

**Achieving Excellence in the Elementary Band Classroom:
“Plan for Success from Day One”**

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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?

My teaching assignment: *I am the band and classroom music teacher at two elementary schools in Fresno Unified School District. F.U.S.D. is the fourth largest district in California and it serves a community with a very wide range of socio-economic challenges. All F.U.S.D. students receive a free school meal. Our VAPA office provides everything necessary (instruments, supplies and method books) for ALL students so that regardless of family ability to provide, students have equal access to band, orchestra and choir. Very few students take private lessons. Almost 100% of students use a school instrument. Average band class size is 10-20 students, in nine different band classes separated into beginning, 5th grade and 6th grade bands. Classes are grouped according to classroom teacher rather than instrument. Band classes meet twice a week for thirty minutes of instruction.*

You cannot effectively teach everything, so you must choose the most important concepts and teach very well. I often say that elementary band is teaching the same three lessons over and over again—the trick is finding a way to keep the reinforcement of the basics fresh and stimulating for both the students and the teacher.

Your first job is to determine the definition of “excellence” for your classroom. Your **primary goal** should be to create the foundations for a lifetime of music-making and intelligent, educated music consumerism.

→What are the components of the music experience that will most likely keep your students interested in continuing in music at the next level?

Consider the following as the basics of excellence in your music classroom:

1. Emphasize the understanding of and reproduction of beat and rhythm.
2. Create an enjoyable and efficient classroom environment and protocol.
3. Build the foundations **initial articulation**, proper tone production and breath control.
4. Fingers, ears and note reading.
5. Public performance before the winter break.

I. Classroom environment and protocol:

- a. Before the first class **create index cards** with student name, instrument, teacher and classroom number to place 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, keeping track of parent contact etc.
- b. **Don't restrict yourself to traditional seating arrangements.** Beginning flutes do better being seated 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 receive equal front-row attention.*
- c. Leave a “highway” through the middle of the ensemble so you can easily access the students in the back.
- d. Don't always teach from the podium or front of the room.
- e. Small room? Larger instruments assemble instruments and leave cases outside to save room and prevent gridlock when entering and exiting. If possible trombones should have their cases next to their seat to avoid incidents when walking in to and out of the room.
- 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. At the beginning of the year, while you are waiting for everyone to get an instrument, use recorders to teach the basics and classroom protocol.

II. 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, retain 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. **Improvisation:** Yes, your beginning students can improvise! Use a background track and do call and response with one, two, three and more unison note patterns. Allow students an opportunity to use their ears only and not be dependent upon the written page.
- d. Beginning to identify symbols: *Counting and clapping does not sound like music!*
 - 1. Ed Sueta system “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. Just like reading text, some students have difficulty tracking symbols—using an overhead and pointing to the rhythms as they move helps students to exercise tracking skills.
 - e. Large foam board cards for drill/games.
 - 2. Use an energetic background track. MANY are available on youtube!
 - 3. As you begin to learn exercises and songs in the method book have students “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!
- e. 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 ears as well as the eyes.*

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

- a. A poster of the human respiratory system is very helpful.
- b. Long tone contests. Posters with student achievement benchmarks are a big help.
- c. Praise students with good posture rather than reprimanding the ones still developing good habits.
- d. Give students time in class to experiment with their “noise-maker” (Clarinet mouthpiece/barrel, sax mouthpiece /neck, flute/head joint, brass/mouthpiece). Students need the time to discover how it works.

IV. Fingers and note reading :

- a. Use a “Fast Start” page (example attached—full instrumentation on CASMEC website) 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 and Sax: BAG Clarinet/Trumpet: EDC Trombone/baritone: DCBb. It’s ok if it’s not unison—it *wouldn’t be anyway!* Give students something to be successful with right away that sounds “good” and is easy to do when they are at home.
- b. Find **many** ways to teach the lines and spaces. Some students will take more time than others to be able to accurately read note names from the staff. I am generally ok with beginning students writing the letters in—as long as they are showing progress in 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 familiar music for your students.
- d. “The Grid”: For use during rhythm exercises.

