

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF MUSIC



Preparing for Your First Lesson

A practical first-lesson guide for parents, young learners and adult beginners

Lessons in Music, Skills for Life

RES-002 | VERSION 1.0 | PUBLIC RESOURCE

A GSofM Academy Resource

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Publication information

A controlled resource for families preparing for their first music lesson.

Field	Record
Document ID	RES-002
Title	Preparing for Your First Lesson
Subtitle	A practical first-lesson guide for parents, young learners and adult beginners
Version	1.0
Status	Public Resource
Owner	The Glasgow School of Music
Publication date	29 June 2026
Review cycle	Annual, or after major Academy, onboarding or policy changes
Audience	Parents, guardians, young learners and adult beginners

DESIGN NOTE

This edition uses a logo-and-quote publication style. Images are never stretched; any image use must preserve its original aspect ratio.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of lesson one

A first lesson should feel calm, clear and manageable. Preparation helps the student arrive ready to learn rather than worried about what might happen.

WHAT THE FIRST LESSON IS

- A starting point for the teacher and student.
- A chance to understand experience, confidence and goals.
- A practical introduction to safe technique or basic musical activity.
- A way to set clear next steps for home practice.

WHAT IT IS NOT

- It is not an exam.
- It is not a performance audition for beginners.
- It is not a judgement on long-term potential.
- It should not be made stressful through over-preparation.

KEY PRINCIPLE

A first lesson is not a test. It is the beginning of the right teaching plan.

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Guide structure

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What to know before arriving

- 02** **What to bring**
Practical items, instruments and information

- 03** **Preparing the student**
Reducing nerves and setting expectations

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- 05** **After the lesson**
Practice, next steps and communication

- 06** **Checklists**
Parent, student and first-week action lists

SECTION 01



Before the Lesson

Good preparation is simple. Families need practical clarity, realistic expectations and a calm arrival plan.

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BEFORE THE LESSON

The right mindset

Students do not need to know everything before lesson one. The first lesson exists because the teacher needs to learn where the student is starting from.

DO NOT OVER-PREPARE

Avoid forcing a child to practise for hours before the first lesson. It can make the lesson feel like a test and increase anxiety.

DO PREPARE CALMLY

Explain that the teacher will help them, listen to them and choose suitable next steps. Confidence matters more than polish.

USEFUL FIRST-LESSON EXPECTATIONS

- The teacher may ask what music the student likes and why they want lessons.
- The teacher may check rhythm, listening, posture, hand position, breathing or general musical awareness.
- Beginners may start with very simple patterns, sounds or exercises.
- Experienced students may be asked to play or sing something familiar.
- The lesson should end with clear advice on what to practise next.

BEFORE THE LESSON

Confirm the practical details

Most first-lesson stress comes from avoidable uncertainty: time, place, teacher, instrument, parking, access and what to bring.

TIME

Confirm the exact lesson time and expected arrival time.

TEACHER

Check the teacher name and lesson type.

LOCATION

Know the building entrance and travel plan.

DURATION

Know whether the lesson is 30, 45 or 60 minutes.

FORMAT

Confirm whether the lesson is in-person or online.

CONTACT

Keep school contact details available in case of delay.

ARRIVAL RULE

Arrive a few minutes early, but not excessively early. A calm five-minute buffer is usually enough.

BEFORE THE LESSON

Information worth sharing

The first lesson is more useful when the teacher has a basic picture of the student.

HELPFUL BACKGROUND

- Previous lessons, if any.
- Any instrument or singing experience.
- Music the student enjoys.
- Reading ability or theory knowledge.
- Any upcoming exams or goals.
- Confidence, nerves or support needs that may help the teacher.

DO NOT OVER-EXPLAIN

- You do not need a long biography.
- A few useful details are enough.
- Private medical or learning information should only be shared where it helps teaching and support.
- Keep the focus on what helps the student learn safely and confidently.

