

Weapons of Brass Destruction

*A Fundamental Approach to Developing
Middle School Brass Musicians.*

Aaron Rex & Johnnie Green
Clinicians

Wednesday, December 18 - 4:30pm
Room W181



Key Witnesses



Aaron A. Rex

Mason Middle School
MMS Band Team Lead
Brass Specialist



Johnnie B. Green

Mason Intermediate School
MI Band Team Lead
Brass Specialist



Purpose

In this session we will:

Share our best practices to prevent bad habits that hinder beginning and developing brass students.

Share strategies to set all students up for success in the real world school setting.

Help teachers adjust and adapt strategies for common instructional setups in Ohio.



DISCLAIMER

The way we approach some instruments in class at Mason may look different from a professional musician, collegiate faculty member, or private lessons teacher.

These are proven successful strategies for us in a real world public school setting.

Some of the names and photos in this presentation may have been altered to protect the victims and guilty parties.

Exhibit A:

Instrument Fittings

Instrument fittings are a crucial component to the beginning band recruitment process.

Every instrument is built differently,
and every student is built
differently.



Exhibit A:

Instrument Fittings

We might want the coolest new kicks (i.e. shoes) to match our “drip” or “fit” (i.e. clothes), but if they don’t fit properly, we will be in pain and want to return them (i.e. quit).

Instrument fittings provide the opportunity for students to match their interest with what they are best “fit” to have initial success playing.

Allowing a student to start on an instrument without a trial is a disservice to the student and family.

Exhibit A:

Instrument Fittings

Example Fitting Process for Brass:

Step 1: Posture/Sitting

Step 2: “Do you know who Darth Vader is?” Breath Like This: “How-Poo”

Step 3: “Hold up a finger like a candle and send the air to the flame to make it “flicker” but not go out”

Step 4: Try it on the mouthpiece.

- Start with smaller mouthpieces, then go larger. It’s OK to go back & forth. Sometimes students need to get a vibration going on a larger mouthpiece first.

Step 5: Try it on the instrument.

- “Any sound is a good sound!”

Suspect 1:

Trumpet

Top red flags to look for:

1. Unable to create vibration (i.e. buzz).
2. Corners pushing out around mouthpiece.
3. Unable to produce High/Middle/Low
4. Full bottom & top lips.
5. Puffy cheeks.



Suspect 2:

Horn

Red flags to look for:

1. Unable to create vibration (i.e. buzz).
2. Corners pushing out around mouthpiece.
3. Unable/Unwilling sing or match pitch.
4. Pronounced underbite.
5. Full upper lip.



B

Suspect 3:

Trombone/Euphonium

Top red flags to look for:

1. Unable to create vibration (i.e. buzz).
2. Corners pushing out around mouthpiece.
3. Unable to produce High/Middle/Low.
4. Pronounced underbite.
5. Puffy cheeks.



B



Suspect 5:

Tuba



Top red flags to look for:

1. Unable to create vibration (i.e. buzz).
2. Unable to produce a Concert F.
3. Unable to hold the instrument.
4. No transportation.

B



Exhibit B:

Equipment

It's imperative to monitor the equipment coming into your band room.

With the popularity of online retailers, big box stores, and supply chain issues, more poor quality equipment is easily accessible to families.

- *"Don't buy an instrument where you can buy toilet paper."*

Work closely with your music reps to assure only the brands and models you approve are part of your rental program.



Exhibit B: Equipment

If there is a financial concern with families, work with your music rep for potential scholarships for quality instruments, or start building the school inventory with used quality instruments.



Suspect 1:

Trumpet

Mason approved brands for beginning band:

- Bach, Getzen, King, Yamaha

Mason "DO NOT BUY" list:

- Accent, Allora, Eastman, Jupiter, Mendini, Shires*

Mouthpiece Selection:

- Bach 7C
- Upgrade to 3C by the end of middle school.



Suspect 2:

Horn

Mason approved brands for beginning band:

- Conn, Holton, Yamaha
- Double horn preferred, but if you must start on a single be sure to only use F horns.

Mason "DO NOT BUY" list:

- Accent, Allora, Eastman, Jupiter, Mendini

Mouthpiece Selection:

- Farkas MDC
- Upgrade to a Laskey 75G by the end of middle school or after.