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

V. The first performance—do this before the winter break.

- Nothing lights the fire of young musicians like their first public performance.
- Think outside the box—you do not have to have a performance in the evening—small performances for other classes (especially Kindergarten and primary grades) work well.
- Concerts during the day may be better for economically challenged areas as reliable transportation and sometimes safety can be a concern for returning to school after hours.
- “Hot Cross Buns”: The Alpha and the Omega.
- 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!*
- Long tone contests in front of the audience. Awards for winners.
- Call and response with background track.
- Photo op: Have students 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!”
- 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 few lessons on the “noise-makers” only to reinforce initial articulation and rhythm patterns. Give students 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—they are about two minutes in length.
- a. **Flute:** Put dots with a permanent Sharpie where they DON’T 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 the first notes while they hold the flute in front vertically as you do a recorder. Seat flutes with one empty chair or plenty of space in between to encourage good posture. It’s easier to check for proper fingering from behind. *If possible have at least one session with flutes only.*
 - b. **Clarinet:** Teach first notes with only the top three sections of the instrument. They should grasp the barrel with their right hand for balance.
 - 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. Size 2 reeds to start.

- e. **Brass:** Start each day with buzzing and siren sounds. . *If possible* try to have a class for brass only to go over lubrication procedures. Teach the partial change on a lower note (Concert Ab to Eb) rather than trying to do Concert Bb to F.
- 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—not great, but good enough.
- g. **Trombone:** Make sure they have plenty of room to move the slide—front row is great for this section. Check out two to each student—one for home, one for school.
- h. **Percussion:** My strategy is to start all students on a wind instrument their first year then allow students to choose percussion after one year of instruction. This assures that your percussionists read music as well as the rest of your students and that they have a sense of melody and balance within an ensemble.

VII. Assessment and Evaluation

- a. One of the most difficult aspects of the over-populated music classroom is finding the time to individually assess students to effectively tailor teaching to match the needs and skills of our students.
 1. Playing tests should be at an easy skill level so that students feel confident about preparing them outside of class and should be selections that the students enjoy playing.
 2. It can lower the stress level of the students to have more than one musician “test” at a time.
 3. Allow a do-over session for students to improve their “grade”, either with you personally during recess, before/after school or during the next class session.
 5. Assign students to small groups and allow them to prepare a piece (line out of the book, etc.) to perform for the class—if your classroom is small try to reserve the cafeteria or other space to give enough space for them to rehearse while you travel from group to group offering instruction

Tried-and-True Arrangements

Beethoven’s Ninth/Sweeney
 Bugler’s Dream/Lavender
 Soar with the
 Dragons/Romeyn
 Rock Attack /Chambers
 Monster Rock/Molter
 March of the
 Romans/Sweeney

Cardiff Castle/Williams
 Magnificent Five/Williams
 Batter Up (Narrator)/Shaffer
 Dr. Boo /Adams
 Confluence/McBride
 Power Rock/Sweeney
 Zombie Stomp/Grice

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

Resources:

Youtube background tracks

90 BPM Rock Drum Track—20 minutes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTE-xOuZDyg>

120 BPM Bb Blues <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlwxBAP3CeM>

104 BPM Funk Fusion <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YubLjIGJ-Q>

Facebook “Band Directors Group” and
 “Beginning Band Engagement”

8notes.com Wow!

ossfab.com Flexible arrangements

Jump Start First Concert/Peter Blair

Standard of Excellence First Performance

Accent on Ensembles/Alfred

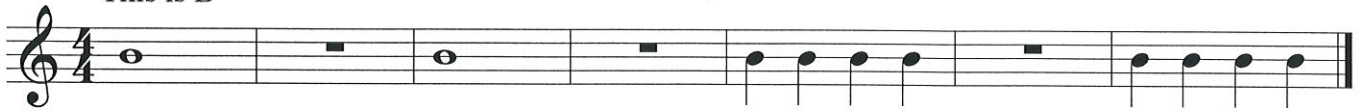
Yamaha Ensembles

Anne Hendrickson is the band director at Manchester GATE Elementary School in the Fresno Unified School District in central California. Prior to Manchester, Anne was the concert and jazz band, guitar, and piano teacher at Central Middle School in Riverside, California for 21 years. She was awarded Central Middle School, Riverside Unified School District and Riverside County music educator of the year in 2000. Anne earned her degree in music education and teaching credential in 1984 from California State University, Fresno. Anne has presented sessions at the California State Music Educator’s conference in 2004, 2017 and 2018. In addition to her teaching career, she has experience as a woodwind performer on cruise ships, Broadway show tours and as a festival adjudicator for the Southern California School Band and Orchestra Association.

Fast Start for Flute!