GOOD WORDING

A useful starting sentence is: "This is their first formal lesson. They enjoy music, but we are not sure what level they are yet."

SECTION 02



What to Bring

The right items make the first lesson easier, but the list should remain practical and light.

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WHAT TO BRING

The basic first-lesson kit

The exact items depend on the instrument, but most students benefit from a small, consistent lesson kit.

NOTEBOOK

For lesson notes, practice targets and questions.

PENCIL

Better than pen for music marking and corrections.

WATER

Especially important for singing and longer lessons.

MUSIC

Any current book or piece if the student already has one.

INSTRUMENT

For portable instruments where required.

QUESTIONS

One or two things the student or parent wants to ask.

KEEP IT MANAGEABLE

A first lesson bag should support learning, not become another source of pressure. Simple is better.

WHAT TO BRING

Instrument-specific notes

Different lesson types require different preparation. When unsure, ask the school before buying anything expensive.

Lesson type	Preparation note
Piano	No instrument needs to be brought. Bring any current music book or prior exam material.
Singing	Bring water. Avoid arriving with a tired voice after shouting, illness or heavy vocal use.
Guitar	Bring the guitar if owned, plus plectrum, capo or tuner if already used.
Strings	Bring the instrument, bow, shoulder rest or spike stop where relevant, and any current book.
Woodwind	Bring instrument, reeds where relevant, cleaning materials and current music.
Drums	Bring sticks if owned. A full kit is not required for the first lesson.
Theory	Bring any previous theory book or exam result if applicable.

WHAT TO BRING

If the lesson is online

Online lessons work best when the technical setup is handled before the teacher joins.

SETUP CHECKLIST

- Device charged and plugged in.
- Camera shows student and instrument clearly.
- Room is quiet enough for the teacher to hear.
- Music stand or screen is visible.
- Notebook and pencil nearby.
- Link and login checked before the lesson.

PARENT ROLE ONLINE

- Help with setup at the start.
- Stay nearby for younger students.
- Avoid answering for the student unless asked.
- Let the teacher lead once the lesson begins.
- Check final practice instructions at the end if needed.

ONLINE PRINCIPLE

The teacher should be able to see posture, hear sound clearly and communicate without repeated technical interruption.

SECTION 03



Preparing the Student

The best preparation reduces pressure. It gives the student permission to begin as a learner.

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PREPARING THE STUDENT

What to say beforehand

The language used before a first lesson can either calm the student or make the lesson feel like a test.

HELPFUL LANGUAGE

- "The teacher is there to help you."
- "You do not need to know everything."
- "It is fine to make mistakes."
- "Try your best and listen carefully."
- "You can ask questions."

AVOID SAYING

- "Show them how good you are."
- "Do not get anything wrong."
- "This is expensive, so concentrate."
- "Your sibling was better at this."
- "You have to impress the teacher."

TONE MATTERS

The student should arrive feeling curious and supported, not inspected.

PREPARING THE STUDENT

If the student is nervous

Nerves are normal. The aim is not to remove every worry, but to make the situation predictable enough to begin.

01 Name the feeling without making it dramatic.

02 Explain what will probably happen in the first few minutes.

03 Arrive with enough time to settle.

04 Let the teacher know if the student may need a gentle start.

05 Praise the act of attending and trying, not only the musical result.

DO NOT PROMISE PERFECTION

Avoid promising that everything will be easy. Promise that the teacher will help them take the next step.

PREPARING THE STUDENT

Adult beginners

Adult learners often bring different anxieties: embarrassment, time pressure, past criticism or fear of starting too late.

USEFUL ADULT MINDSET

- Start from where you are.
- Do not apologise for being new.
- Be clear about your goals.
- Ask for realistic practice expectations.
- Expect coordination to take time.

BRING TO THE LESSON

- Any previous music books.
- Questions about practice time.
- Information about hand, voice or physical concerns where relevant.
- Examples of music you enjoy.
- A willingness to begin simply.

