

Practical Pedagogy: Level up Your Rehearsals

Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic

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Expectations for Every Musician

Beginner Band:

- Students learn how to practice and learn rhythms on their own! They get the skills modeled in class with practice steps so they can be successful even when a teacher is not present with them.
- We ask students and parents to fill out practice records for accountability so they are creating great practice habits.
- Students receive easily achievable objective sheets so they can gain knowledge and skills in an ordered manner throughout the year.
- Students have Rhythm Racers (Rhythm Studies) to pass off individually where they can go above and beyond what we are learning in class to help create stars in the band setting. Rhythm Randomizer website is another great tool for reinforcing rhythmic literacy.
- We test weekly in order to hear individual students and give meaningful feedback so they can take charge of their growth. Chair tests are fun later in the year, but we don't chair everyone.
- Students learn and pass off mini scales, then 1 octave scales, then 2-3 octave scales so they have these skills ready for higher level playing in the performing band years.

Performing Bands:

- One of the best ways to maximize efficiency in your rehearsal is by marking the music for your students in advance. This gives you the opportunity to see every part from *their* perspective. For example, mark accidentals, write out difficult rhythms, include phrasing considerations, or notate alternate fingering/technique issues.
- We ramp up scale pass offs and they are required to learn more scales and/or octaves in the higher bands so they can read music easier in other key signatures.
- You can create lesson plans that include technique, repertoire, and a schedule of assessments that helps maximize your time. Focus on instrument-specific pedagogy such as flow studies, lip slurs, articulation exercises, etc.
- Incorporate rhythm drills, mock auditions, and tools like the "Wheel of Doom" to keep things FUN!

Strong Starts lead to Rigorous Rehearsals

- Incorporate daily exercises that target specific skills like articulation, dynamics, or rhythmic clarity.
- Create Melody Sheets and Rhythm Studies that unify the band, regardless of instrument.

- Keep students accountable with regular pencil and tuner checks to reinforce daily habits. Monitor posture, hand position, and foot tap! Don't neglect these basics, even late in the year. Tuner checks will help you guide the students to learn to tune by sight and by ear.
- Have clear, planned rehearsal objectives that outline your priorities. Record yourself to reflect on how you're using time, and adjust as needed.
- Avoid getting stuck in one section or difficult passage. If a group needs help, ask a co-worker or student leader to step in. You can also provide students with individual practice plans to revisit in sectionals or future rehearsals.

Crafting Confident Players from the Podium

- All directors will have the opportunity to teach outside your primary focus area, and we hope this resource will help you on your pedagogical journey!
- It is crucial to study individual parts for students, not only for excitement when they get their part in class, but also for technique, chordal considerations, tuning issues, terms, and more.
- Once in a rehearsal, you will know which sections of the music are not going well. Be sure to give the students techniques to practice and refine their part. They can slow the tempo down, tongue it all, slur it all, play it swung, try to memorize it, or even play it down the row in class or sectionals AFTER having time to rehearse.
- Know alternate fingerings in the music, tuning tendencies, trills, terms or know where to find them! (Phone a friend!)

Instrument Pedagogy is Paramount

While we will not cover all of this material in our session, please save this valuable resource to reference as often as needed!

- PICCOLO

- Piccolo embouchure is to “Bunny down” (the muscle between your nose and top lip) You have to do this even more than flute!
- High notes tend to be sharp on piccolo due to overblowing and not setting the embouchure correctly.
- Students should practice piccolo and flute to shift back and forth easily.
- Wooden piccolos are preferred because they sound darker and blend better.
- Only use piccolo if you have a good player for it - it's not necessary even if there's a part for it.

- FLUTE

- Corners in and not back like smiling - on ALL instruments!
- Know when to use the 3 Bb's. Students should be on the Bb thumb side 90% or more of the time since our young band music usually calls for Bb's in the key signature. All other notes can be played on the Bb thumb side except B natural.

Top thumb/double thumb (preferred)



Lever Bb (chromatic)



1&4 (rarely use)



- Alternate fingerings for C and C# (adding fingers brings pitch down)



- Response issues with ledger line high E, F, F# (helps to not be on the Bb thumb side)

- Students will have to practice starting these notes often

- Finger popping for low C

- You can quickly “pop” the third finger of the left hand right as you are starting this note to help it respond more easily and clearly

- Oil off the nose for low Db/Eb

- Since you must slide your pinky from the low Db key to the Eb pinky key for this, students can swipe the crease of their nose with their right handed pinky to make the slide seamless (plus they think it's gross/a fun trick!)