B

Suspect 3:

Trombone

Mason approved brands for beginning band:

- Bach, Yamaha
- If your music dealer and families have the resources, a small bore student model with an F attachment is even better.

Mason "DO NOT BUY" list:

- Accent, Allora, Eastman, Jupiter, Mendini

Mouthpiece Selection:

- Bach 6½ AL
- Optional upgrade to Bach 5G or Schilke 51 later in their studies.



Suspect 4:

Euphonium

Mason approved brands for beginning band:

- Yamaha YEP-201
- If your music dealer and families have the resources, students could also start on a Yamaha YEP-321.
- The King 625/628 can also be a good option for beginners.

Mason “DO NOT BUY” list:

- Accent, Allora, Eastman, John Packard, Jupiter

Mouthpiece Selection:

- Bach 6½ AL
- Upgrade to Schilke 51D by the end of middle school.



Suspect 5:

Tuba

Mason approved brands for beginning band:

- Yamaha YBB-105
- The King 625/628 can also be a good option for beginners.

Mason "DO NOT BUY" list:

- Accent, Allora, Eastman, John Packard, Jupiter

Mouthpiece Selection:

- Conn Helleberg 7B
- Could upgrade to a Bach 7 or Tucci in later studies.



Exhibit C:

Embouchure

The #1 goal of beginning band is setting students up for a successful journey. All taken from *The Art of Brass Playing*.

So many barriers in a student's playing can be avoided by taking the time to make sure **EVERY** student has a characteristic embouchure.

This first starts with the fitting process. If a student is not on an instrument they are best built for, then developing a correct embouchure will be an extra challenge or barrier to success.



Suspect 1:

Trumpet

Relaxed face (i.e. “Zombie Face”).

Corners hugging the teeth.

50/50 placement centered on lips.

Aperture cushy and free of tension.

Space between teeth & molars.

- About the width of student’s pinky finger.

Mouthpiece angle set my nature bite.



B

Suspect 2:

Horn

Relaxed face (i.e. "Zombie Face").

Corners hugging the teeth.

$\frac{2}{3}$ Top Lip, $\frac{1}{3}$ Bottom Lip centered.

Aperture cushy and free of tension.

Space between teeth & molars.

- About the width of student's pinky finger.

Mouthpiece angle set my nature bite.



B

Suspect 3:

Trombone/Euphonium

m

Relaxed face (i.e. "Zombie Face").

Corners hugging the teeth.

50/50 placement centered on lips.

Aperture cushy and free of tension.

Space between teeth & molars.

- About the width of student's pinky finger.

Mouthpiece angle set my nature bite.



B



Suspect 5:

Tuba

Relaxed face (i.e. "Zombie Face").

Corners loosely hugging the teeth.

50/50 placement centered on lips.

Aperture cushy and free of tension.

More space between teeth & molars.

- About the width of student's pointer finger.

Mouthpiece angle set my nature bite.

- Can adjust for underbite.



B

Exhibit D:

Hand Position

Setting the correct hand position from the start is crucial for students to have success later on for more technical playing.

Proper hand position also makes sure students do not cause damage to their instrument resulting in additional maintenance (i.e. bent valves)

Poor hand position can also result in unnecessary tension in a student's playing.

For horn, the correct right hand position is imperative to good intonation.



Suspect 1:

Trumpet



Relaxed backwards “C” in the right hand.

- Must be able to “see” through hand.

Right thumb tip in the “valley” between 1st & 2nd valve casing.

Finger pads in contact with the pearls.

- Helps to avoid additional pressure on the valves.

Right pinky on top!

- Reduces tension in the right hand.
- Prevents students from pressing into their face.
 - *Can also start with just the left hand to avoid this!*

Left hand lightly gripping the valve casing.

- Ring finger in the ring & thumb in the saddle.

B

Suspect 1:

Trumpet



B

Suspect 2:

Horn - Left Hand



Slightly flattened “C” in the left hand.

- This differs from trumpet.
- Pushing and supporting the lead pipe to be centered.

Left thumb on the Bb trigger or thumb hook for single horn.

Finger pads flat on the paddles.

- This differs from trumpet.

Left pinky is “placed” in the hook, NOT gripping the hook.

