

HIGHLAND PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL
McCULLOCH INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL
ORCHESTRA HANDBOOK

2025 – 2026

Shelby Dickey, Director of Orchestras
dickeys@hpsid.org



Raider Orchestra Parents and Students,

Welcome to the HPMS/MIS Raider Orchestra! This handbook will help you understand our policies and expectations for our program. It's available anytime on our website and Google Classroom.

Please read it carefully and submit all electronic forms by Friday, August 29, 2025. This will be the first completion grade of the year, pass or fail. Instructions are at the end of the packet.

Thank you, parents, for supporting your child's music education—we appreciate your partnership! Feel free to contact me with any questions.

Students, congratulations! You are part of one of the top school music programs in Texas. The Raider Orchestra has a proud tradition of excellence, and we aim to prepare you for success in the Highlander Orchestra and beyond.

Participation in orchestra develops creativity, responsibility, teamwork, and leadership—all skills that benefit you both academically and personally. I am excited for a great year ahead!

Thank you,

Shelby Dickey

Director of Orchestras, HPMS/MIS

214-780-3667

CONDUCT & EXPECTATIONS

Orchestra Expectations & Commitment

Orchestra is a full-year commitment. Leaving mid-year is only allowed with the director's approval. By joining, you agree to contribute time, effort, and a positive attitude to support the success of the Raider Orchestra.

Your Responsibilities:

- Stay in the program for the full school year.
- Strive for musical growth.
- Maintain a positive attitude and support others.
- Avoid disrupting class or interfering with learning.
- **Practice daily**—your progress depends on it.
- Show respect to all people, instruments, and facilities.
- **Keep fingernails short**—this is essential for playing technique and sound quality.

Facility Guidelines:

- Only water with a spill-proof cap is allowed unless approved by the director.
- No food, gum, or drinks in the orchestra room.
- Vandalism or misuse of property will be handled per district policy.
- Always clean up after yourself.
- Practice rooms are for individual use unless given special permission.

COMMUNICATION

The orchestra directors will communicate an immense amount of information to our orchestra family throughout the year. Please make every effort to thoroughly read all communication in a timely manner.

EMAIL: Please keep an up-to-date email address on file with the program at all times in order to ensure that there are no lapses in communication. The directors will use email as the primary source of parent communication throughout the year.

PHONE: Please keep an updated phone number on file to ensure that we are able to reach you quickly in case of emergency. Phone contact will be used for the purposes of individual communication needs.

WEBSITE: Please bookmark our website! Music, news releases, documents, and other important resources can be found on the orchestra website. www.raiderorchestra.org

GOOGLE CLASSROOM: Google Classroom will be the primary form of communication with students.. Parents are encouraged to join as guardians to help your student’s progress. Students will be invited by the directors to join our classrooms at the start of the school year.

SOCIAL MEDIA: Follow us to celebrate all of the amazing things our students do in orchestra!

Facebook: www.facebook.com/HPRaiderOrchestra

Instagram: @hpms_orchestra

ELIGIBILITY

All HPISD UIL programs adhere to the eligibility rules and regulations as stated by TEA, UIL and HPISD. Students participating in orchestra activities must adhere to eligibility requirements. A student shall be suspended from participation in extra-curricular activities sponsored or sanctioned by the school district during the 9 week period following a grade report in which the student received a grade lower than a 70. Loss of eligibility takes effect beginning seven days after the end of the reporting period at the end of the school day. Eligibility may be regained at the end of each 3 week period throughout the following 9 weeks. In order to regain eligibility, students must have a grade of 70 or above in ALL classes. Reinstatement of eligibility begins 7 days after the 3 week progress report period.

The eligibility requirements do not affect activities that are considered curricular components of any course. **Examples of these activities are all rehearsals and performances that take place as a regular extension of classroom instruction.**

CONCERTS/PERFORMANCES

Expectations:

- Students are to arrive at call time for all performances, punctuality is imperative to success!
- Attendance at all performances is required
- All concerts are extensions of the classroom and are graded accordingly
- Students are expected to listen to all performing groups at the respective concert
- Proper concert etiquette is to be exhibited by all orchestra members both on and off stage
- Cell phones should not be present in the auditorium during a performance

2025 - 2026 Highland Park MS and McCulloch Intermediate Orchestra Calendar

Our scheduled orchestra performances are the major events in the year, and they represent the culmination of hours of your students' effort and hard work. Please put these dates in your personal calendar and let Mrs. Dickey know of any family conflicts that cannot be rescheduled or missed as soon as possible so that an alternative assignment can be given.

