



The Midwest Clinic

International Band and Orchestra Conference

2021 DAY ONE CLINIC SERIES

*An Educational Initiative of The Midwest Clinic
Presented by Master Teachers of Beginning Instrumental Methods*

HORN PEDAGOGY

From DAY ONE

Karen Houghton, Janet B. Nye, Clinicians

Wednesday, December 15 • 3:30 – 4:00pm

Friday, December 17 • 3:00 – 3:30pm

MEETING ROOM W186



HORN PEDAGOGY FROM DAY ONE

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SELECTING STUDENTS FOR HORN

Remarks: Horn can be a challenging instrument. Successful students tend to be bright, mature, and patient.

- Students must have a good ear to differentiate between the close partials.
- Students should be able to produce a good quality buzz while keeping a flat chin.
- Students with a normal bite naturally produce the required downward leadpipe angle.
- Horn students, like other wind players, should ideally not have a severe tongue-tie and should be able to form a pointed tongue.

BEFORE THE FIRST SOUNDS ARE MADE

Remarks: When assigning instruments, the predetermined distance between the finger hook and the thumb lever should match the size of the student's left hand. If clip-on tuners are used, transposing tuners are recommended.

THE INSTRUMENT ITSELF

- Students should be taught how to lay the case down and safely remove the horn.
- Students should be instructed how to hold and store their horns.
- Students should secure the mouthpiece into the horn with a gentle quarter turn.
- Students should be able to identify the parts of the instrument, including the F/Bb sides and the main tuning slide.
- Students should pull slides for good general tuning.
- Students should learn simple water removal techniques.
- Students should be taught to depress the valve lever while removing and inserting the corresponding slides.

BODY POSITION/BALANCE/POSTURE

- It helps initially to position the horn while standing with a straight but relaxed spine.
- The head is centered, and the chin is parallel with the floor.
- Elbows should be positioned slightly away from the body.
- Bring the mouthpiece and leadpipe to an angle that matches the teeth and is aligned with the center of the body.
- The bell can be placed on or off the leg. There is no one set-up that fits everyone. If the student has a very short torso, the bell may temporarily rest on the chair beside them or be held off the leg. If they place the bell on their right leg, the legs should be positioned apart in an L-shape, with the right leg beside the chair or lowered slightly beside the chair. Achieving and maintaining the correct leadpipe angle should determine whether the student plays on the leg or off the leg.

HAND POSITION

- The left hand should rest comfortably with slightly curved fingers on the valve levers. There should not be a big stretch between the thumb lever and finger hook. A hand strap that wraps around the hand will help hold the horn if a student plays off the leg.
- There are two acceptable (temporary) beginner right-hand positions: palm resting on inside bell or hand grasping bell rim. By delaying the proper right-hand position, the student can focus exclusively on developing their embouchure, posture, tapping left foot, and music reading skills.
- In transitioning to a more permanent right-hand position, the right-hand should rest on the top inside of the bell, thumb, and fingers together. The thumb should line up near the bracket located on the outside of the bell. The hand should focus but not impede the sound.

PRODUCING THE FIRST SOUNDS

Remarks: Attention to forming and maintaining the correct embouchure will help ensure growth. Poor methods lead to false success and ultimately compromise long-term development.

EMBOUCHURE

- The ideal mouthpiece set-up is 2/3 top lip, 1/3 bottom lip. However, the placement on the bottom lip may vary according to the size of the player's lips.
- The leadpipe angle should match the student's teeth. If the student has a natural overbite, the leadpipe will result in a downward angle.
- The teeth should be slightly open.
- The corners should be firm and forward, and the chin muscles pulled flat. This "horn face" will naturally open the aperture creating a clear and open sound. A bunched chin is a common problem among young players since they lack muscle control but have the desire to reach the high notes.
- The center of the lips should remain soft as if saying "poo."
- As students descend below a written middle C, they need to be taught to maintain firm corners/pointed chin and to shift their bottom teeth forward. Discourage them from rolling their bottom lip out excessively, which pushes the mouthpiece away. As they descend lower, their bottom jaw should also drop.