[Comfy Horn Strap](#) or similar is **HIGHLY** recommend to reduce tension and avoid pressing into face.

B

Suspect 1:

Horn - Left Hand



Suspect 2:

Horn - Right Hand



Right hand fingers and thumb together with natural curvature to the hand.

Analogies of “cupping water” or holding a “little birdie” in palm.

Thumb and pointer finger create a “shelf” for the bell to rest on.

Phalanges between base knuckle and middle knuckle should be in contact front of bell at the flare point to “catch” half of the sound.

Pointer finger phalange at 2 o'clock.

- Put a small piece of painters tape at this contact point in the bell.

B

Suspect 1:

Horn - Right Hand



Can start hand
outside the bell in
order to support
lead pipe angle.



B

Suspect 3:

Trombone



Left hand makes a letter J that wraps around the bell brace and points at the mouthpiece.

- Left thumb on the trigger if using an F attachment.

Left middle, ring and pinky fingers placed comfortably between the two braces on hand slide.

Right thumb, pointer finger, and middle finger gripping outer handslide brace.

Right ring & pinky fingers together, naturally curved towards palm **OR** supporting outer handslide at the base of the ring finger nail.

Trombone held in an "X" position.

B

Suspect 3:

Trombone



Insert Picture
of Flat Slide
Here



B

Suspect 3:

Tuba/Euphonium

Relaxed backwards “C” in the right hand.

- Pushing forward for proper lead pipe alignment.

Right thumb supporting brace behind valves or next to first valve.

- For front action, thumb is placed in the ring.

Finger pads in contact with the pearls.

- Helps to void additional pressure on the valves.

Right pinky relaxed **OR** on top of 4th valve.

Left arm wrapped around “hugging” the instrument.

- [Comfy Euph Strap](#) **HIGHLY** recommended!
- Hockey pucks can be used to raise tuba up.



B

Suspect 3:

Tuba/Euphonium



B

Exhibit E:

Pacing

Our motto at Mason is...

Band is sometimes slow,
because slow is FAST!

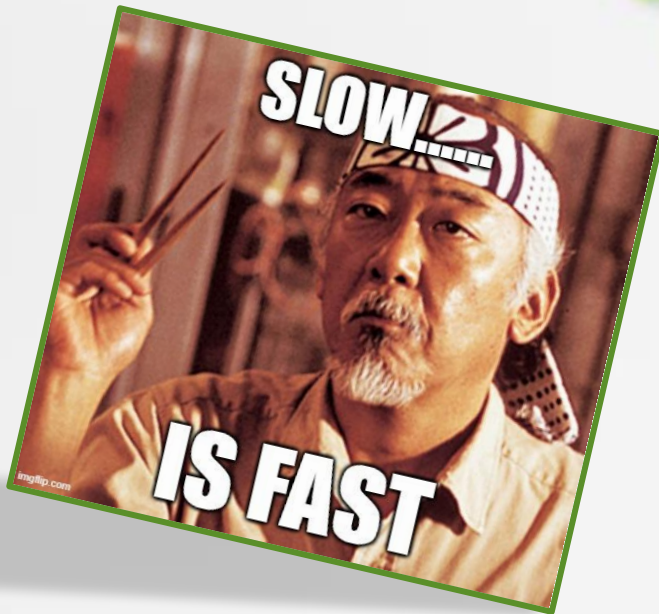


Exhibit E:

Pacing

The first word to teach students at the 6-8 level is
"Patience". Make them say it again for the kids in the back!

In beginning band, students must be set up to **walk**:

- Band Habits: Posture, Toe Tap, Breathing
- Embouchure
- Hand Position
- Tone

Students can then **jog** in middle school:

- Embouchure Development
- Technical Development

That way they can **run** in high school:

- Advanced Musicianship

Exhibit E:

Pacing

Accept that brass can move slower than woodwinds and percussion.

If you move too fast, you will force brass students into bad habits.

Let students know it is ok to sound bad before it sounds good.

- Demo both bad sounds and good sounds.
- *"Frack friendly zone"*

Mix up what might seem slow monotonous to students with games, activities, and challenges to keep them engaged.

- More on this later!

Exhibit E:

Pacing

Separate each skill and “Trust the Process”

- This might seem slow, but students need your patience too!