ADULT LEARNER PRINCIPLE

Adult progress depends on clarity, routine and patience. Starting later is not a reason to start badly.



What Happens in the Lesson

A first lesson is usually a structured introduction, not a final judgement on ability.

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WHAT HAPPENS

A typical first-lesson flow

Teachers vary the lesson based on age, instrument and experience, but most first lessons follow a similar educational shape.

WELCOME

01 Settle the student and establish a calm tone.

BACKGROUND

02 Ask about experience, interests and goals.

INITIAL CHECK

03 Observe rhythm, listening, posture, movement or current playing.

FIRST TASK

04 Introduce one manageable musical activity.

NEXT STEPS

05 Agree what to practise and how to continue.

IMPORTANT

The first lesson should give the teacher enough information to choose an appropriate starting point. It should not be treated as a pass/fail event.

WHAT HAPPENS

Beginners and experienced students

The first lesson looks different depending on whether the student has studied before.

COMPLETE BEGINNER

- May learn how to sit, stand, hold or breathe safely.
- May copy simple rhythms or patterns.
- May explore sound before reading notation.
- May receive very small practice tasks.
- The teacher will avoid overloading them.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

- May be asked to play, sing or discuss a current piece.
- May have technique, reading or aural skills checked.
- May discuss previous exams or books.
- May receive corrections immediately.
- The teacher will identify gaps and strengths.

HONESTY HELPS

It is better to describe experience accurately than to overstate level. Good teaching depends on choosing the right starting point.

WHAT HAPPENS

Should a parent stay in the lesson?

This depends on age, confidence, safeguarding arrangements, school policy and what best supports the student.

Context	Suggested approach
Very young or nervous child	Parent may stay initially if this helps the child settle.
Primary-age learner	Some children work better with a parent nearby; others focus better independently.
Teenager	Often benefits from more independence, with parent updated afterwards.
Adult learner	Usually attends independently unless there is a practical support need.
Online lesson	Parent may help with setup, then reduce involvement once the lesson is running.

BEST PRACTICE

The adult role should support the lesson, not take over the lesson. The teacher needs space to build a relationship with the student.



After the Lesson

The first week matters. Simple, clear practice is better than an ambitious plan that collapses immediately.

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AFTER THE LESSON

What to do immediately afterwards

The end of the first lesson is when families should capture the next steps while they are still clear.

IMMEDIATE PARENT CHECKLIST

- Confirm what should be practised before the next lesson.
- Ask how long practice should take at this stage.
- Check whether any book, app or equipment is needed.
- Note anything the student enjoyed or found difficult.
- Avoid turning the journey home into a long critique.
- If continuing, make sure the timetable and payment process are understood.

GOOD FIRST QUESTION

Ask: "What is the one thing we should make sure happens before the next lesson?"

AFTER THE LESSON

The first week of practice

The first week should build rhythm and familiarity. It should not become a daily argument.

PRACTICE TARGET

- Choose a regular practice window.
- Keep practice short and achievable.
- Repeat the exact task given by the teacher.
- End before frustration takes over.
- Praise attention and consistency, not just correct notes.

AVOID IN WEEK ONE

- Doubling the workload without teacher guidance.
- Comparing the student with siblings or friends.
- Correcting constantly from another room.
- Using practice as punishment.
- Expecting instant musical independence.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLE

In the first week, the habit is often more important than the amount. A calm five minutes done well can be better than thirty minutes of resistance.

AFTER THE LESSON

Communication after lesson one

Clear communication avoids confusion about materials, timetable, home practice and expectations.

WHEN TO CONTACT THE SCHOOL

- You are unsure what to practise.
- The recommended material is unclear.
- The lesson time is not sustainable.
- The student is anxious about returning.
- You need to update availability or contact details.
- Payment, portal or registration steps are unclear.

COMMUNICATION STANDARD

Small problems are easier to solve early. Do not wait several weeks if the first lesson has raised a practical concern.

