

# Finding the Perfect Fit:

*Beginning Band Recruitment &  
the Instrument Fitting Process*

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The Midwest Clinic  
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How I developed a passion for  
recruitment and refined my process

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## First thoughts. . .

Recruitment is much more than an  
*event* that happens on a specific day.

It is a *process*. . .one in which you  
should be engaged all year.

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## Part One:

*Organizing and Streamlining Your Recruitment*

"Organizing is what you do before you do something,  
so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up."

A. A. Milne

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## An organized recruitment process. . .

- Sets the stage for a successful program
- Helps to make a great first impression
- Makes your job easier
- Saves time

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Great beginner groups are at the heart of any successful band program. . .

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But first you have to  
get kids in the door.

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## Steps to Success

*Allow at least 4 months to actively plan, prepare materials and carry out your recruitment.*

1. Build a timeline
2. Determine your audience
3. Develop your message
4. Plan how to communicate
5. Organize it all
6. Carry out your plan (the fun part!)



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## Step 1: Backward-Develop Your Timeline

### Sample Timeline

- Students select courses for next year Early April
- Instrument Fittings take place Late March
- Communication & Sign Up Early-Mid March  
*Send Introductory Letter*  
*Demo Concert/ Visit Classrooms*  
*Sign-up for Fitting Appointments*
- Secure helpers/ volunteers Early March
- Preparation of Materials Jan. - Feb.

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Remember to schedule  
parent meetings and/or  
instrument rental nights

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During the rest of the year, engage in  
positive outreach within your  
community to **develop an image** of your  
program that attracts new members!

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## Step 2: Determine your audience



Students



Parents



Other  
Stakeholders

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## Step 3: Develop your message

- Specifics about your program
- Important dates and events
- How enrollment works
- Benefits to joining/ advocacy materials
- Other important information

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## Step 4: Plan how to best communicate your message



\*Know your audience- people respond to different methods of communication

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## Hooking Students

### Demonstration Concerts

- Make the music fun, familiar and no more than a few minutes

### Classroom Visits

- Opportunity to connect on a more personal level and answer questions



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## Hooking Students

- Videos
- Exposure to instruments/ instrument fittings
- Personal invitations
- Kid-to-kid interaction
- Giveaways with a purpose (stickers, wristbands, etc)



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## Engaging Parents

- Letters/ Email
- Websites
- Social Media
- Advocacy Materials
- Meetings
- Phone Calls



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Don't underestimate the power  
of "word of mouth" for  
engaging parents

*\* This can be positive or negative*

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## Educating Stakeholders

- Face to face meetings
- Invitations to concerts/ events
- Invitations to observe your classroom
- Advocacy materials
- Data
- Research/ articles on best practice



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## Step 5: Organizing it All

### **My favorite time-saving tools**

Google Forms & Sheets  
Mail Merge  
Sign-Up Genius

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## Google Forms and Sheets

[illegible]

Set up your form to gather information online you need from prospective students.

Form can be linked, emailed or embedded in your webpage

Many types of possible question responses:

- text*
- multiple choice*
- select from dropdown menu*
- checklist*

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## Google Forms and Sheets

[illegible]

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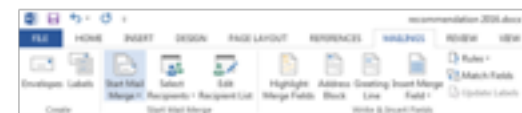
Google also lets you analyze responses!



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## Mail Merge

## Part of Microsoft Word: Make Personalized Documents and Forms



To the parents of First Name Last Name

Thank you for attending our recent Instrument Fittings! Based on the instrument fitting, we are very pleased to be able to recommend Student Name for participation in Performing Arts on Instruments.

To the parents of **Claire Reid**

Thank you for attending our recent Instrument Fittings! Based on the instrument fitting, we are very pleased to be able to recommend **Chloe** for participation in Performing Arts on **French Horn**.

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## Student Info

Collected Online via Google Forms &  
Mail Merged into Document

The image shows a mail-merged document template for student information. It includes fields for School Code, Student Name, Appointment Time, Email/Phone, Instruments the Student Wants to Try, and Notes. A section titled 'Student Info' contains a list of instruments: 1. French Horn, 2. Flute, 3. Bassoon. A 'Try-OUT' box is also visible.

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Use volunteers to help with  
non-musical elements of your  
recruitment and easily sign them  
up through Sign-up Genius

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## Sign-Up Genius

The image shows the Sign-Up Genius website interface. It features a calendar view for scheduling sign-ups, with columns for dates and times. The interface includes options to 'Sign Up', 'Check In', and 'Check Out' for various groups.

1. Set your dates, times and details on the website.
2. Email a link to your group.
3. You are notified when someone signs up or changes their sign-up.
4. Sign-up Genius emails your volunteers a reminder a few days prior.

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Once you have planned and  
prepared, the fun begins! (Step 6)

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## Part Two: *The Instrument Fitting Process*

"Curious indeed how these things happen.  
The wand chooses the wizard, remember."  
*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

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## Two ideas to consider:

- Getting kids on the right instrument jump starts their learning and puts them on a personal path toward success.
- It is the Band Director's responsibility to try to place each student on an instrument where he/ she has a strong chance of succeeding.