Incorporate a consistent learning sequence:

1. Count It: We use TRL, but have a system in place. (Steady Pulse)
2. Sing It: On solfege, letter names, neutral syllable. (Audiation)
3. Fake It: Fingers only, focus on technical skill. (Kinesthetic)
4. BERP It: Finger along and vibrate. (Cognition)
5. Play It: The fun part! (Application)

Exhibit F:

Method Book

THE METHOD BOOK IS NOT THE CURRICULUM!

Say it again... *The Method Book is **NOT** the curriculum.*

It does not matter so much **WHICH** band method book you use,
but rather **HOW** you use it.

Band Method Books are essentially song books to reinforce fundamental development through a “one size fits all” approach.

Method Books do not not teach students **HOW** to play instruments.



Exhibit F:

Method Book

And then there's a horn book...

While there are some band method books that have *"horns only"* pages, many do not or these pages are not setup to be used in a heterogeneous setting.



Consider having your horns use the trumpet book.

- Puts them in more comfortable ranges.
- Avoid awkward and/or challenging leaps.
- Trains them to play in harmony from day 1.

Exhibit G:

Fundamental Routine

Since the Band Method Book does not establish a daily fundamental routine, you must create one yourself.

A “Daily Drill” for brass students is the best way to start each class.

Brass students need **DAILY** work on:

- Band Habits: Posture, Toe Tap, Breathing
- Tone Production
- Harmony/Ear Training
- Embouchure Development
- Skill/Technique Development

This can be achieved in all settings,
both homogeneous & heterogeneous.



Suspect 1:

Air

Darth Vader

- "Hear" the air moving.
- Dark, low sounds to open up throat and keep tongue low.



Shark Fin

- "Feel" the air moving.
- 4 count, 3 count, 2 count, 1 count



Balloons

- "See" the air moving.
 - **ALL** the air, **ALL** the counts, with **CONSISTENCY!**
- "Beating" the Balloon & "Frogging"



Suspect 2:

Vibrations

We prefer “vibration” vs. “buzz”

- Buzz sounds tight or tense to us.

Start every class with this as part of “Band Habits”

- This can be done with just the mouthpiece.
- Falls, Doits, Sirens: “I play, you play.”



BERPS:

- Forces students to use more air to fuel vibration.
- Hold instrument in playing position.
- Focus on technical skill while vibrating.
- Stepping stone to vibrating on the horn.

Suspect 2:

Articulation

AIR creates the articulation, not the tongue.

Tongue **defines** the articulation.

- Same Spot
- Same Speed
- Same Strength
- Same Sound



Tubes

- PVC valve at 25% open.
- Forces students to use air.
- Helps students to hear and match initiations, releases, and note shapes.

Verdict:

Daily Drills

1. Tone production
2. Tone moving fingers
3. Tone with articulation
4. Tone changing partials
5. Tone with technique
6. Tone in harmony
7. Did we mention **TONE**?

Trumpet in B $\flat$ Daily Drill 3.0 Sensei

Longtone 1



Our First Remington



Five Note Scale in Quarter Notes



Lip Slur #2



Articulation Exercise



Chromatic Exercise 1



Trumpet in B $\flat$ Daily Drill 6.0

Long Tone 2



Descending Remington



Combination Study 1



Six Note Scale in Quarter Notes Scale Pattern #3



Lip Slur #2



Articulation Exercise



Chorus



Can work in a
Homogeneous or
Heterogeneous
setting.



Verdict:

Daily Drills



Ex. Horns in harmony

This musical score is for a drill titled "Ex. Horns in harmony". It features five staves for the following instruments: B♭ Trumpet (B♭ Tpt.), Horn (Hn.), Euphonium (Euph.), Tuba, and Mallets (Mal.). The music is in 4/4 time. The Horn and Euphonium parts play a melody of eighth notes, while the Tuba and Mallets provide a harmonic accompaniment. The Mallets part includes sections labeled "piston strokes" and "dead strokes".



Ex. Horns in unison

Similar to the Foundations for a Superior Performance book.