SECTION 06



Checklists

Use these pages as practical reference before and after the first lesson.

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CHECKLISTS

Parent preparation checklist

Use this before leaving for the first lesson.

- Confirmed lesson time and teacher name
- Checked location, travel and arrival plan
- Packed notebook and pencil
- Packed instrument or current music if needed
- Prepared one or two useful background details
- Explained the lesson calmly to the student
- Avoided pressure, drilling or last-minute criticism

PARENT FOCUS

Your role is to help the student arrive settled, prepared and ready to meet the teacher.

CHECKLISTS

Student first-lesson checklist

A simple version for young learners and beginners.

- I know the teacher is there to help me.
- I do not need to be perfect.
- I can ask questions.
- I can say if I do not understand.
- I can try something simple first.
- I can tell the teacher what music I like.
- I know what to practise before the next lesson.

STUDENT FOCUS

The first lesson is about beginning well, listening carefully and trying the first step.

CHECKLISTS

First-week action plan

Keep the first week simple. The aim is to start a rhythm that can be sustained.

Day	Action
Day 1	Read the lesson notes. Try the assigned task once, calmly.
Day 2	Repeat the main task. Keep it short.
Day 3	Notice what is easier and what still feels unclear.
Day 4	Practise again. Avoid adding extra tasks unless assigned.
Day 5	Ask the student what they remember from the lesson.
Day 6	Prepare any question for the teacher.
Day 7	Check books, instrument and timing before the next lesson.

CHECKLISTS

Common first-lesson problems

Most early issues are practical and solvable. Identify the problem before assuming lessons are not working.

THE STUDENT SAYS IT WAS HARD

That may be normal. Ask what part was hard and whether the teacher gave a manageable task.

PRACTICE CAUSES ARGUMENTS

Reduce the length, fix a routine, and focus only on the assigned task.

THE STUDENT FORGOT EVERYTHING

Use the notebook. Ask the teacher to clarify the practice target if needed.

THE INSTRUMENT IS UNSUITABLE

Ask for practical advice before buying or changing equipment.

THE TIMETABLE IS DIFFICULT

Raise the issue early. Timetable problems rarely solve themselves.

FAQ

First lesson FAQ

DOES MY CHILD NEED TO PRACTISE BEFORE THE FIRST LESSON?

Only if they already have something familiar to play or sing. Otherwise, calm preparation is enough.

SHOULD WE BUY BOOKS FIRST?

Usually no. It is better to wait for teacher guidance.

WHAT IF MY CHILD IS SHY?

Tell the school or teacher. A good first lesson can be paced gently.

WILL THE TEACHER ASSESS LEVEL?

Yes, but informally. The aim is to choose the right starting point.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE INSTRUMENT IS NOT SUITABLE?

The teacher can advise on options after seeing the student and instrument.

RELATED ACADEMY RESOURCES

What to read next

This guide is part of the GSofM Academy Resource Library.

RES-001 **The Complete Parent Guide to Music Lessons**
Broad guidance on choosing, starting and supporting lessons.

RES-003 **How to Practise Effectively**
Practical guidance for building a sustainable practice routine.

RES-004 **Weekly Practice Planner**
Printable planning sheet for home practice.

RES-005 **Music Practice Journal**
Structured journal for tracking lesson notes and progress.

THY-001 **Music Theory Roadmap**
Future Theory Compass pathway for early theory learning.

WEBSITE INTEGRATION

This resource should be paired with a dedicated download page, short web summary, related lesson links and a call-to-action for trial lessons.

REVISION HISTORY

Version control and review

Version	Date	Change	Status
1.0	29 June 2026	Initial public resource publication	Foundation release

REVIEW REQUIREMENT

Review annually, or earlier if GSofM onboarding, lesson policies, registration process, payment structure or Academy resource architecture changes.

PUBLICATION STATUS

Current version: RES-002 v1.0. Superseded versions should be archived and clearly marked as no longer current.



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