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## Success on an Instrument Can Be Influenced By:

- Musical Aptitude
- Shape and size of lips
- Formation of the teeth and jaw
- Size of hands, fingers, arms and body

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## What should a student be able to do at an instrument fitting?

1. Form a very basic embouchure (does not have to be perfect!) after instruction and guidance
2. Sustain a tone on the mouthpiece/ small instrument for 3-5 counts after instruction and practice
3. Create sounds on the full instrument
4. Hold the instrument by themselves



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## Why do an instrument fitting?

Going through each of these steps allows the teacher to determine which instruments best suit each student by:

Evaluating any potential embouchure issues related to the physical characteristics of the lips, teeth and jaw

Determining instruments where the student has the best potential to produce a characteristic sound after instruction

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## Why do an instrument fitting?

Going through each of these steps allows the teacher to determine the potential of the student on the instrument by:

Checking for any issues with the size of hands, fingers, arms or body that might influence success on the instrument

Comparing the student's embouchure and sound on a variety of instruments to determine which are more likely to be a good fit.

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And it helps the student know what instrument feels most comfortable and natural to play.

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## What Do Instrument Fitting Nights Look Like?

- Several tables with instruments, sterilizing solution, paper towels, pencils
- Chairs for parents a few feet away (they can observe everything, but are not in the way)
- Have enough testers and enough time to allow 5-10 minutes per instrument, per child (hire help or trade time with colleagues)



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## What Do Instrument Fitting Nights Look Like?

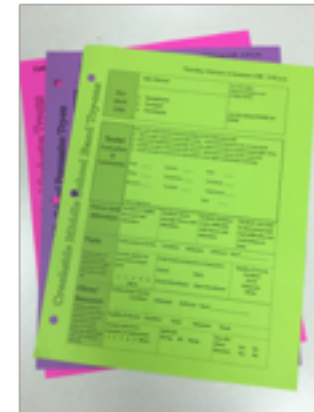
- Have lots of current band kids and/or parents to welcome everyone and direct traffic
- Sign In
- Try the instruments
- Sign Out/ Preferences



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## Wendy's Forms

- Color Coded for easy sorting!
- Pre-printed with student info via Mail Merge
- Helps you keep information organized
- Download wind and percussion forms free from my website  
[www.onandoffthepodium.com](http://www.onandoffthepodium.com)



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## A Closer Look

<b>Low Brass</b> <small>Student produces buzz on the mouthpiece, then produces sound on instrument. If more than one brass instrument is tried, list aptitude on each.</small>	<b>Embouchure (circle):</b> Excellent    Adequate    Deficient How? _____		<b>Physical Considerations</b> (body or lip size, braces, etc.)
	<b>Buzz on mouthpiece (if more than one brass instrument tested, indicate each):</b> Strong    Adequate    Weak    None		
	<b>Sustain pitch # of seconds on mouthpiece</b> 1   2   3   4   5   More	<b>Circle all pitches played on instrument:</b> Trb/Bar: Lower   Bb   F   Bb   Higher Tube: Lower   Bb   F   Bb   Higher	

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## Making the First Sounds

Brass instruments use a natural embouchure

Woodwind embouchures must be "built"

*But don't get too technical at the instrument fitting*

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## Quick Tip - All Wind Instruments



Start with the "small instrument"

It is crucial that the teacher place the mouthpiece in the correct position.

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## Quick Tip - Flute



Pout with your bottom lip over your finger and blow as if you are saying "pooh"

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## Quick Tip-Double Reeds



Don't be afraid to start students on oboe or bassoon.

Use a synthetic reed for instrument fittings.

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## Quick Tip-Clarinet



To get that characteristic clarinet embouchure shape, tell students to "pretend to put Chapstick on their bottom lip."

Always start with the mouthpiece and barrel  
Use a #2 or #2 1/2 strength reed

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## Quick Tip - Saxophone



Too many saxophones? Have them all try clarinet too.

I do not recommend using a hard reed as a method of "discouraging" students from playing saxophone, as you will wind up with students prone to forcing the sound. Instead look for students who can maintain a relaxed but steady air stream on a 2 or 2 1/2 reed.

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## Quick Tip - Saxophone



To further distinguish your potential sax "superstars," put the neck strap & instrument on the student and see if they can add a finger at a time and play from B all the way down to low D.

Some won't like the weight of the instrument or will find this task too difficult and will gravitate to another choice.

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## Quick Tip - Brass

If a student has trouble creating a sound on a trumpet or horn mouthpiece, "move up" to a larger mouthpiece.

Many students will have an easier time, and then you can go back to the smaller mouthpiece once they get a sound going.

