

## **“Too Many Students, Not Enough Time”**

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*Disclaimer:* If you are a teacher who has to have everything work in just a certain way at a predictable pace you will find much to disagree with in what we are presenting today!

**Congratulations!** Your recruitment efforts have been successful and you have big numbers signed up for your beginning band classes. What do you do when you have a room full of eager students and only 30 minutes twice a week for instruction? *It is assumed that you have communicated with the classroom teachers to make sure that your students are academically ready to face the challenge of a pull-out program.*

- I. **“The Hill You Want To Die On”:** *You cannot effectively teach everything*, so pick the most important things and do them very well.
  - a. Your **primary goal** should be to create the foundations for a lifetime of music making.
  - b. What are the components of the music experience that will most likely keep your students interested in continuing in music at the next level?
  - c. Our Five “Hills”—in order!
    1. Create an enjoyable and efficient classroom environment and protocol.
    2. Emphasize the understanding of and reproduction of beat and rhythm.
    3. Build the foundations of proper tone production and breath control.
    4. Fingers and note reading.
    5. Public performance before the winter break.

### **II. Classroom environment and protocol:**

- a. Before the first class make index cards with their name, instrument, teacher and classroom number to put on the seats so the students know where to sit. Write big so students can easily see their name on the card. Keep the cards all year—they can come in handy for seating students at concerts, creating seating charts, taking roll and notes, etc.
- b. *Don't restrict yourself to traditional seating arrangements.* Flutes may do better in the back row so they can hear themselves and won't be encouraged to overblow. *Rotate the seating from time to time (again, the cards!) so all sections get equal attention.*
- c. Leave a “highway” through the middle of the seats so you can easily get to the students in the back.
- d. Learn names as soon as possible.
- e. Saxes and trumpets assemble instruments and leave cases outside to save room and prevent gridlock when entering and exiting.
- f. Have a procedure for waiting outside, entering the room, warming up, rest position/ready position, and procedures for cleaning up and exiting as well as emergency procedures.
- g. “A.B.M”: Always Be Moving.
- h. While you are waiting for everyone to get an instrument, break out the recorders to teach the basics and classroom protocol.

### **III. Developing a working understanding of beat and basic rhythms:**

- a. Everyone learns differently. ***Discover and develop and use as many different ways as possible of teaching the same concepts.*** If they are not picking up on what you are teaching you will need to change how you teach the concept—perhaps several times. *You may need to teach the basics many times over due to not having class every day.* Some young brains are not ready to understand and produce the concepts of beat and rhythm.
- b. **Sound before sight:** *Music writing was not developed before humans began making music so it makes sense to learn the sounds and how to create them before learning to read notation.* Call and response should be a major component of your early lessons. Insist on the initial articulation.

- c. Beginning to identify symbols: *Counting and clapping does not sound like music unless you are a percussionist!*
  - 1. Ed Sueta “tooting and oohing”.
    - a. Benefits: Reinforces initial articulation and holding out long note values. Don’t worry—they won’t “bounce” the notes forever!
    - b. Use the “noise maker” in your initial lessons.
    - c. Counting and clapping can be introduced later on.
    - d. A document camera or overhead projector is essential to teaching these concepts.
    - e. Foam board cards for drill/games.
  - 2. Use a “Garage Band” style background track
  - 3. As you begin to learn exercises and songs in the method book have them “too and ooh” first—stand behind the class and have the students point to the page while they are doing this—that way you will know who is actually watching the page!
- d. On a regular basis have a rhythm day—no stands, no music—project rhythm examples (don’t forget the background track!) to reinforce and build skills. *Band time does not always have to be about reading from printed music—train the ear as well as the eyes.*

**IV. Develop the basics of proper tone production and breath control:**

- a. Having a poster of the human respiratory system is very helpful.
- b. Long tone contests. Posters again are a big help.
- c. Praise students with good posture rather than reprimanding the improper examples.
- d. Give students time in class to experiment with their “noise maker”—they need the time to discover how it works.