In addition to the dates below, sectionals and other rehearsals may be called prior to contests or performances, which will be scheduled at the directors' discretion.



Month	Date	Event	Time	Location	Group(s)
August	18	Parent Meeting	6:30pm	HPMS Orchestra Room	All Orchestra Parents
August	31	Back to School Pool Party	5:30pm-7:30pm	Holmes Aquatic Center (3501 Lovers Lane)	Orchestra Parents, All Students
October	9	Movie Social	4:30-6:30pm	Studio Movie Grill Dallas	All Students (optional)
October	14	Fall Hauntcert	6:30pm (Call time 5:45pm)	HPMS Auditorium	All Orchestras
October	18	Region Orchestra Auditions (JV Region Orchestra Only)	TBD, I recommend reserving 8am-12pm	MacArthur HS	All interested students (not required)
October	17-31	Practice-A-Thon Fundraiser			All Orchestra Students
November	1	Practice-A-Thon Party	MS Gym	TBD	Students that participate in the fundraiser
November	6	Veteran's Day Performance (w/band)	6:00pm	HPMS	Chamber Only
December	9	Winter Concert	6:30pm (call time 5:45pm)	HPHS	All Orchestra Students

December	TBD	Fine Arts Elementary Tours	All Day	HP Elementary Schools	Chamber Orchestra
December	12-13	Region Clinic and Concert	Friday evening, Saturday all day	TBD	Any students qualifying after auditions
February	10	Winter Beginner Showcase	Rehearsal: 5:30 PM Concert: 6:30 PM	HPMS Orchestra Room/Auditorium	Beginner Orchestra Students
February	19	Pre-UIL Clinic and Concert	6:30PM	HPMS Auditorium	Chamber & Philharmonic Orchestras
February	20	Fine Arts Showcase	TBD	HPMS	Chamber
February	28	Instrument Selection Day	9am-12pm	HPMS	Volunteers, Booster Club Board
March	3-5	UIL Contest	School Field Trip	Lake Highlands High School	Chamber, Philharmonic Orchestras
March	24	HS Orchestra Visit for 8th Graders	School Field Trip	HPHS	8th grade Orchestra students
April	13-17	Pride of Texas Performance Festival	School Day Field Trip	Pinstack Plano	All Students
May	9	Solo and Ensemble	8:30 AM - 1 PM	HPMS	All Students (optional)
May	13	Spring Concert/Awards	6:30pm	HPMS	All Students

Please note: Dates and locations are subject to change, and we will let you know a change as soon as possible.

Students must be academically eligible according to “NO PASS/NO PLAY” rules to participate in social events.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

All orchestra students must abide by the MIS/HPMS attendance policy. Students are expected to participate in all events required by their respective ensemble, including rehearsals, sectionals, chamber music events, and performances.

Students cannot be successful in orchestra or school if they are continuously absent. If a student is absent on any given day, he/she is responsible for checking with his/her teachers and directors to make up any missed assignments.

Absences will be excused for the following cases:

Death in the family, Medical emergency or illness, Religious holiday, Private lessons during class

(A director MUST be notified two weeks prior to the absence by a parent)

Absences will be unexcused for the following cases and any similar situations:

Family trips, Personal business or entertainment, Homework, No Ride, Academic Tutoring

Request for an excused absence:

- Notification of an excused absence from a performance or required event must be submitted by a written request or parent phone call at least **two weeks prior to the event.**
- In the case of illness or family emergency, an explanatory telephone, e-mail or written note from the parent as soon as possible is appreciated.
- Students who have an excused absence must complete make-up assignment within **seven days** from the missed event.
- EXCUSED absences will have five days to complete an alternative assignment for up to 100% of the grade, but it is the student's responsibility to make arrangements for any make-up work

Unexcused Absences:

- Unexcused absences will adversely affect the student's musical performance, the progress of the orchestra, and his/her orchestra grade by 20%.
- Attendance is taken into account when determining appropriate orchestra placement.
- Rules for absences apply to the entire rehearsal, before or after school.
- Tardiness to any rehearsals is the same as an unexcused absence for the portion of the missed rehearsal. Consequences will be determined by the length and reason for the tardiness.
- Parents and/or students must make arrangements for transportation of their children to rehearsals, performances and to the orchestra room when traveling to special events. Lack of transportation will not be an accepted excuse for missing an orchestra function.
- UNEXCUSED absences from concerts will have five days to complete an alternative assignment for a maximum grade of 70%. Any make-up assignments not done within the five day period will remain a zero.

