

Beginner Band

We've only just begun.....



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In the Beginning...

Band Demo and Recruitment:

Two of several possible ways to do a successful Band Demo:

- I.
 - Band Demo for students with all instruments demonstrated by you.
 - Demo size: Personally, I prefer 50 or less students at each demo.
 - Large demos may be ineffective if the students are too far away from the instruments.
 - Information to join band and rent an instrument handed out that day.
 - Parent Band Demo that evening or in the very near future.

- II.
 - Band Demo for students done by HS musicians who travel around all the elementary schools in one day to do demos.
 - Demo size: Entire grade.
 - No handouts given at that time.
 - Parent Band Demo that evening or in near future.
 - Sign up in classrooms for band testing.
 - Sign up may or may not indicate instrument preferences.
 - Students come down in small groups for evaluation on all mouthpieces for tone production and physical characteristics. (flute head joint, clarinet mpce. and barrel, sax mpce., trumpet mpce., trombone mpce. and rhythm test for perc.)
 - Teacher's recommendation and information to join band and rent an instrument handed out at the evaluation.

Evening Instrument Demo and performance for the parents.

- Discuss instruments and physical characteristics, instrumentation, practicing and weekly assignments and expectations.
- This can only be a positive move for your program. More parents meet you and learn about the program.
- Remember to announce the due date of paperwork and a time line for starting instruction to the parents. Make sure paperwork is self-explanatory and that it has your name and school telephone number.
- A group from the HS can play and demonstrate instruments at the demonstration.

Instrumentation: To control or not to control. Yes!

Two of several possible ways to take control of your instrumentation:

- I. **Four year plan to convert an old system and take control.**
 - 1st year--follow the former director's policy unless it was a total failure. More than likely the past policy has been "play whatever you want."
 - 2nd year--First come, first serve--list a first and second choice for instruments on the registration form. If you get overloaded on an instrument (based on projected band enrollment and your instrumentation expectations), talk to the latecomers about playing their second choice.
 - 3rd/4th year--The student chooses two instruments-unless they already have an instrument at home. Options now are: "First come, first serve", talk to anyone who picked a less selected instrument as his/her "2nd", and see if he/she will play it. (Some students really don't have a strong first preference.), or consider announcing when a particular instrument is "full" and telling the students to pick something else.

- II. **Evaluation of all prospective band students:**
 - During the evaluation, you recommend an instrument that the child will be successful on and that will fit into your instrumentation guideline. Keep track of testing and recommendations to help balance your instrumentation.

Use the baseball team analogy (not everyone gets to be the pitcher) to help people understand balanced instrumentation is required to provide students with a positive band experience.

Instrumentation problems started in Beginner Band will not easily correct themselves in later grades.

Note reading and counting:

- Develop a common counting system with the General Music Teacher. Beg him/her to teach/review lines and spaces and basic note values at the beginning of the school year.

- Teach students to count the lines and spaces on their hand, so they can practice anywhere alone or with a friend.

Scheduling--How to fill the blank slate:

- How many minutes of pupil contact time should you have each day?
- Are the lessons the same time each week or rotating schedule?
- Find out if you are expected to schedule around anything. Example: In past jobs, I have scheduled around Specials (General Music, Library, P.E. and Art) and several other pullout programs--Basic Skills, Supplemental Instruction, Academically Talented Program, Speech and Resource Room.
- Schedule "large instrument" lessons on band rehearsal days.

Before the first lesson:

- Invite the students that already own an instrument to bring it to the band room so they will be sure to have it in school for the first lesson.
- Grease all corks, take off plastic bags, pull out cork pad sealers on clarinets and saxes and oil all valves and trombone slides. There may not be time for you to teach this and an embouchure during the first lesson.
- Check to make sure that all students who rented an instrument get one delivered before their first lesson.
- Put an "Adults Initials" column in the practice record of each method book before the first lesson if you are going to require a signature.

Music Dealer and suggested instrument brands:

- Compile a list of brands of each type of instrument that you approve of and would like your dealer to rent or sell to the students. Distribute the list to all the band directors in the district.

Goals of the first lesson:

- Consider teaching this entire lesson on the on the floor.
- Assemble and take apart instrument-including putting it back in the case.
- Make a tone--instrument does not go home if they can't make a tone; the student comes back the next day. Sometimes I let the "trumpet hummers" take their mouthpiece home.
- Play the first note to be introduced- they may not see it in the book at the first lesson due to time constraints.

Suggestions for producing the first tone:

Flute emb: M and M, Mom

Flute tone: 1. Roll the head joint down your bottom lip and scrunch it up a little bit.
2. Spit a watermelon seed.
3. Winnie the Pooh
4. Too

Play only head joint for about 2 weeks.

Clar./Sax emb: Open your mouth like you are going to the dentist.
Curve your bottom lip over your bottom teeth-not your bottom face. (You will need a mirror-I recommend one that will sit on a stand.)
Put your finger in your mouth about 1/2 inch.
Gently put your top teeth on your finger.
Shut your lips like normal.
Do this several times before you transfer them to the mouthpiece.