**V. Fingers and note reading**

- a. Use a “Fast Start” page rather than the method book for your first lessons. Teach the EASIEST first three notes for each instrument and “Hot Cross Buns” on this page. Flute: BAG Clarinet/Trumpet: EDC Trombone: DCBb Sax: BAG. It’s ok if it’s not unison—it *wouldn’t be anyway!* Give them something to be successful with right away and that sounds good when they are at home.
- b. Find **many** ways to teach the lines and spaces. We are generally ok with students writing the letters in—as long as they are showing progress making music on their instrument music notation is a secondary concern. *It takes some students longer to grasp the concepts due to brain development.* Once they start playing longer pieces with more notes they won’t have time to do the writing and it will go away.
- c. High interest music will create a natural desire to learn more notes. Check out 8notes.com for a great source of FREE music for your students.
- d. “The Grid”

	1	2	3	4	5
Flute/Trombone/Baritone	Bb	C	D	Eb	F
Clarinet/Trumpet	C	D	E	F	G
Alto Saxophone	G	A	B	C	D

**VI The first performance—do this before the winter break.**

- a. Nothing lights the fire of young musicians like a public performance.
- b. Think outside the box—it does not necessarily have to be in the evening—small performances for other classes (especially Kindergarten and primary grades) work well.
- c. “Hot Cross Buns”: The Alpha and the Omega.

- d. Play the first tunes “Concert Style”: Tutti, each section, tutti again. Also do solos. *It is ok to play the same eight measures over and over again as long as you do it a different way!*
  - e. Long tone contests in front of the audience.
  - f. Call and response with background track.
  - g. Photo op: Have them perform their favorite song again allowing the parents to come up to the group and take pictures. If you have a VERY large group you can do this multiple times, saying “Now the parents of the trumpets come on up!”
  - h. Concerned that if you do an evening concert it will be too short? Just remember—*no one cares if the concert is over in 20 minutes—they are thrilled their child is playing music AND no one minds going home quickly!*
- VI. Instrument Tricks: General considerations: Spend a couple of lessons on the noise-makers only to reinforce initial articulation and rhythm patterns. Give them time to experiment! Do not make the students sit for too long while you are working with another section. Learn to be an effective teacher in a noisy environment. ALWAYS BE MOVING! Feet flat and back straight solves most problems. Instrument care and maintenance: Show Portman’s instrument videos. About 2 minutes each
- a. Flute: Put dots with a permanent Sharpie where they DON’T put their fingers. Chris puts stickers where they DO put their fingers. Place a piece of Scotch tape where the left index finger and right thumb rest. Allow flutes to play exercises on the first note only—their finger changes in the books are very difficult. Teach first notes with them holding it like a recorder. *If at all possible have at least one session with flutes only.*
  - b. Clarinet: Teach first notes with only the top three sections of the instrument.
  - c. Saxophone: Put dots with a permanent Sharpie where they DON’T put their fingers for the left hand. Adjust neck strap while they are standing.
  - d. Clarinet and sax—they usually have too much mouthpiece in their mouth. This creates that horrendous sound. Also check that their top teeth are actually touching the mouthpiece—gently pull up on the mouthpiece to see if you feel a “click”—if so, they are not anchoring.
  - e. Brass: Start each day with buzzing and siren sounds.
  - f. Trumpet: Left hand trumpet push-ups to reinforce that the left hand, not the right, supports the weight. Oil valves at first by putting some drops in the bottom.
  - g. Trombone: Make sure they have plenty of room to move the slide—front row is great for this section. All brass—teach the register change on a lower note (Concert Ab to Eb) rather than trying to do Concert Bb to F.
  - h. Percussion: Anne does not start percussion in my beginning classes—she waits until they have played a wind instrument for a year. Chris starts beginners but has them play bells first.