***Directors reserve the right to review any exceptions to the absence policy (either for or against) depending on individual circumstances.**

THE HPMS/MIS ORCHESTRAS

Chamber Orchestra: Selection into this group is by audition, director recommendation, and demonstration of academic proficiency. **Members of this group will be expected to demonstrate high levels of musicianship, technical proficiency, and commitment to detailed rehearsal and individual practice. Students in this group are required to prepare for and audition for All-Region Orchestra. Chamber is subject to rehearsals after school before major events such as concerts and UIL. Such rehearsals will be communicated in a timely manner, and student attendance is expected.** Extensive efforts are made to avoid conflicts with athletic commitments in order to minimize conflicts. Additional rehearsals or sectionals may be added throughout the year and will always be communicated in advance. **Due to the high rigor of this fast-paced competitive group, participation in Private Lessons cannot be required, but is very strongly encouraged for all Chamber Orchestra members.**

Chamber Orchestra Members are required to:

- Prepare for and perform concerts throughout the school year
- Participate in the TMEA All-Region Orchestra process
- Perform at Solo and Ensemble Contest
- Perform at UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Contest
- Perform at other performances deemed necessary by the director, campus, or school district (such as performances to support the community, etc.)

Philharmonic Orchestra: Selection into this group is by audition and director recommendation. **Members of this group will develop technical and musical proficiency, advanced musical skills, tone production and control, and advanced ensemble skills. Students in this group are strongly encouraged to prepare for and audition for the All-Region Orchestra. The Philharmonic Orchestra is subject to rehearsals after school before major events such as concerts and UIL. Such rehearsals will be communicated in a timely manner, and student attendance is expected.** Extensive efforts are made to avoid conflicts with athletic commitments in order to minimize conflicts. Additional rehearsals or sectionals may be added throughout the year and will always be communicated in advance. **Private lessons are highly recommended to all students in this class.**

Philharmonic Members are:

- Required to prepare for and perform concerts throughout the school year
- Highly Encouraged to participate in the TMEA All-Region Orchestra process
- Have the option to perform at Solo and Ensemble Contest
- Required to perform at UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Contest

6th Grade Beginning Orchestra: Students in this class will learn the basic fundamentals of reading music and playing their instrument in preparation for the rigorous middle school orchestra classes. Students will learn one instrument for the duration of their orchestral career with the goal of mastering the instrument and gaining lifelong appreciation of music. As such, changing instruments is not allowed except in special circumstances as deemed appropriate by the orchestra staff.

6th Grade Orchestra Members are:

- Required to prepare for and perform concerts throughout the school year
- Required to perform at Solo and Ensemble Contest

****Detailed descriptions and requirements for ALL events will be provided as the year progresses.**

GRADING GUIDELINES

HPISD fine arts programs have instructional objectives that are derived from the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). These objectives are aligned to address the academic skills needed for successful performance in the next grade level or course in a sequence of courses.

MINOR GRADES : 40%

- PLAYING ASSESSMENTS – These will happen many times over the course of each nine-week grading period and will be calculated as daily grades or a major grade.
- OTHER DAILY GRADES- Music Theory Quizzes, Binder Checks – Written quizzes covering music theory, musical terms, music history, etc. will be given and notebook binders are checked throughout every nine weeks for organization.
- Sectionals – Orchestras attending UIL may have weekly sectionals. Attendance is required.
- Practice Journals

MAJOR GRADES : 50%

- Rehearsal Etiquette – A test grade will be given to each student each nine weeks assessing rehearsal etiquette. All students will start with a 100 and points will be deducted throughout the nine weeks for

such things as forgetting instruments, repeated disruptions, failure to bring supplies, cell phones out during rehearsal, food/gum, long fingernails, etc.