Clar. instrument: Top half only, helps embouchure stability. Add the rest several weeks later.

Clar./Sax tone: Air first, like a windstorm: then, tell them not to change anything with their mouth but speed up the windstorm.

Hands: Flute/Sax: Make "hand position" labels on your computer and put them in the front of their books. This may help them remember what keys to put their hands on.
"Skip one, hit one, skip one, hit two"

Brasses:	They will be able to cover buzzing and making a tone during the first lesson without running out of time.
Brass emb:	M and M, Mom
Brass tone:	Buzz without mouthpiece first; keep lips even. Buzz, and then add mouthpiece while buzzing. Sirens.
Trombone assembly:	Teach students a system for holding the two parts before putting them together so when assembly is complete, the trombone is not backwards. Example: "Hold the slide in your right hand with the tall part by your belly button, the other part facing out. Put the bell in your left hand with the bell section pointing out to your side and the connector by your belly button."
Percussion:	Introduce match grip and make sure the students understand the "mirror image" concept of the hands. Students should work to memorize the grip. Discuss, demonstrate and have students practice piston motion. Emphasize it is one fluid motion and that sticks should start and stop in the same spot. Make sure there is no "wind up" motion. Include a worksheet with percussion vocabulary. Drum pads, drums, or bell sets?

Goals of second lesson:

- Fix embouchure and instrument holding problems; introduce book.
- Introduce/review assignment policy, practicing and practice record chart.
- Ask each student to bring a pencil; suggest they store one in their case.

Braces? Consider your free sample from The Morgan Bumper Company, 1-800-453-7846, www.morgan-bumper.com or e-mail to drtimmorgan@hotmail.com

Beginner Band at the December Concert?

- Absolutely! The rental period could be up around this time--give parents a reason to keep supporting their child's musical growth.
- A performance puts everything into perspective for students and parents.
- Parents get a chance to listen and evaluate their child's performance in comparison to the group effort.
- Beginner Band students develop a sense of pride.

Tunes for the first concert:

Take them straight from the method book.

- Suggestions:
- Play each one with a repeat so they are twice as long.
 - Feature sections or instrument groups to add tunes to the short performance.
 - They might be able to do Jolly Ol' Saint Nick if they know 6 notes.
 - Write out Jingle Bells melody on staff paper for the Finale if the book doesn't have it, or the arrangement is too difficult

February seems to be the worst month for practicing--maybe motivate by giving out candy or stickers for good work and preparation.

Band and the special education student: YES!

- Specific Learning Disability: Personally, I have had the most success with these students. I have had to make flash cards, write in all note names or make other accommodations to help them be successful.
- Cognitively Impaired: Some do well (usually auditory learners) and some don't.
- Multiply Disabled and Traumatic Brain Injury: Yes, they have been positive contributors to my Beginner Bands.

Method books and band music:

- There are some good quality method books on the market. Some of them have several accessories to go with them. I prefer a method book that starts on Concert D. Sometimes I use the accompaniment CD during lessons.

- Literature: There seems to be a large variance in the difficulty of Grade 1 music. Select new music from score study, research or by listening. Edit low instrument parts if needed.

PLEASE-don't beat the band music during lessons. Try your best to balance your limited lesson time between the book and the band music. A logical progression of concepts through a method book is the only way you can guarantee ALL students will be introduced to all concepts. Isn't the flute part always harder than the tuba part? Don't let your low instrument players be bored; they are scarce enough as it is.

Grading and evaluation:

- Develop a system that is fair and meets the requirements of your school. Make the grade be for more than attendance.
- If you are not on the school report card, make your own and send them home the same day.

Band Cheerleader: Don't forget they are looking to learn and to have fun.

Some personal thoughts for successful teaching anytime, anywhere...

Remember your students want to learn.

Be prepared, so you can demand that of your students.

Imagine EVERYTHING you say to your students coming out of their mouths at the dinner table later that evening.

Please don't teach notes and rhythms by rote.

If you think you can help a child by calling home to ask for parental support, do it.

Save articles or handouts that defend or speaks positively of music education. Put them in a folder and have it handy. You never know when you will need them, and they make great report card stuffers.

GOOD REFERENCE BOOKS:

Teaching Instrumental Music Developing the Complete Band Program: Shelley Jagow, published by Meredith Music Publications

The Art of Elementary Band Directing: Eileen Fraedrich, published by Meredith Music Publications

Handy Manual Fingering Charts for Instrumentalists (has trill fingerings, too.)
#03876: Clarence Hendrickson, published by Carl Fischer, Inc.
(This book does not have a saxophone trill chart, so I use the Advanced Vol. I Rubank saxophone method book.)

The Complete Woodwind Instructor: Deborah and Robert Sheldon, published by C. L. Barnhouse Company

Percussion Education: A Source Book of Concepts and Information: Percussive Arts Society.

The Complete Percussionist: Robert Breithaupt, published by C. L. Barnhouse Company

Complete Guide to the Maintenance and Repair of Band Instruments: Kenneth A. Mueller, published by Parker Pub. Co.

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