

Clinic Title

"But We Learned This Already!" Back to the Basics for Students Who Already "Know It All"

Clinic Description

A recent career move brought me to the high school orchestra setting after teaching in middle school for 20 years. Because I taught beginning strings for so many years, I was immersed in the basics and felt those tools were vital to all students and should always be reinforced no matter their age or experience. This session will offer a variety of tips and tricks to keep the basics fresh and exciting so that orchestra teachers can teach and re-teach. Now more than ever, it's important that middle through high school students head in the right direction with these basics so that they can succeed with more challenging literature placed in front of them.

Clinic Outline

I. Basic instrument & bow hold set up

Students who have played incorrectly or have fallen into bad habits from virtual learning are especially challenged to change their set up.

- A. Remind students quickly and move on. Daily prompts will help.
- B. Sometimes a small detail will make a huge difference!
- C. Teaching is *learning twice*: ask students to teach each other proper bow hold.
- D. In severe cases have students switch instruments and have them start all over.

II. Pitch Names

Oftentimes, students will be several years into orchestra without ever knowing or being fluent with pitch names/note reading. They will know finger numbers as well as finger patterns but not note names.

- A. Note naming games.
- B. Class reciting of note names.
- C. Classic method books like *Müller Rusch* Books 1 & 2 appear more advanced to today's students because of the lack of pictures and colors. They are less likely to say "I've done this already" with older texts.
- D. Learn other clefs.

III. Key signatures

Students are generally not good at naming key signatures or understanding that, for example, in F major there is more than one Bb on their instrument.

- A. Frequently identify key signature names with students.
- B. Apply tips and mnemonic sayings that help with memorizing keys.
- C. Key signatures and group intonation go hand-in-hand.

IV. Rhythm reading

Students are very capable of imitating rhythms/rhythm patterns, yet some aren't strong independent counters. Acquiring rhythm skills requires different exercises and games.

- A. Teach new counting systems, maybe Eastman system. That way it is new to everyone.

- B. Add short dictation exercises into daily rehearsals.
- C. Add sightreading into daily rehearsals.
- D. Use or recommend rhythm apps for home practice/assignments.

V. Intonation

Developing and sustaining good intonation requires attention each and every day. This goes for all levels of learning.

- A. Include drone work for all levels and especially advanced groups.
- B. Try ear training with small groups of students.
- C. Identify patterns and apply them to rehearsals.
- D. Incorporate unison playing every day.
 - 1. Unison solos.
 - 2. Create difficult parts for all sections to play.

VI. Music selection

Choices in literature must answer myriad needs, not just for performance or festivals, but to strongly reinforce learning and playing concepts. Music needs to be age appropriate and should connect with the cultures of your group and/or community.

- A. Avoid over programming! You need sufficient time for the basics.
- B. Choose literature that will help reinforce the basics yet sounds mature and is fun to play.
- C. Program a mix of different grade levels so that some music can quickly review and reinforce learned concepts and others can offer more musical challenges. Success and achieving performance goals will also aid in retaining students for next year and will contribute to a lifelong appreciation for music.