- PLAYING ASSESSMENTS – These will happen many times over the course of each nine-week grading period and will be calculated as daily grades or a major grade.
- Dress Rehearsals and Concerts - Each student is required to attend all dress rehearsals and concerts on the orchestra calendar. Please check the calendar carefully.

COMPLETION GRADES: 10%

- This portion of the grade reflects the student's consistent effort in completing non academic assigned tasks on time (i.e. permission slips, Handbook Form, etc)
- Participation Grade (once each nine weeks)

It is your responsibility to avoid scheduling conflicts with the dates on the calendar. Students with an EXCUSED absence will have five days to complete an alternative assignment for up to 100% of the grade, but it is the student's responsibility to make arrangements for any make-up work. UNEXCUSED absences from concerts will have five days to complete an alternative assignment for a maximum grade of 70%. Any make-up assignments not done within the five day period will remain a zero.

LATE WORK – All assignments are expected to be done on-time. *Any work that is 1-5 days late can be made up for a maximum grade of 80%.* Anything later than five days will remain a zero.

RETAKES – Students that receive a grade of 85 or below on a playing test may request a retake to raise their grade up to 50% more than the missed amount of points. (Example: if the original grade is an 80, you may retake to earn 50% of the missed points which would be 1/2 of 20, for a max grade of 90). Only one retake per playing test is permitted.

REQUIRED SUPPLIES for Violin, Viola, Cello, & Bass

The following supplies are required at every class! It is your responsibility to purchase and keep up with your supplies. Failure to have your supplies will be reflected in your 9-weeks rehearsal etiquette grade.

1. Rental Instrument (includes case, bow)
2. Rosin - Beginners may use basic rosin that come with the instrument rental. Philharmonic and Chamber Orchestras MUST have Pirastro brand (or comparable) rosin. Any variety of this rosin is acceptable.
3. **Violins/Violas** - Kun or Everest shoulder rest recommended
4. **Cellos/Basses** – labeled rock stop with your child's name
5. Cleaning cloth
6. Folding wire music stand for use at home
7. Digital Tuner/Metronome – **THESE ARE REQUIRED FOR CLASS USE**
 - KORG PitchClip (violins and violas)
 - KORG Sledgehammer (SHG-1) or comparable
8. 1-inch BLACK 3-ringed binder WITH POCKETS (will be provided to 6th grade students)
9. 5 dividers with labels (will be provided to 6th grade students)
10. 3-holed pencil bag to remain in the binder (will be provided to 6th grade students)
11. Pencils and at least 1 highlighter of any color
12. Method book:
 - **Beginners:** Essential Elements, Book 1
 - **Philharmonic:** Essential Elements, Book 2 AND Essential Technique 3
 - **Chamber:** Essential Technique Book 3

PLEASE TALK TO A PRIVATE TEACHER/ MRS. DICKEY BEFORE PURCHASING AN INSTRUMENT!!! Not all instruments and music stores are created equal! Please DO NOT order an instrument from a catalog, online source, Amazon/Facebook Marketplace/eBay without first checking with your director.

INSTRUMENTS

All instruments must be in good playing condition at all times. Proper maintenance is required. **Students are expected to have rosin, shoulder rests (violin and viola), and endpin holders (cello and bass).** School owned instruments are the responsibility of the students to whom they are checked out.

*****PLEASE DO NOT PURCHASE A BEGINNER INSTRUMENT WITHOUT HAVING A DIRECTOR APPROVE THE INSTRUMENT!** Some internet instruments are good, but many are not playable and/or will not stay in tune. A reputable dealer will allow complete satisfaction or the return of the instrument.

**Instrument Rental Options:
Dallas Strings: 469-675-0085
Music and Arts: 972-293-1321
BrookMays: 214-905-8614
Tarpley Music: 469-685-1110**

General information for instruments:

- 1.) Before purchase, please ask a director and/or private instructor for advice.
- 2.) Do not buy your beginner instrument. You will outgrow its ability.
- 3.) Buy an instrument only from a recognized music dealer. Frequently, instruments that look acceptable are not necessarily of good quality. Many factors contribute toward a good quality instrument.
- 4.) Some instruments do not come as an outfit. You must also purchase the bow and the case. Check with a director to see what you are buying before you buy it.
- 5.) It is wise to try several instruments before purchase. A reputable seller will allow you to take the instrument with you and try it for several days.
- 6.) There are several models and brands designed for middle school, high school and beyond that make quality instruments
- 7.) This is a process that is unique and different for every individual. It takes time and care to select the appropriate instrument.

