding mistakes or you can focus on learning, but you can't do both.
 - Remember that being bad at something is the first step to being good at something.
 - Start now and start anywhere.
 - Aim for progress, not perfection.
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“When I got the music for this piece, I started to scan all of the music and decided where I really wanted to start. And, naturally for me, I’m going to start at the trickiest, most exposed passage.”

– Joe Kelly
TSO Percussion/Assistant Principal Timpani



Diana Leung
TSO Viola

STEP TWO

PLAN & PRACTISE

“In my practice room, I try to teach my brain each note—one at a time—and put them together in little pairs, rather than trying to make it in one nine-note problem passage.”

– Gabriel Radford
TSO Horn

IN THE *Moments* concert, we follow the journey of three musicians – Eric Abramovitz, Hingyi Cui, and Eri Kosaka. When they are first learning their solos, they start by breaking down the task into smaller pieces.

Try doing the same yourself!

Take a major goal you circled in question #2 and subdivide it into smaller pieces. What are the smaller, minor goals that you will achieve to get to your bigger, major goal?

For example:

Major Goal: *Understanding a math concept*

Minor Goals:

- *I will create a space free of distractions so I can focus on learning.*
- *I will review my notes after class and pinpoint what I still don't understand.*
- *I will get help from a person who understands the problem.*
- *I will dedicate X minutes every day to studying math.*
- *I will ask someone to quiz me to check my understanding.*

Major Goal:

Minor Goals:

PLAN & PRACTISE

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Make your goals concise and achievable.
 - Space out your practice time regularly in your schedule rather than cramming.
 - Test yourself throughout your learning process, not just at the end. The simple act of trying to recall what you've learned will help you absorb the information.
 - Keep challenging yourself to improve over yesterday.
-

“It’s just about the consistency. Slowly learning the music. Practising slowly. Practising with a metronome. You know, all that kind of ‘boring’ stuff, which is unfortunately necessary. And hopefully, after all that, it gets me confident and to the point where I feel ready to perform.”

– Eric Abramovitz
TSO Principal Clarinet



Yolanda Bruno
TSO Violin

STEP THREE

MOTIVATE YOURSELF

“When I was 6, I saw a violinist play a concerto on the stage, and that’s when I thought, ‘I have to start this instrument.’”

– Eri Kosaka
TSO Principal Second Violin

STARTING to learn something new is difficult, and sticking with it can be even harder. Reaching your goals takes motivation, persistence, and commitment. Eric, Hingyi, and Eri each found different ways to stay motivated on their musical journeys.

How will you find yours?

5

Your own internal motivation is what will carry you through the biggest challenges. Forget what others think – why do you, personally, want to succeed at this?

Display this reason in your practice area.

6

Who inspires you? Think of three heroes or role models that you respect the most, and why.

MOTIVATE YOURSELF

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Discover what you love, and use visual triggers, like displaying your goals, to stay motivated.
- Mark a calendar on days when you complete your goals as planned.
- See the excellence of others as something to aspire to, but don't compare your progress. Everyone's learning journey is different.

“I have to be in the right state of mind to start practising and studying music. I turn off my phone and put it far away from me so that I won't be distracted. I'll sit for a few minutes, go through everything I want to accomplish in the next hour, and connect with what excites me about it. I love it when I get into a space where I forget about the outside world.”

– Daniel Bartholomew-Poyser
TSO Barrett Principal Education Conductor &
Community Ambassador



Eric Abramovitz
TSO Principal Clarinet

STEP FOUR

VISUALIZE SUCCESS

“Leading up to a performance, a useful exercise for me is to create the entire experience of the performance in my mind. Planning out everything helps to calm me down because I eliminate any unknown things that can give me stress on the day of. As I do that more and more, I feel like I’ve already lived this moment by the time I actually get to the performance.”

– Eric Abramovitz
TSO Principal Clarinet

VISUALIZATION is a powerful tool. It is normally done within your imagination, but, for the sake of this exercise, you’ll be writing down your answers.

Let’s practise visualizing

IMAGINE yourself in the first-person perspective, seeing through your own eyes as you go through the experience and perform at your best.

7

“What do I see and hear around me when it’s time to begin?”

8

“What am I doing, thinking, and feeling that helps me perform at my best?”

VISUALIZE SUCCESS

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Practise visualization 15 minutes a day to improve this ability.
- Eliminate as many unknowns as you can by gathering real data. For example, visit the place where your performance will happen so you know what it looks like.
- Visualize your success to help yourself achieve it. If you can see it clearly in your mind, it will feel like something you can really accomplish.

“To play well on stage, 90% of the work is in the preparation.”

– Eri Kosaka
TSO Principal Second Violin



Eri Kosaka
TSO Principal Second Violin

STEP FIVE

BE YOUR OWN CHAMPION

“When you’re on stage, avoid negative phrases, like, ‘Don’t play too fast. Don’t get nervous. Don’t be tense.’ Somehow, in the unconscious mind, the word ‘don’t’ disappears. So they become, ‘Play fast,’ or, ‘Be tense.’ Instead, I could say, ‘Use a relaxed tempo. Relax here. Relax on this beat...”

– Eri Kosaka
TSO Principal Second Violin

AS PART OF the learning process, you have to critique yourself to find areas for improvement, but you need to be careful. It is easy to slip into negative or self-defeating thoughts. Be prepared to counter these automatic negative thoughts whenever they pop into your head!

Find your own way to stay positive

9

What are the three qualities you appreciate most about yourself?

10

What accomplishment are you the most proud of, and why?

11

Write some examples of self-defeating negative thoughts you have had. Think of a positive statement to counter each one.

For example:

"I'm terrible. I should quit." → "I'm learning. I am getting better."

"I can't do it." → "I am going to try my best."