This musical score is for a drill titled "Ex. Horns in unison". It is part of a "Warm-Up Set (Lip Slur/Register Exercise)" from the "Eighth Grade Fundamentals" book, page 9. The score includes staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Bsn.), B♭ Clarinet (B♭ Cl.), B♭ Clarinet (B. Cl.), Alto Saxophone (A. Sax.), Tenor Saxophone (T. Sax.), Bass Saxophone (B. Sax.), B♭ Trumpet (B♭ Tpt.), Horn (Hn.), Trombone (Tbn.), Euphonium (Euph.), Tuba, and Mallets (Mal.). The Horn and Euphonium parts play a melody in unison, while the other instruments provide a harmonic accompaniment.

Exhibit H:

Technology

Yamaha Harmony Director

- Drones/Sustains
- Transposition
- Drum Grooves
- Intonation
- Equal & just tuning



Tuner and Contact Mic

- Picks up vibrations
- Clip on instrument, mouthpiece, BERP
- Korg (non-transposing) or Wegrower (transposing)



Tonal Energy

- Judgey face of DOOM!

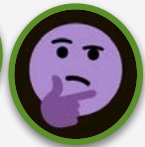


Exhibit I:

Vertical Alignment

Whether you're a part of a large band team or are THE team, vertical alignment of pedagogy from beginning band through high school is necessary for brass students' development.

Students need that consistency of instruction, pedagogy, and terminology.

Whichever systems work best for your students and setup, make sure it is vertically aligned.



Exhibit J:

Personalized Learning

Intervention

- Team teaching vs. solo teacher
- High School Mentors
- Private Lessons

Extension

- Challenges/Champions
- Models
- Private Lessons



Fun/Motivation

- Band Bucks
- Band Karate
- Mess Up/Drop Out
- Dance Moms Rankings
- Wheel of Misfortune
- Scale Roulette



A photograph of a brass instrument, likely a tuba or euphonium, set against a solid black background. The instrument is shown from a side profile, highlighting its large, flared bell and the complex valve mechanism on the left side. The lighting creates strong highlights on the metallic surfaces, emphasizing its form.

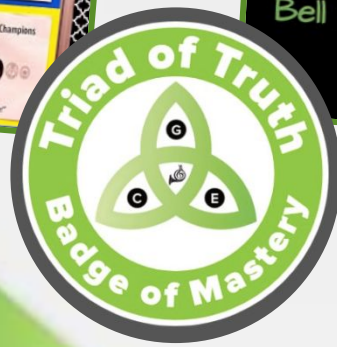
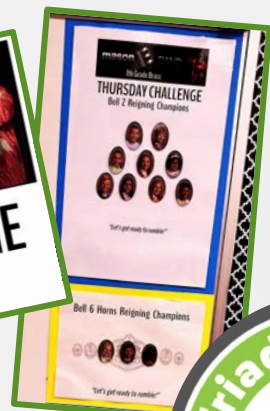
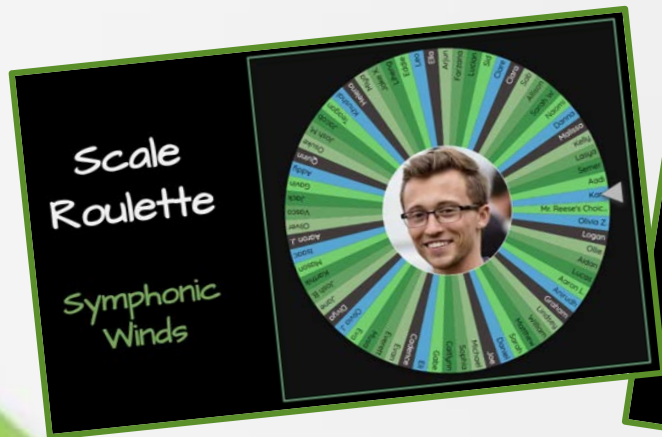


Exhibit J:

Personalized Learning



Questions?

THANK YOU!

Mason City Schools
Buddy Rogers/Willis Music
Freddy Martin
John Benzer
Dana Pradervand-Sedatole
Angelo Sylvester
Andrew Bass

**Prize Pack
Drawing!**

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Link to this Presentation

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*A Fundamental Approach to Developing
Middle School Brass Musicians.*

February 1 - 5:00pm

Hyatt Union AB

**WIN A
BRASS
PRIZE PACK!**

Blue Juice

Balloons

MORE!

Mouthpieces

BERP

S