District-Owned Instrument

HPISD provides a limited number of instruments for student use. These instruments (**violin, viola, cello, bass, and harp**) are provided by the school district due to their expense if rented from an outside entity. Students are required to rent at least (one) quality instrument from the music store and have the option to rent a second instrument from HPISD in order to minimize carry and travel. **All district-owned equipment must be handled with care.** Students failing to properly care for their district-owned instruments may lose the privilege of using them.

HPISD does not provide insurance for individually owned or district-owned instruments or equipment. All students are encouraged to provide insurance coverage for their instrument. Most district-owned instruments exceed \$2,000 in value. Students will be held responsible for damage of the district-owned instruments issued to them.

- **Students and parents must sign an instrument checkout form upon the student beginning to use the instrument. Each instrument will be issued in good playing condition.**
- **HPISD will assess an instrument usage fee of \$150 per instrument for violin, viola, cello, bass and \$300 for harp. This is for routine summer cleaning and maintenance for district-owned**

instruments. This fee will be paid through SkyWard this year (NEW). Mrs. Dickey will communicate payment instructions closer to September 1.

- o Violin/Viola students that bike to school that wish to use a district instrument during the school day may pay a \$150 usage fee paid via skyward. This instrument will stay at school. If a student wishes to borrow an instrument from school for at home use AND school use, the fee would be \$300.
- o All Cello/Bass students will pay a \$150 instrument usage fee paid via skyward. If a student wishes to borrow an instrument from school for at home use AND school use, the fee would be \$300.
- o All Harp students will pay a \$300 instrument usage fee paid via skyward.
 - For 6th grade Harp Students Only- since the Harp is considered an auxiliary instrument in the Orchestra, harp students will also be given the opportunity to learn a string instrument alongside the harp. A school instrument will be issued to beginning harp students *free of charge* to use during the school year. Please let Mrs. Dickey know if your student will be needing an instrument for at home use.

All students will receive an email with further instruction at the beginning of the year as well as the necessary form for school instrument use.

UNIFORM GUIDELINES

Formal Uniform: **Required for Chamber and Philharmonic Orchestra Members:**

Ladies:

- Black concert dress (appropriately hemmed)
 - o *Corelli Dress from Southeastern Apparel is required. Dresses are available for purchase through Raider Orchestra Booster Club for \$80 (during beginning-of-year registration, more info to come)*
- Black close-toed shoes (no flip flops!)

Gentlemen:

- Black long-sleeved dress shirt
 - o *Shirts are available for purchase at Al's Formal Wear- 3400 Oak Lawn Ave, Dallas, TX. Fittings are complimentary with purchase.*
- Black formal pants
- TALL, BLACK socks
- Black dress shoes

Formal Uniform: **Required for Beginning Orchestra Members**

- HPMS Orchestra T-Shirt
- Ankle-length black pants/skirt
- Black dress shoes

ALL-REGION PREPARATION GUIDELINES

- All Chamber Orchestra and Philharmonic students are expected to prepare the music at a high level and audition for All-Region Orchestra.

- The All-Region Orchestra is the highest honor an individual middle school orchestra student can obtain. As such, auditioning for The All-Region Orchestra is a privilege and deserves one's best efforts and preparation.
- Students who are selected as All-Region Orchestra Participants by the judge panel are expected to attend all rehearsals and performances pertaining to this event. This is a TMEA Regional Event, and a distinct honor and privilege. Attendance (if selected) should take precedence over all other extra-curricular activities.
-Students who are selected to participate in this Elite group that do not attend effectively take the opportunity away from another student

PRIVATE LESSON PROGRAM

Private lessons are a wonderful way to increase the playing ability of your student. They are not required, but they are highly encouraged, especially in Chamber Orchestra. Please read the following information carefully if you are interested in participating.