AIR

- Students should be instructed to take a tall, relaxed vertical breath, maintaining contact with the top lip as they breathe. Breathing through stretched corners should be avoided because it is difficult for the players to return to a "corners forward" position after the breath.
- Encourage beginners to adopt the habit of playing with a full, relaxed sound, as it is essential for embouchure development. The higher volume of air will dictate that the corner muscles remain firm to control the air flow. Even though the initial sounds may be a bit raw or primitive, the students will eventually learn control and refinement.
- Students should be taught to use more air in the low range (warm) and faster air in the high range (cold).

FIRST NOTES

- Initially, students should be instructed to switch easily from their resting face to their “horn face.” This helps establish the muscle memory needed to create an ideal sound. A mirror is a helpful tool for visual confirmation of this concept.
- Instruct the students to lick the center of their lips, form their horn face, take a tall vertical breath, and practice buzzing long notes. Next, have them produce small “sirens” (change of pitch) while buzzing.
- The 2nd slide pull-ring can be used as a buzzing visualizer, making sure it’s slightly angled down (to match the teeth).
- E is the most natural note for most students and is a good first note.
- Follow that by introducing the next two harmonics above and below on the open F horn (C and G).
- Teach students to blow more air and use the syllable “oh” for middle C. To reach the G, have your students keep their corners forward, blow faster air and use the syllable “ee.”
- The next step is to have the students identify and play C, D, E, F, and G.
- The low range should be introduced at this time by either slurring from a middle C to low G (shifting the bottom teeth forward/down) or descending chromatically.
- If students use a double horn, middle C can be played on both the F (open) and Bb (thumb lever) sides of the horn. This provides a consistent pitch reference allowing them to walk up or down to find their notes.
- Students will be more successful with downward slurs at first. Upward slurs may initiate embouchure problems.

ARTICULATION

- The tip of the tongue should tap on the bottom of the top teeth, not where the teeth meet the upper palate.
- When initially teaching tonguing, have the students form their “horn face” and articulate in the air holding their right hand in front of their face to feel the tongue release the air.
- The inhalation and exhalation should be one fluid motion.
- After learning to articulate in the middle of a tone on their mouthpiece, students may start notes with their tongue.
- Most students will need to be taught not to end the note with the tongue or by closing their lips.
- Students should only move their tongues while articulating.
- Students should learn to keep consistent airflow while articulating and move from note to note without stopping the air in between.

RECOMMENDED METHOD BOOKS AND PRINT MATERIALS FOR BEGINNERS

Remarks: Traditional band method books are necessary for mixed classes of instruments, but most lack sufficient lip slurs and low range development for horn players.

- ***Recipe for Success: a balanced curriculum for young horn players***, by Karen Houghton and Janet B. Nye (A comprehensive approach to learning solid fundamentals and skills from day one and continues through several years of playing. Ideal for homogenous horn classes and as a supplement to traditional band method books.)
- ***First Book of Practical Studies for French Horn***, by Robert W. Getchell (A simple, progressive etude book designed for increasing music-reading skills.)

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT FOR BEGINNERS

Remarks: Having students on reliable instruments is a high priority. Perform a basic compression test before issuing horns. This can be done by removing the first valve F slide. Completely cover the first slide leg opening with your thumb. While pressing the first valve lever, forcefully move air through the leadpipe. A hissing sound may indicate a leak.

MOUTHPIECES

- Farkas MC (not MDC because the rim is small and the cup is deep)
- FAXX MC
- Verus 17.5
- Schilke 29 or 30

HORNS

- Verus V or VG
- Paxman Academy
- (Both of these options have an adjustable finger hook and thumb lever)

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Remarks: Since beginners are anxious to play familiar tunes, introduce them as soon as the students are pedagogically ready. These 2-3 note songs may reinforce a fundamental concept while keeping the lessons fun. The development of both high range and low range should be encouraged simultaneously. Beginners should ideally develop a little over a two-octave range from an Eb (4th space treble clef) to a low C (second line bass clef) by the end of their first year. Concert pitch, note recognition, and knowing the corresponding fingering are essential in the first year. The website www.gimkit.com can be used for supplementary assignments and competitions. Providing students with correct information, believing in their potential, and holding them accountable will encourage and cultivate a growth mindset.