Your first three notes are B, A and G

This is B



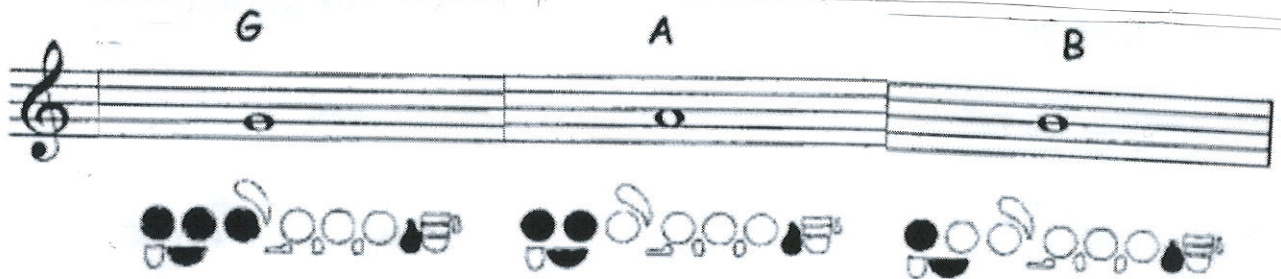
This is A



This is G



Hot Cross Buns



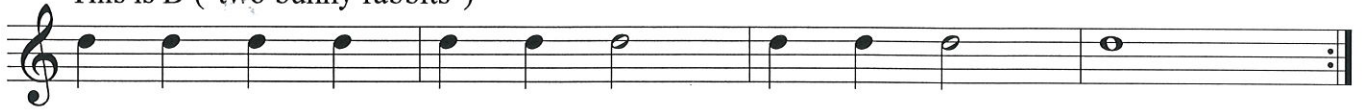
Part 2: Fast Start for Flute!

Your next notes are D and C

This is C



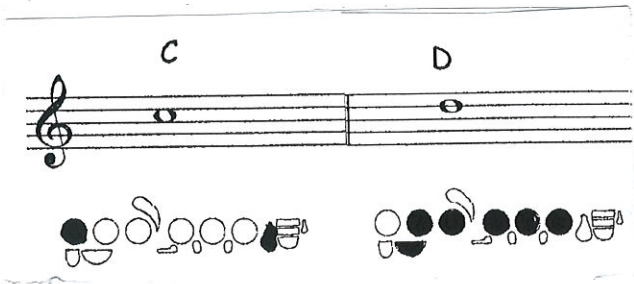
This is D ("two bunny rabbits")



Go back and forth between C and D



Mary Had a Little Lamb



Fast Start for Clarinet!

Your first three notes are E, D and C

This is E

This is D

This is C

Hot Cross Buns

E		
D		
C		

Fast Start for Saxophone!

Your first three notes are B, A and G

This is B



This is A



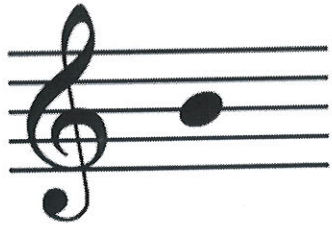
This is G



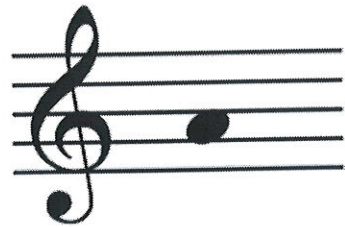
Hot Cross Buns



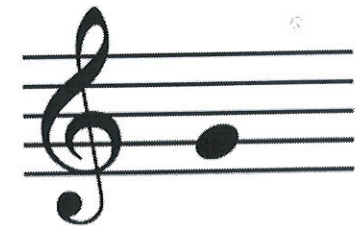
B



A



G



Part 2: Fast Start for Saxophone!

Your next notes are C and D

This is C

Musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The melody consists of quarter notes: C4, C4, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

This is D

Musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The melody consists of quarter notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Go back and forth between G and D

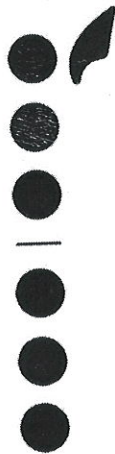
Musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The melody alternates between G4 and D4: G4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), D4 (quarter). The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Mary Had a Little Lamb

Musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The melody consists of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Here's D!

Musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The melody consists of quarter notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.



C



D

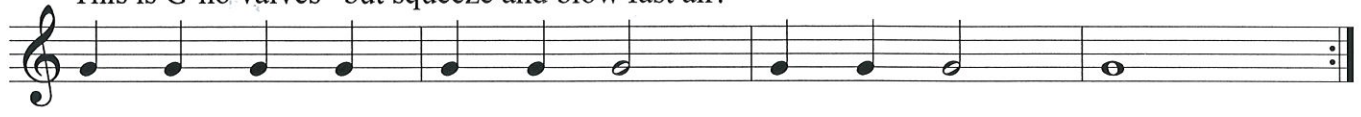
Part 2: Fast Start for Trumpet!

