

Studying in the School of Music at RCS: Things you May Need

In order to take part in some modules, you will need access to some specialised software and/or hardware. While some of this will at times be available in the Conservatoire, because of Covid measures, it may not always be accessible to you. With this in mind, here are some recommendations on hardware and software.

Students without the funds to purchase necessary equipment or software may apply to one the Conservatoire's hardship funds. Visit the [portal page](#) for more information, or email Welfare (welfare@rcs.ac.uk) if you have queries.

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1. Computer

You will need a either a desktop or laptop computer during your studies. It should have a microphone, and a webcam (the built-in ones are fine for conferencing). The computer should also be capable of running Zoom, Microsoft Teams, as well as other software such as Word Processing and basic Audio editing. Note that certain modules or classes may have additional software requirements.

While it might be possible to do much of the above on a tablet or iPad, you may find that any extended typing you need to do is better done on something with a physical keyboard, as opposed to typing on screen.

2. Headphones

During your course, you will likely spend some time listening closely to recordings, whether they are of yourself, or of others. You will also spend time in Zoom lessons, classes or 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 really 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 represents what you're listening to.

We recommend one of the following as good, reasonably priced headphones:

Audio Technica ATH-M30x (£53) – [Amazon](#) / [Scan.co.uk](#)

Audio Technica ATH-M40x (£78) – [Amazon](#) / [Scan.co.uk](#)

Beyerdynamic DT770 Pro (£105) – [Amazon](#) / [Scan.co.uk](#)

3. Video Conferencing / Online Meeting Software

The Conservatoire uses both [Zoom](#) and [Microsoft Teams](#) in its classes, lessons and events. As a student at the Conservatoire you have FREE access to both apps. Log into both using your RCS login and password. You should ensure that you have access to both on your machine.

4. Scoring & Notation Software

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 formats:

Sibelius

Musescore

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).

[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. You can find it here: <https://musescore.org/en/download>

You can also find tutorials on how to use Musescore [here](#)

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. To save your work as an XML, in most cases you have to go to the 'File' menu and look for the 'Export' option, then choose XML. Be sure to submit a PDF also.

Other Paid-for Notation Software options:

Dorico - <https://new.steinberg.net/dorico/> (£291 for a perpetual license)

Finale - <https://www.finalemusic.com/>

Both Dorico and Finale are fully-featured software and can do everything that Sibelius can. Just remember to save as XML+PDF.

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

[Noteflight](#) – a browser-based notation service. It's 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)

If you have additional questions about notation software options, contact Colin Broom c.broom@rcs.ac.uk

5. Written Work

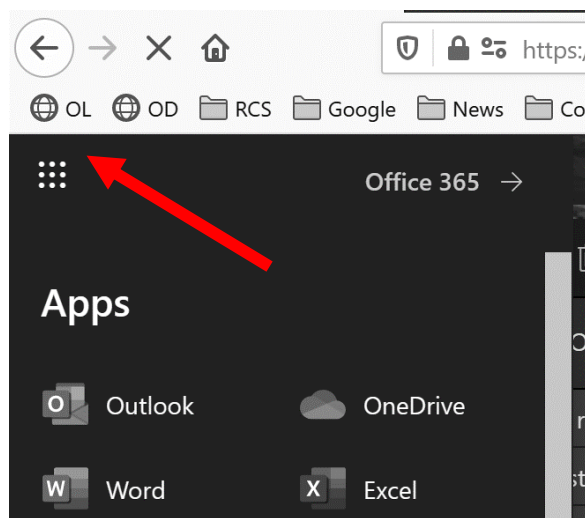
Essays, reflective journals, commentaries and other written work you may have to complete for your course may be submitted in either of the following formats:

Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx)

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 automatically have FREE immediate access to the Microsoft Office suite for the duration of your study. This includes Word, Powerpoint, Onedrive and several others. You can access these from anywhere using your RCS login. You can either download the apps to your machine or use them online by logging into Outlook via your browser with your RCS login and password. You'll find the full range of apps in the square near the top of the screen:



If you have additional questions about the Microsoft Office suite software, contact the IT trainer Julie Halstead (j.halstead@rcs.ac.uk).

6. Recording at Home Equipment

In your principal study lessons you may be sending recordings of yourself playing to your teacher and web conferencing with them. 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 have the poorest sound quality of the three options and usually cannot be attached to a mic stand, so they are 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.

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 (recommendations below)

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.

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 (£230)

or:

Zoom H4N handheld recorder with two built in mics and two xlr inputs for connecting external mics (£200)

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

1 x headphones (recommendations above)

1 x tripod adapter <https://amzn.to/2XRoaR4>

1 x mic stand, either:

- i. [K&M w/Telescoping Boom](#) - £38 (a telescoping boom can go much shorter, very good for live work on stage or cramped spaces).

or:

- ii. [K&M w/out Telescoping Boom](#) - £31

Option 3: Audio Interface & Dedicated Microphone(s)

For an audio interface we recommend:

Focusrite Scarlett 2i2 audio interface (connects to a computer via USB) (£138)

For microphones, we recommend either:

Rode M5 Pair (£116 in total)

or:

Line Audio CM4 (c. £130 per mic; £260 pair)

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

1 x mic stand, either:

- i. [K&M w/Telescoping Boom](#) – (£38) (a telescoping boom can go much shorter, very good for live work on stage or cramped spaces).

or:

- ii. [K&M w/out Telescoping Boom](#) – (£31)

1 x [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.

If you have additional questions about recording equipment/software options, contact Alistair MacDonald (a.macdonald@rcs.ac.uk).

7. 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.