### **Tried and True**

Beethoven’s Ninth/Sweeney  
 Bugler’s Dream/Lavender  
 Soar with the  
 Dragons/Romeyn  
 Rock Attack /Chambers  
 Monster Rock/Molter  
 Cardiff Castle/Williams

Magnificent Five/Williams  
 Batter Up (Narrator)/Shaffer  
 Dr. Boo /Adams  
 Confluence/McBride  
 Power Rock/Sweeney  
 Zombie Stomp/Grice  
 March of the  
 Romans/Sweeney

Homework Blues (need  
 bones)/Lavender  
 Pegasus/Curnow  
 Midnight Madness/Balmages  
 Sailor’s Holiday/Williams  
 Any Brian Balmages

### **Resources:**

Facebook “Band Directors Group”  
 8notes.com Wow!  
 ossfab.com Flexible arrangements  
 Jump Start First Concert/Peter Blair

Standard of Excellence First Performance  
 Accent on Ensembles/Alfred  
 Yamaha Ensembles

## Questions from new teachers:

**How do you introduce embouchure with all the different instruments at the same time?** You need to spend just a few minutes on each instrument while the others wait, and then do rhythm drills on just the “noisemaker”. (Clarinet mouthpiece/barrel sax mouthpiece /neck flute/headjoint brass mouthpiece)

**How do you explain the main difference between clarinet and saxophone embouchure if you're teaching both groups simultaneously?** Can you recommend any good videos to use as example? At the elementary level there isn't much difference. Just make sure they have the top teeth firmly anchored on the top of the mouthpiece and are covering the bottom teeth w/the lip. Start the tone with the tongue against the tip of the reed, pulling away quickly.

**Do you do ever separate groups - for example, have only woodwinds come one day and brass the next?** This is difficult for the classroom teachers to have so many students leaving at different times. The most important one for me is to see the flute section separately at least once—emphasizing to the classroom teacher that it is a one time only request. Just ask the classroom teachers what they are willing to do for you in the beginning of instruction—most are willing to cooperate on a short-term basis but don't count on it!

**Do you just send mouthpieces home with beginners for the first couple of weeks to ensure they're only practicing buzzing/embouchure?** There is a high risk that you will never see the mouthpiece again if you only send that part home. Do not send anything home until you are certain they are pretty solid on how to care for the instrument and how to make the initial sounds.

**How long do you spend on embouchure and posture?** It's constant and at every rehearsal. Never ending battle.

**I have noticed that reading is a big weakness. Should I focus a week or two on simply reading common rhythmic combinations?** I focus on rhythm almost exclusively for several weeks at the beginning. I use an overhead projector (old school kind) and put up transparencies with rhythm exercises. I use the Ed Sueta counting system as it makes a lot more sense for young wind players. It is a real game changer for elementary students.

**What are some techniques for dealing with not having a classroom (I'm on the stage with my beginning students during primary lunch. It's pretty loud and distracting)?** There are not techniques. It sucks and you just have to learn to carry through. Sorry—no answers here. It's horrible. Approach your administrator with your concerns.

**Do you review embouchure/ posture/ proper breathing before anything else?** I review these all the time on almost a daily basis.

**What are your thoughts on doing your own arrangements for students to play.** You can do this but there are many commercial publications available to save yourself the time—arrangements that are designed to be adaptable to any combination of instruments. Let me know when you want to stop by and take a look, or knock yourself out and arrange your own.

**Do you play piano or guitar occasionally to accompany students?** Yes I can chord very simple I IV V chord patterns for the easy songs and do this very often.

**Do you use Smart Music - if so how often?** It's too expensive and can be fickle. I've tried using it but since the students play so terribly out of tune and out of time it is an exercise in frustration. You'll dink around with it so much that in an eye blink the class is over and no one has played. However I do use Garage Band accompaniments (just rhythm) to make the rhythm exercises really fun. I suggest using that sort of thing rather than Smart Music.