BE YOUR OWN CHAMPION

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Counter or interrupt negative self-talk with positive self-talk.
 - When facing adversity, problem-solve constructive actions you can take to improve your situation.
 - Be kind to yourself.
-

“Despite the hours of preparation and all the practice, it’s still very intimidating to walk out on the stage, and I’ve got this negative voice inside my head that is saying, ‘You’re going to fail. You’re not going to be able to do it. You’re going to make mistakes.’ And that can be a very difficult feeling to perform with. What gave me a lot of encouragement is that, as I got to know other musicians and spoke with them, I realized that this is a kind of universal experience.”

– Eric Abramovitz
TSO Principal Clarinet



Joseph Kelly
TSO Percussion/Assistant Principal Timpani

STEP SIX

MANAGE STRESS & ANXIETY

“One of the most challenging things for me as a percussionist is that every part that I play is a solo part. I don’t have a section of snare drums or a section of crash cymbals. When I have that note I need to play, it’s just up to me, to make it happen the way I want it to happen, and that can be very stressful at times.”

– Joseph Kelly

TSO Percussion/Assistant Principal Timpani

EVERYONE experiences performance anxiety, but the effects on our bodies vary. Thankfully, what doesn’t vary are the solutions to anxiety, which can be as simple as breathing.

How does pressure feel to you?

12

What do you feel in your body when you are feeling stress?

For example: my mouth gets dry, my heart rate increases...

13

What could you do to counteract these physical effects of stress?

For example: I could have a bottle of water to drink when my mouth is dry. I can take slow breaths to lower my heart rate...

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**Try to turn anxious energy into excitement.
What makes this challenge an opportunity to do something you care about?**

MANAGE STRESS & ANXIETY

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Know that moderate performance anxiety is normal and your body's way of getting ready.
- Do your best, and be reassured that you will either succeed or you will learn something.
- Try the “box breathing” exercise right now, and whenever you feel anxious: breathe in for four seconds, hold for four seconds, breathe out for four seconds, and hold for four seconds. Repeat four times.

“We’re human. Mistakes happen. When you listen to a recording, it’s all edited. When you hear it live, anything can happen, and that’s what makes it exciting.”

– Steven Woomert
TSO Principal Trumpet



Audrey Good
TSO Horn

STEP SEVEN

FOCUS ON NOW

“If you continue to dwell on the past, whether it was a great moment or it didn’t go the way you wanted it to, you’re out of the moment, you’re out of the present, and all of a sudden, you aren’t creating music anymore, you’re just stuck in the past. Whatever happens, you just have to keep flowing with time.”

– **Audrey Good**
TSO Horn

IN THE *Moments* concert, TSO musicians speak about how they stay focused, and how important being present is to staying in sync as an orchestra.

Let’s think about what to think

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During your performance, what is NOT under your control?

For example: what people think, what the weather is like, how well other people are performing...

16

During your performance, what IS in your control? What should you focus on to perform at your best?

*For example: my posture → focus on proper form
my breathing → focus on slow, steady breaths
my technique → focus on the skills I've practised*

CHAPTER

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Focus on your present actions, not the future outcome you fear. Think, “What should I do next?” instead of, “Am I going to fail?”
- Stay on your current task. If you are practising, think only about practising. If you are performing, think only about performing.
- Wait until afterward to think about other things that might be worrying you, like your mistakes. If you start reflecting on mistakes during your performance, you will make even more of them.

“If you mess up, you forget about it and keep looking forward, to do what you are trained to do.”

– Steven Woomert
TSO Principal Trumpet



Hugo Lee
TSO Oboe

STEP EIGHT

TRUST YOUR HARD WORK

“When the mind is blank, there is space for negative thoughts. Instead of going on stage blank-minded, I tell myself what to think about. Instead of focusing on what I do, I think about how the music should sound.”

– Eri Kosaka
TSO Principal Second Violin

WHEN THEIR MOMENT in the spotlight finally arrives, there’s nothing that Eric, Hingyi, and Eri can do but trust the work they’ve put in, and do their best.

Trust all that you’ve done

WHEN YOU ARE about to perform, try answering the following question in your head.

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“What are all the things I have done to prepare for this moment?”

These are the reasons you are more likely to succeed.

TRUST YOUR HARD WORK

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Remind yourself of everything you've done in preparation for your moment to counter any self-doubt.
- Use all the tools you've learned so far to stay positive.
- Act with confidence.
- Do your best.

“At the end of the day, nothing bad is going to happen if you don't nail it, but—if you practise and prepare really well—you are going to nail it.”

– Miles Haskins
TSO Bass Clarinet & Clarinet



Kelly Zimba Lukić
TSO Principal Flute

Heidi Elise Bearcroft
TSO Principal Harp

STEP NINE

CELEBRATE & REVIEW

“After the concert is over, I personally do take time to remember how great that felt, and wonder if the audience really enjoyed that moment as much as I did, or in the same way that I did.”

– Audrey Good
TSO Horn

EVEN WHEN they succeed, TSO musicians still take time to reflect on their achievements and seek out ways to improve. Learning is a lifelong process! Start a daily journal to keep track of your progress. On the next page, you’ll find sample questions you can ask yourself every day.

Reflect on your moment

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“What did I achieve today?”

19

“Where do I have the most room for improvement?”

20

“What should I do next to improve?”

CELEBRATE & REVIEW

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Take the time after your performance to reflect.
- Celebrate the progress you've made. Don't measure your self-worth by how well you do in a single performance.
- Remember, learning is a lifelong process. You are aiming for progress, not perfection.

“When it’s going really well, it feels truly incredible. When you are landing those notes in the right place, it’s one of the greatest feelings that I know.”

– Joseph Kelly
TSO Percussion/Assistant Principal Timpani

