Studying in the School of Music at RCS: Things you may need!

Although it is no longer the case that we mostly teach online, during the pandemic, we taught a lot of our modules online via Zoom and Teams, and learned new ways of doing things, some of which continue to be useful! In particular, we now make much more use of online resources in support of all our modules; and we have developed more resources to help our students to learn how to record themselves effectively, and work in online environments. You will have access to a range of software as an RCS student, and will be able to borrow specialist equipment (e.g. microphones) but there may be times that this is not available (e.g. if it is in use by someone else) so you may also want to invest in your own resources. With this in mind, here are some recommendations on hardware and software. You are not under any obligation to purchase your own recording equipment, but as many of you will, this document is intended as a guide to what will be useful and effective.

Students without funds to purchase equipment or software needed to complete particular elective modules in years 2-4 may be able to apply to one the Conservatoire's hardship funds. More details will be available after matriculation.

Computer

You will need access to either a desktop or laptop computer during your studies. Some modules may sometimes run classes on [Zoom](#) or [Microsoft Teams](#). Your computer should be capable of running this software, with a built-in microphone and webcam (the built-in ones are fine for conferencing). The computer should also be capable of running basic Word Processing and audio editing software.

Please note that once you have matriculated as a student of the Conservatoire you will have free access to both Zoom and Microsoft Teams, and to the full Microsoft 365 software suite which includes Word, Excel and Powerpoint.

Headphones

During your course, you will likely spend time listening closely to recordings, whether they are of yourself or of others. You may also spend time in Zoom/Teams lessons, classes and meetings. With this in mind, for reasons of sound quality and for personal comfort, we recommend that you invest in a pair of high-quality headphones.

Whatever you choose, it is very important to have good headphones for listening. Whilst you might enjoy using headphones with a bass boost for listening at leisure, when working you will need headphones that accurately represent what you are listening to.

We recommend one of the following as good, reasonably priced headphones (prices are estimated as of August 2023):

Audio Technica ATH-M30x (£64) – [Amazon](#) / [Scan.co.uk](#)

Audio Technica ATH-M40x (£95) – [Amazon](#) / [Scan.co.uk](#)

Beyerdynamic DT770 Pro (£99) – [Amazon](#) / [Scan.co.uk](#)

Written work

Essays, reflective journals, commentaries and other written work you may have to complete for your course may be submitted in two formats: Microsoft Word (.doc/.docx) or PDF.

Note that some modules may have specific submission requirements involving other file formats, which will be outlined in the module documentation.

As a student at the Conservatoire, you will automatically have free and immediate access to the Microsoft Office suite for the duration of your study. This includes Word, Powerpoint, Excel, OneDrive and more. You will be able to download the apps to your machine or use them anywhere online by using your RCS login and password.

Scoring & Notation Software (and alternatives)

For work that involves creating a score (e.g. a Composition, Arrangement, Orchestration or other piece of notation), files can be submitted in any the following three formats: Sibelius, Musescore or XML + PDF (2 files).

Sibelius

If you have access to Sibelius then you can complete your work using it. Sibelius is the software which has normally been used by staff and students in the Conservatoire. An educational license for Sibelius Ultimate (the recommended version) can be bought on a per month (£8.25), per year (£79.00) subscription, or a perpetual license (one-off payment: £249). If you are working in the RCS building on an RCS computer, you will also be able to access Sibelius via one of our onsite licenses.

Musescore (Free)

If you don't have access to Sibelius, we recommend you download Musescore, a free notation app available for Windows, Mac and Linux. (https://musescore.org/en/download)

There are also many online tutorials available on how to use Musescore.

Scoring & Notation - Other Alternatives

There are also many other notation software alternatives – some cost money and some are free. The other free ones may not be quite as fully featured as those above, but they may prove useful if you do not want to or can't use Musescore.

However, if you use any software other than Sibelius or Musescore, **you must submit your work as an XML file, accompanied by a PDF**. An XML is a file format that most notation software apps can open.

Other Paid-for Notation Software options:

- Dorico
- Finale

Both Dorico and Finale are fully-featured software and can do everything that Sibelius can, but you will need to remember to save as XML+PDF.

