



GUIDE TO STARTING A UNIVERSITY GROUP



FIRST THINGS FIRST. WHAT'S OUT THERE ALREADY?

Are there any other a cappella groups at your University? If so, talk to them! Learn from their experiences as they'll be a valuable source of insight for you, in your planning. A new a cappella group is bound to have an effect on existing groups. This can be really positive (think of all the opportunities it may present!) so try to communicate and co-operate from day one.

What other singing goes on? Is there a music society? Music groups may be part of an overarching music society in your university. Think about linking in with them. They might be able to offer you help – from financial support and expertise to recruitment! Some universities may require you to be part of the society to book rooms or access funding; joining may seem like a faff at first, but it might pay off in the long run.

If there isn't a formal singing structure then speak to your student union. Depending on your university, your SU might be able to give you tips on important things like booking rehearsal and concert space, advertising, and accessing funding.

Look outside your university for influences. Check out professional and amateur a cappella. Look at other art forms. Go to gigs, musicals, art exhibitions, opera, theatre, scour YouTube, and listen to the radio. You can't have too many influences and you don't know what could strike a chord with you and shape the direction of your group.

We don't mean to boast, but we know a lot of singers. Chances are, we're connected with someone from your university who's in an a cappella group or wants to try a cappella for the first time. Tell Zoe, our University Programme Manager, that you're starting a group! We may be able to link you up with other singers, and we'd love to hear about your journey!

university@thevoicefestival.co.uk



WHAT TYPE OF GROUP WILL YOURS BE?

You don't need to set up your whole programme for the year with fifty arrangements ready, but it is useful to have an idea of the basics. Here are some things to consider...

- Will the group be auditioned or unauditioned?
- Is it going to be a mixed group? All male? All female?
- What genre of songs will you sing, and how big will the group be? (This doesn't have to limit you, but it may help recruit people with similar goals)
- How often will you rehearse/perform?
- Do you want to be the musical director, will you wait to see who the natural leader is, or do you want to work without one designated MD?
- Will you set rehearsal time now (so only those who can make it sign up) or will you try and fit around the group? (Caution... this sometimes doesn't work, especially if you're dealing with a big group of busy people!)

RECRUITMENT

Maybe you've already assembled the perfect group but if not, you need to work out a recruitment plan. This depends a bit on your SU and the question of "what else is out there".

Perhaps you can put posters up or speak to existing music groups with members wanting to try something a little different?

You could also advertise at a fresher's event. Better still, if you've already got a core of members, why not do something creative? Think [flash mob](#), YouTube video, or a 'sing off' that might get tongues wagging on campus.

A cappella is perfect for talented singers who want something other than classical choral music, so spread the word far and wide. Who knows when you're talking to a closet a cappella fan!



What about a beatboxer?

First, decide whether you want (or even need) a beatboxer. You might worry that finding a beatboxer is even harder than recruiting singers. Don't panic! There are other ways to put rhythm in your arrangements, like percussive vocal lines and body percussion. There are heaps of YouTube videos with tips on how to beatbox, too - who knows, someone might find a talent they never knew they had! Click here to get you started.

NEXT STEPS.

You're ready to go, and there's a million and one things to think about. Start here!

Somewhere along the road to a cappella stardom, you'll need to pick a name. You're on your own for this one (sorry!) but click here for inspiration...

We've recruited our group – it's time for our first rehearsal! Go along with an open mind and something to sing. This could be an 'off the shelf' arrangement, your own, or (feeling brave?) a song to work on from scratch.

How difficult do you want it to be? Do you want something challenging (taking longer to perfect)? Or something easier so you can walk out of your first rehearsal with something sounding like a song?

But I still don't know these people! Get a social in early. It's noticeable when members of a group have a genuine rapport. A social will help you get to know each other, which will make rehearsals easier and performances more natural. Oh, and it'll probably be fun!