Your next notes are F and G

This is F-press valve 1



This is G-no valves--but squeeze and blow fast air!



Go back and forth between C and G- no valves



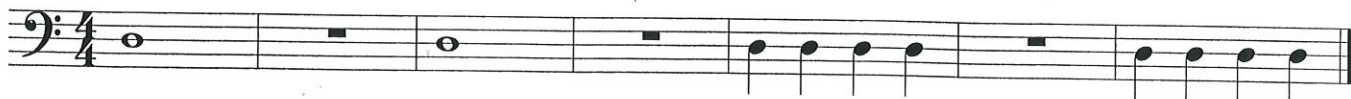
Mary Had a Little Lamb



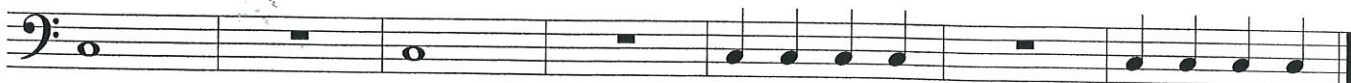
Fast Start for Trombone!

Your first three notes are D, C and Bb

This is D-4th Position



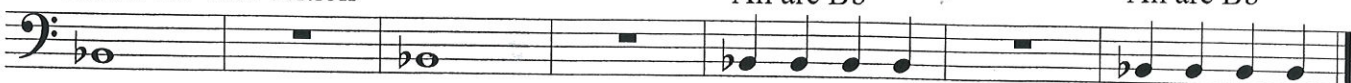
This is C-6th Position



This is Bb-1st Position

All are Bb

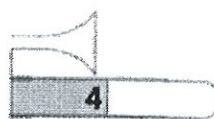
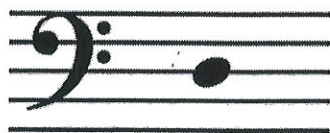
All are Bb



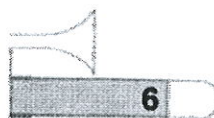
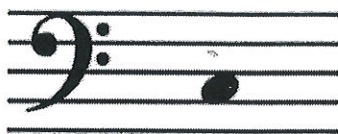
Hot Cross Buns



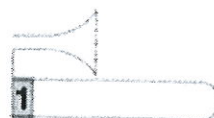
D



C



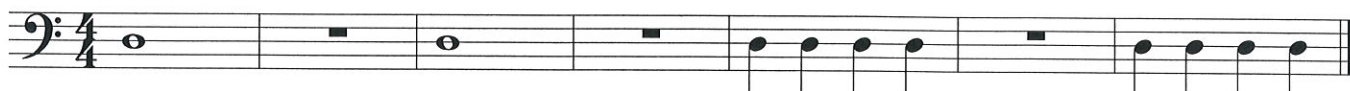
Bb



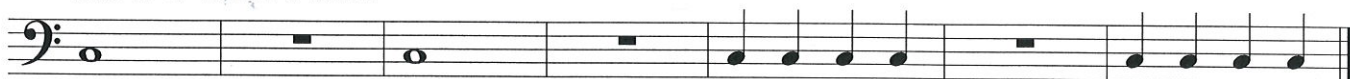
Fast Start for Baritone!

Your first three notes are D, C and Bb

This is D-valves 1 and 2



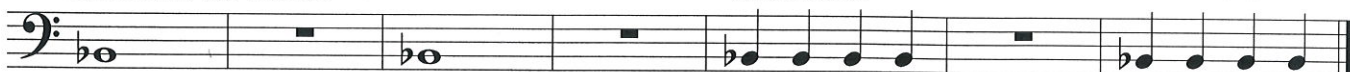
This is C-valves 1 and 3



This is Bb-no valves

All are Bb

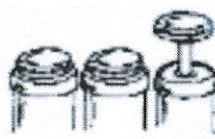
All are Bb



Hot Cross Buns

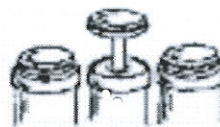
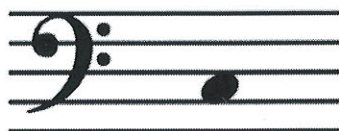


D



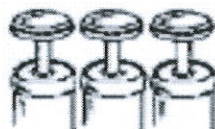
1 2

C



1 3

Bb



Open