*(You might gain a low brass player in the process!)*



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## Don't Be Afraid To Guide Students



- Trumpet buzz weak - try low brass
- Great sound on trumpet/ good ear try French horn
- Too many saxophones - try clarinet
- Motivated student interested in woodwinds - try double reeds
- Natural fit for everything/seems excited about everything- sell instruments that you need

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## Percussion

- Educate students and parents about what being a percussionist "is" and "is not"
- Depending on your situation, you may want to cap percussion enrollment
- Develop well-rounded percussionists, not drummers



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## Percussion Characteristics

- Excellent sense of rhythm
- Excellent coordination
- Willing to learn and play all percussion instruments
- Organized
- Focused
- Piano background helpful



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## Percussion- Coordination

<p>Teacher demonstrates each exercise by one before student performs.</p>	Tap quarter notes with right hand and right foot	GOOD	OK	WEAK	NOT AT ALL
	Tap quarter notes alternating R and L hands and right foot	GOOD	OK	WEAK	NOT AT ALL
	Hand taps eighth notes. Foot taps quarter notes.	GOOD	OK	WEAK	NOT AT ALL
	Student performs minimum of 4 possibilities, alternating hands	GOOD	OK	WEAK	NOT AT ALL

All exercises are demonstrated by teacher and then repeated by the student. Musical terminology is for teacher reference only.

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## Percussion- Rhythmic Discrimination

<b>Rhythmic Discrimination</b> <p>Teacher taps rhythm (up to 3 times), then does silent rhythm.</p>	Correct on 1 <sup>st</sup> attempt	Correct on 2 <sup>nd</sup> attempt	Correct on 3 <sup>rd</sup> attempt	Nearly correct	Not at all
	Correct on 1 <sup>st</sup> attempt	Correct on 2 <sup>nd</sup> attempt	Correct on 3 <sup>rd</sup> attempt	Nearly correct	Not at all
	Correct on 1 <sup>st</sup> attempt	Correct on 2 <sup>nd</sup> attempt	Correct on 3 <sup>rd</sup> attempt	Nearly correct	Not at all
	Correct on 1 <sup>st</sup> attempt	Correct on 2 <sup>nd</sup> attempt	Correct on 3 <sup>rd</sup> attempt	Nearly correct	Not at all

All exercises are demonstrated by teacher and then repeated by the student. Notation is for teacher reference only.

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## Percussion- Mallets

<b>Mallets</b> <small>Teacher performs each pattern, measures pattern. Student echoes pattern.</small>		Correct on 1 <sup>st</sup> attempt	Correct on 2 <sup>nd</sup> attempt	Correct on 3 <sup>rd</sup> attempt	Nearly correct	Not at all
		Correct on 1 <sup>st</sup> attempt	Correct on 2 <sup>nd</sup> attempt	Correct on 3 <sup>rd</sup> attempt	Nearly correct	Not at all
		Correct on 1 <sup>st</sup> attempt	Correct on 2 <sup>nd</sup> attempt	Correct on 3 <sup>rd</sup> attempt	Nearly correct	Not at all

All exercises are demonstrated by teacher and then repeated by the student. Notation is for teacher reference only.

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## Rhythm Aptitude Testing



IMMA Rhythm Aptitude Test is an additional data point, used to help confirm what is seen in the instrument fitting.

*It is never considered alone.*

Requires a computer and headphones and takes about 15 minutes to complete

Available from GIA

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## After the instrument fitting...

*You must take the time to find out what instruments the student prefers and feels most comfortable playing.*

***Student buy-in is essential if you want to retain them in your program***

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## Sign-Out

PERFORMING ARTS SIGN-OUT FORM	
CLAIRE ANNETTE REID	
I TRIED: FRENCH HORN FLUTE BASSOON	
OTHER INSTRUMENTS I TRIED:	
WHAT I LIKED THE BEST WAS:	RATING: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
WHAT I LIKED 2ND BEST WAS:	RATING: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
WHAT I LIKED 3RD BEST WAS:	RATING: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
The director will make every effort to place students on their first or second choice. Please note that this may not always be possible, particularly if your child's first two choices are instruments with limited enrollment such as percussion and saxophone.	
IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU TRIED THAT YOU DO NOT WANT TO PLAY?	
STUDENT SIGNATURE _____	PARENT SIGNATURE _____

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## Recommending an Instrument

Consider (in this order)

- Child's Preferences
- The Best Fit
- Needs of the Ensemble



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Get students on an instrument that they love AND can be successful playing, and your band will blossom.

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## Where Can I Get More Ideas?

- Videos for parents, kids, teachers and administrators
- Instrument Demonstrations
- Tons of downloadable documents! (Letters, Social Media Posts, Advocacy Materials, Posters, etc.)
- It's all FREE!



bepartofthemusic.org

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## Where Can I Get More Ideas?

- *Teaching Music Through Performance in Middle School Band* (Chip De Stefano's chapter on Recruitment)
- NAMM Foundation Educator Resources <https://www.nammfoundation.org/educator-resources/mac-practical-guide-recruitment-and-retention>
- Wendy's Website [www.onandoffthepodium.com](http://www.onandoffthepodium.com) (blog posts and downloadable materials)
- Talk to colleagues and share your best ideas - we all have something that works!

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Thanks to my sponsor!



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