- A big issue we hear about is that flute players sound airy and sharp. This can be addressed and resolved usually with aperture size/focus and air direction.
- Remind players to “be a flute snob” to fix flat and sagging phrase endings (or just bad posture!)
- A and D are good individual tuning notes
- Try not to slide Bb to B natural thumb keys when possible.
- Check the flute tuning cork in sectionals or beginner classes once a semester to ensure the flute is most in tune.

- OBOE

- Embouchure shape buzz words can be “Milkshake”, “Drawstring bag” or “Round” embouchure
- Low note production - good air support required for instant response and to keep the pitch from being flat. They must also keep the inside of the mouth more open.
- Don't be afraid to rewrite parts if they go above ledger line C in NV/Sub NV bands
- Tuning third space C - tends to stick out and be louder, so use corners to control.
- Tuning A/Bb/C above staff - these tend to be flat, so support with good air and corners in but not biting.
- The 3 F's and when to use them - check for technique considerations so students aren't working against themselves.

Right F (preferred)



Left F (most common in MS)



Forked F (rarely use)



- Two Eb's: Right Eb (preferred)



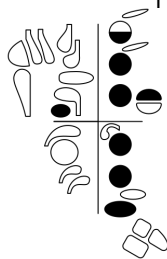
- Left Eb (use to keep from sliding R pinky)



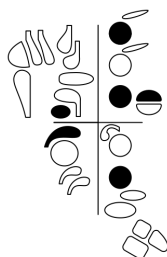
- BASSOON

- Embouchure should be corners in, jaw dropped and no biting
- Voicing/air speed as you go lower and higher
 - Low - Oh or Ooo
 - Middle - Ah or Eh
 - High - E
- Middle C#, Eb, E, and F - common for them to be flat; fix with more focused air and voicing, NOT jaw tension
- Choose your double reed fingering chart resources wisely as just one finger difference can be all it takes!
 - If using other method books, color in the correct fingerings for students

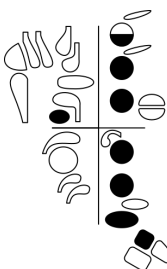
- Half hole G SHOULD have the resonance pinky - many books show it without



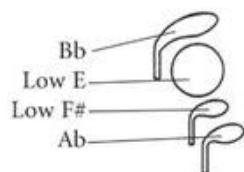
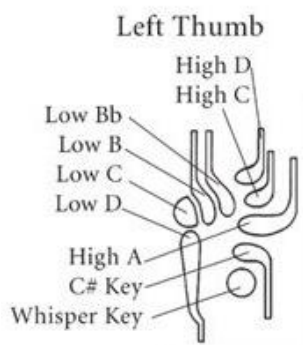
- Middle Eb correct fingering below - lots of older books show a trill fingering instead



- Front F# is preferred for MS students because of key signatures we see most often



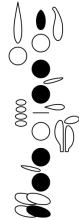
- Half Hole notes: F#/G/Ab
 - For your advanced players - F# $\frac{2}{3}$ uncovered, G is half, Ab is only $\frac{1}{3}$ uncovered
 - Know your thumb keys!! (print this out and keep it in your binder!)



Right Thumb

- CLARINET

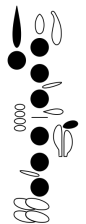
- EMBOUCHURE reminders: Click in/anchor/push up with right handed thumb. Think corners like saying "Q" or "Ew". The tongue should be high in the "E" position and chin flat and away from the mouthpiece.
- No flying fingers or right hand thumbs that poke out when looking at students.
- Reed strength - based on each individual student, NOT a class transition
- Reed checks should be with regularity. Train students to maintain reeds, then hold them accountable! Try a fun ceremony like Reed Funeral or Reed Heaven!
- Throat tones are sharp - easy fix is to add the right hand down
 - "Advanced" fingerings that help pitch and tone for A and Bb