- Lessons are a once-weekly session for students to spend one-on-one time with a master of their instrument. Think of it like a personal training session.
- Lessons typically last half of a class period, but some students (only 7th or 8th grade) opt to take full class period lessons.
- Lessons are \$27 per half class and \$54 for a full class period; however, teachers with larger sections may need to utilize before and after school time for overflow.
- Lessons are an opportunity for students to advance ahead of the class on their instrument.
- Lessons are NOT a tutoring service for students who do not practice, nor are they a "get out of class free" card.
- Students enrolled in private lessons are expected to practice each week and come to lessons prepared.
- All private lesson teachers have been vetted through the school district as highly qualified, master teachers with a degree in their specific instrument.
- Often, private lesson teachers perform professionally on their instrument! Students are highly encouraged to watch their lesson teacher perform if the opportunity arises.

There are a very limited number of half scholarships available for families who are unable to afford the full tuition. Contact Mrs. Dickey directly for information on how to apply for these scholarships or if you are in need.

Please return the **Private Lesson Form on the Raider Orchestra Website** if you are interested in this music enrichment program

FINANCIAL OBLIGATION

The Highland Park Independent School District ("District") considers the instruction offered within the classroom during normal classroom hours to be curricular and the other instruction and activities outside the normal classroom hours to be co-curricular.

Co-curricular activities therefore include all activities outside of normal classroom instruction. Included within these co-curricular activities is student participation in orchestra contests. Such contests include, but are not limited to, Pride of Texas Music Festival, TMEA Honor Orchestra, UIL Concert and Sight Reading, Beginning Orchestra Contest, etc. The Raider Orchestra Booster Club ("ROBC") funds expenses not covered by the District of more than \$300 per orchestra member per year.

The yearly fee for all orchestra members is \$400 per year. This covers field trips, meals and snacks, transportation, clinicians, contest fees, and supplies. The Raider Orchestra Booster Club relies on fundraising to cover the deficit of roughly \$100 per student for the year.

It is the philosophy of the MIS/HPMS orchestra that no student be denied the privilege of orchestra membership due to financial hardship. For options in meeting financial obligations, parents should contact Mrs. Dickey directly.

REFUNDS: The start of year registration fees and fundraising do not fully cover the amount of money it takes to run the orchestra program. As such, refunds due to exiting the program can highly impact all students in the orchestra program.

Registration Fees:

- If a student has paid for orchestra fees, but drops prior to the first day of school, the student will receive a full refund for fees paid for the upcoming school year. (Funds paid for previous years cannot be refunded.)
- If a student exits the orchestra program for any reason prior to September 30th, the student will receive a 50% refund for any fees paid for the current school year.
- If a student exits the orchestra program for any reason after September 30th, the student will not receive a refund.
- The Director of Orchestras has ultimate discretion regarding student registration refunds.
- Refunds will not be transferred to another booster club.

Instrument Usage Fees:

- If a student exits the orchestra program prior to taking possession of their school-owned instrument, the student will receive a full refund of the instrument usage fee.
- If a student exits the orchestra program after taking possession of the instrument, a refund will not be given.
 - After a student retrieves the instrument, it must be sent back to the music store and to be cleaned again.
 - This creates an additional expense for the orchestra program that will not be recuperated by the program.

Donations:

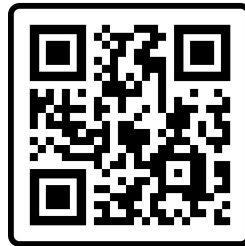
- No refunds will be given for donations made to the program, including optional general donations and optional credit card processing donations.

ORCHESTRA REGISTRATION IS DUE BY AUGUST 29TH, 2025!

COMPLETE THESE STEPS BY AUGUST 29TH IN ORDER TO ALLOW YOUR STUDENT TO PARTICIPATE IN ALL THE GREAT THINGS THE ORCHESTRA PROGRAM HAS IN STORE AND GET YOUR FIRST 100 IN THE GRADEBOOK!

- Read and go over the Handbook with your orchestra student
- Visit (and bookmark) our website: www.raiderorchestra.org
- Mark your personal calendar with all Orchestra calendar dates
- Fill out Handbook Acknowledgement/Contact Form

SCAN ME



- Raider Orchestra Fee Calculation (paid via PayPal)
- Individual Lesson Program Interest Form (optional, but very very encouraged!!!)
- School Instrument User Fee: PAID VIA SKYWARD IN OCT.

Thank you in advance for taking time to review this information and complete the process!