Other Free Notation Software (again, remember to save as XML+PDF):

- Noteflight - browser-based notation service; missing some instruments, but it may do the job
- Flat.io - another web-based notation service; can be downloaded as an app for iPad

- [Staffpad](#) - (iPad or Microsoft Surface only)

Recording at Home Equipment

Being able to make recordings of yourself playing is a useful skill to develop, and something that will be explored in the Music technology workshops as part of one of undergraduate core modules in year 1. With this in mind, it makes sense try to get the best sound you can for these.

There are three different options for home recording:

1. USB microphones (the cost of the mic)
2. Handheld recorders (total estimated cost included accessories: £200 - 250 depending on which recorder you choose)
3. External microphones with an audio interface (total estimated cost including accessories £313 - £464 depending on the mic(s) you choose)

USB mics are cheap and relatively easy to connect to your computer. However, they often have the poorest sound quality of the three options and usually cannot be attached to a mic stand, so they can be difficult to position well for many instruments.

Handheld recorders are very portable and many can also be used as a USB microphone (and in terms of sound quality are better than dedicated USB mics). They are very easy to transport and so useful to take with you for gigs/rehearsals. You can mount these on tripods, but you can also get adapters for mic stands (very useful!).

A dedicated microphone and audio interface gives the best sound quality. An audio interface connects to a computer and controls the microphone input and your headphone output. Small interfaces are available that are easy to transport in a bag with your laptop.

Summary

*If you want maximum portability, a handheld recorder will be your best option.
*If you want the highest quality, you will get this from a decent mic and interface.
*We can't recommend USB mics as the best choice for recording acoustic instruments/voices, but if they are your only option, try to find ways to position it well for your instrument/voice.

Recommendations for Option 2: Handheld Recorders

We recommend either:

- **Tascam DR-44WL** handheld recorder with two built in mics and two XLR inputs for connecting external mics (c.£240), or
- **Zoom H4N** handheld recorder with two built in mics and two XLR inputs for connecting external mics (c.£200)

Question: I've decided to get a handheld recorder. What else do I need?

- Headphones (recommendations above)
- Tripod adapter such as this: https://amzn.to/2XRoaR4
- Mic stand, either:
    - [K&M w/ Telescoping Boom](#) - £48 (a telescoping book can go much shorter, very good for live work on stage or cramped spaces), or
    - [K&M w/out Telescoping Boom](#) - £35

Recommendations for Option 3: Audio interface and dedicated microphone(s)

For an audio interface we recommend: **Focusrite Scarlett 2i2** audio interface (connects to a computer via USB) (c.£125)

For microphones, we recommend either:

- **Rode M5** Pair (£116 in total), or
- **Line Audio CM4** (c. £130 per mic; £260 pair)

Question: I've decided to get an audio interface and mic(s). What else do I need?

- Mic stand, either:
  o [K&M w/ Telescoping Boom](#) - £38 (a telescoping book can go much shorter, very good for live work on stage or cramped spaces), or
  o [K&M w/out Telescoping Boom](#) - £31
- [K&M Stereo Bar](#) (£8.50)
- 1 or 2 mic (XLR) cables. A cable isn't going to make a meaningful difference to the recorded sound, but a good quality cable won't break. You can buy cables direct from [Canford](#) that are quite reasonably priced, or from [CPC](#).

Audio Editing

For basic audio editing [Ocenaudio](#) is free, and easy to use. Some modules may require the use of specific software, which will be outlined either in the documentation or in the introductory classes.

Video Recording

As well as audio recording, you may occasionally be asked to film yourself performing or presenting. In most cases the camera on a smartphone is perfectly sufficient for this. However you may wish to purchase a simple tripod to give you flexibility in positioning the camera. A [Vicloon Camera Phone tripod](#) is an inexpensive option for smartphones.

Video Editing Software

If you need to edit video footage, there are a number of free software options available. We recommend [Da Vinci Resolve](#).

Alternatively:

- [iMovie](#) (Apple only)
- [Videopad](#) (Windows only)

Additionally, most computers within the Conservatoire have access to Adobe Premiere Pro.