We can't wait to perform for our friends and family! Fairly soon – get a gig of some sort in the diary. It doesn't have to be a full-blown two-hour concert, but having something to work towards will keep motivation up – and there's nothing like a performance to help a group bond. Most university towns offer free performance opportunities – a song at an open mic night; busking on the high street; a set at a local venue.

Be careful about booking an expensive venue – even though you all have fifty friends who say they want to see you perform, you shouldn't shoulder a financial risk this early on – save it for when you can be sure you'll sell out!

How do we connect with our fans? Obviously your first gig was *amazing*, and people want to know when you'll next be performing. Consider building an online presence so that people know when they can next catch a glimpse of you.

Now we're so busy – I can't do everything to run the group... Managing money; organising gigs; rehearsals; recordings; musical direction; publicity. You probably want to divide up responsibility through the group. This could be through a formal committee or just agreeing jobs when they come up.

*Building an online presence and engaging with social media can be a lot of fun. Aim for regular interaction on multiple channels - you could even try recording your first YouTube hit, such as **this one!***



FUNDING

Clothing, props and promotional items come at a cost. Recording can be expensive, as is travel and accommodation if you want

to go on tour. But there are things that you can do to make it a bit easier...

- Buying arrangements can be costly, but writing your own arrangement isn't. Get creative!
- Investigate whether your university has funds to help students run projects.
- Concerts, busking and performing at events can be a great money-spinner for groups – play to your strengths and promote yourself!
- Many schools would love to have the support of a University group. The school may be able to pay you if you offer a workshop – alternatively, consider approaching your University's outreach department who may be able to offer financial incentives for engaging with the wider community.

DON'T BE DISHEARTENED BY ANY SETBACKS

Sometimes people that join groups find that the group isn't quite what they thought it would be, or they can't make the time commitment and so they leave – don't worry, it happens to everyone.

Most a cappella groups will have performed to a really small crowd at some stage, or a massive crowd that aren't interested in listening to you. It happens – getting a good crowd at performances takes time and there can be a whole range of reasons why you don't get a big turn out (think essay deadlines, football matches, other gigs...)

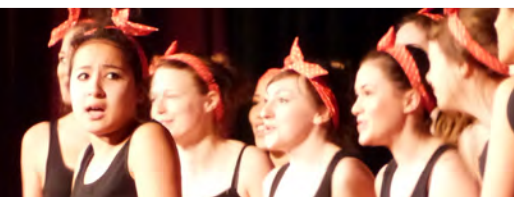
Most groups will have tried at least one piece that just doesn't work. If something doesn't work, it means that you're trying something new or pushing yourself to do something really difficult – that's great and will pay off in the long run! Don't be afraid to put something aside if you realise that it's just not right for you.

VF-UK can offer loans to groups, so get in touch if you're looking for support.

carys@thevoicefestival.co.uk



Consider starting up a blog (or vlog) to share your story. We love this one: iheartaccidentals.wordpress.com. Alternatively, write a guest post for the VF-UK blog!



FINALLY...

A handy summary of our best hints and tips for a successful, happy group!

- Get involved at your University, do your research, take in everything that you can and find things that inspire you
- Do some forward planning and draft your goals; think about your genre, group size, rehearsal schedule, and organisational structure
- Communication is key! Collaborate with other groups and be open to suggestions
- Get yourselves out there and grab any opportunity you can find in your community
- Stay realistic, but be ambitious and creative, and learn from things that don't go quite to plan!

Naturally, you can make sure you're at the heart of the UK contemporary a cappella scene by participating in your first Voice Festival event. There are lots of Voice Festival opportunities all over the country, as well as online. Do come along and meet us! We'll offer performance opportunities, some sterling advice on how to get the most out of your group, as well as some really top-notch workshops that can help take your group to the next level.

We're always here to help, and you'll be able to find advice, support, and a sympathetic ear at voice@thevoicefestival.co.uk



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