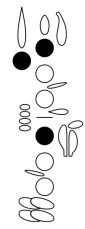
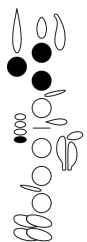
- Teach your students how to find the best fingering for THEIR instrument; experiment with a different combination of fingers
- Know your alternate pinkies for F#'s/C#'s, E's/B's - avoid sliding pinkies



- Left C (third space) - must use when coming from register Eb or low Ab



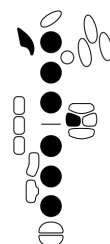
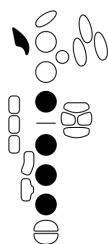
- Three Eb's: Side Key (preferred) Banana/Sliver (chromatic) 1&4 (rarely use)



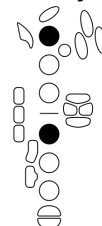
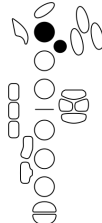
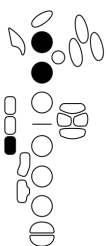
- Alternate throat tone Bb fingering for sustained notes (improves tone quality)



- Tuning process: Middle E, C, or G (adjust at barrel), register C (adjust at middle)
- BASS CLARINET
 - Regular shop check ups!
 - The register mechanism gets messed up a lot. If possible, learn how to fix this on your own. It's different for each type/brand of bass clarinet.
 - Angle of the bass clarinet and mouthpiece - more mouthpiece inside mouth.
- ALTO SAXOPHONE
 - Neck strap/positioning - the instrument comes to you!
 - "Drawstring bag" embouchure or "Round" embouchure
 - "Prints or Pads on the Pearls" to remind them of the correct hand position.
 - Reed strength - based on each individual student, NOT a class transition
 - Reed checks - check reeds in sectionals every 6 weeks - or have co-worker do it during class. Train students to maintain reeds, then hold them accountable!
 - Covered C# (helps pitch and tone quality) Octave D w/ B key (helps pitch)



- The 3 Bb's: Side key (preferred) Bis (when Bb is in key) 1&4 (rarely used)



- Tuning process: low G, octave G, F# (works for all saxophones)
- TENOR SAXOPHONE
 - G tends to crack a lot more, so check your screws and rods.
 - Round and more open embouchure - more mouthpiece inside mouth possibly to help. Remind bigger saxes to be careful when putting away their instruments so they don't damage the side keys or palm keys.
- BARI SAXOPHONE
 - Round and more open embouchure - more mouthpiece inside mouth
 - Harnesses recommended to ensure proper posture and playing position
 - Consider rewriting parts down to help beef up the tuba and bass sounds for your band if you have a strong player!

- TRUMPET

- Embouchure: Corners in, lips against teeth, "Keep corners activated/engaged"
- "Corners in for the win!"
- Slide maintenance is so important! Check tuning slides often - Trombotine or valve oil is a GREAT hack for slides.
- Use the thumb slide for first line E, use 3rd valve slide for D/C# (they aren't the same distance out!) from the beginning as they learn the notes.
- Consider teaching positions instead of valve combinations, especially when teaching/reviewing scales or method book lines in a full band setting.
- Tuning tendencies in upper range
 - 5th partial tends to be flat (high D/Eb/E)
 - 6th partial tends to be sharp (high F/F#/G)
 - Lip up, use "ee" voicing, alternate fingerings (same as lower octave)
- Tuning with mutes
 - Straight mutes make the horn sharper
 - Harmon mutes make the horn flatter
 - Students will likely need to adjust tuning slides
- Tuning process: G-A-B-C (hold)

- HORN

- Tuning Process: G, low C, high C with and without trigger
- Must maintain slides well on horn since there are so many and they truly can affect tuning.
- Hand position really affects tuning as well. Walk around behind the section or have a co-worker do this so you can check the right hand position often. Students will play sharp when they don't have it in properly, or will sound bright/muffled depending on the hand.
- Trigger 12/4th position A is super sharp up to Trigger 1 C. You can have students play without the trigger at times to help, or check their slides are in the correct place.
- Horn angle is important for controlling range and lip flexibility. Train students to not see their own left hand, think of a ski slope. Watch where the bell is on their leg - it may need to come up farther.
- Horn players should articulate lower on their front teeth for a firmer attack and more clarity.
- Teach correct voicing (oh - ah - eh - ee)
- Can teach passages with or without the trigger for technique considerations (alternate fingerings)
- Many sub NV and NV pieces double the sax/horn parts, so the horn range is really high. You can consider rewriting to be a different note in the chord or leave out upper notes if they go up to high D or more.
- Sometimes playing G on trigger instead of 3rd position can help with accuracy or technique considerations (even though it's sharper).

- Horn is an important instrument to get familiar with so you can play along with them on a Harmony Director, on a horn or sing their part/partial for them.
- Consider using the trumpet method book instead of horn if possible in a full band (or even beginner band) setting.
- TROMBONE:
 - Tuning process: F to upper Bb, and sometimes trigger C
 - Trombones sometimes have to push their main tuning and trigger slides in because of the cases they have. Be sure to remind students to pull them back out so they will be in tune.
 - BIGGEST ISSUE is that most middle school band literature is just knowing if the trombones are playing 2nd or 3rd position! They can think inch of silver for 2nd position (closer to first than to 3rd) and 3rd position is mainly at the bell. They need to make these different from the beginning!
 - High C tends to be flat
 - Slides need to be clean/lubricated and you can use the drop slide technique to check. If they didn't learn in beginner band how to tune well, they have to use ear/tuner combo in 7th grade to help develop these skills.
 - Tuning issues could be a fundamental embouchure/air speed issue as well.
 - D/G tuning (4th position focus in MS years) is a major thing to focus on getting right early on with a tuner and ear training.
 - For higher notes, remind them to keep corners in for high notes ("corners in for the win") and "more lip in the cup".
 - 7th partial should only be used on trombone as opposed to valved instruments (way sharp 2nd for G's and way sharp 3rd for F#'s)
 - Straight mutes make students sharp.
- EUPHONIUM:
 - Same as trombone with focusing on whether it's 2nd valve/2nd position or 1st valve/3rd position in the piece.
 - Corners in for high notes and high C tends to be super flat
 - Really pay attention to hand position as many euphonium players can have flat fingers or be lazy with pushing down quickly. Watch the right hand thumb positioning as well. If students have really small hands, you can even bring the left hand 1st finger over to help press the 4th valve.
 - No T-Rex fingers! (Where they only use 1st and 2nd fingers)
 - Compensating euphoniums have extra slides on the back of the euphonium that let air pass through when the 4th valve is depressed. This allows notes below the staff to be much more in tune.
 - Most 4 valve euphoniums tune extremely sharp below the staff. Students exploring that low range must use a tuner to lip the pitches down or use a fingering a half step below. Most euphoniums are about a half step sharp by the Eb below the staff.

- TUBA:
 - Tone quality is key! Think about having an egg inside your mouth. Think toe instead of tah.
 - Many students can articulate too far back so it sounds like “gah”. Remind tuba players to feel their teeth and feel the enamel. They should also remember to keep corners in and slightly down.
 - Tuba players are flat on concert B & C in the staff. They can either manipulate the 1st valve slide when playing those notes or use alternate fingerings (high D is flat and can be played in 4th position instead of open.)
 - If you are having trouble getting the low brass 1 & 2 fingering (4th position) in tune on D and G (especially on a sustained note), just use 3rd by itself (only one tuning slide to deal with for fine tuning).
 - The 1st valve slide MUST be pulled OUT several inches 95% of the time they play or the Eb will NOT be in tune. The trade off is the high B and C will be very flat unless you push the 1st slide in for the B and C in the staff. Since you will play hundreds of Eb’s before playing a high B & C, it is best to tune the instrument for the Eb (1st slide out a few inches)
- PERCUSSION
 - General Info:
 - Setup/Orientation of Equipment - know the proper setup of each instrument your students are playing. Ask a private lesson teacher or percussion director (if you have them) if you’re not sure of something. If you don’t have a resource in your district, reach out to a state or local mentoring program!
 - Strike Zone - each instrument has a specific place that it should be struck. This may vary depending on the style or dynamics.
 - Implements - changing the mallet/stick a student is using can make a HUGE difference in timbre. Don’t be afraid to experiment with a variety of implements to find the exact sound/color you’re looking for!

Katie Lewis and Laura Bell are middle school band directors in Frisco ISD and Co-Creators of the “Band BFFs” podcast, available on Apple and Spotify!

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