

CHARACTERISTICS TO CONSIDER **WHEN PLACING STUDENTS ON** **WIND INSTRUMENTS**

OVERVIEW

I. Physical Size

A. Size of Hands

1. Fingers must be big enough to cover holes when dealing with woodwind instruments.
2. Fingers must be big enough to operate/handle the instrument.

B. Length of Arms

1. Pertaining to trombone and bassoon, the right arm must be long enough to allow the student's body to remain balanced.
2. Trombone candidates must be able to reach at least 6th position without contorting their upper body.

C. Facial Structure

1. Thick lips are recommended for flute students.....and also good for euphonium/trombone students.
2. Unusually thick lips are not recommended for high brass students.
3. A thin lower lip is recommended for single reed and cornet/trumpet students.
 - a. Students with upper lip deformities must be steered toward woodwind instruments with a plastic mouthpiece so their upper lip will not be involved.
 - b. A thick upper lip is essential for flute students.
4. The length of tissue between bottom of nose and bottom of upper lip should be enough to easily cover upper teeth.
 - a. Essential for bassoon/oboe students
 - b. Essential for flute students
5. Students can have unusual formations and have success playing clarinet/bass clarinet and saxophone.

II. Physical Characteristics That May Cause Frustration as a Beginning Student

A. Unusual Mouth Structure

1. Pertaining to students with upper/lower lip abnormalities: have student say “pooh” and blow. If their air does not come out the center, do not place them on flute and consider not placing them on any brass instrument.
2. Pertaining to students with overbites/underbites: if they can not move their jaw flexibly, they will not be able to play flute or clarinet successfully.

B. Unusual Teeth Structure

1. Pertaining to students with crossed or crooked front teeth; put your thumb carefully against their front teeth. If it irritates them, they need to be steered toward an instrument with a mouthpiece that is placed in the mouth rather than on the face.

Do not give students impossible things to do when there are many choices of instrument placement that will not adversely affect their success.

It is your job is to look for facial characteristics and attributes that would prevent students from enjoying success with their chosen instrument.

III. Strength

A. Student Characteristics

1. Students must be big/strong enough to handle their instrument—especially French horn and low brass.
2. Students playing French horn must be strong enough to hold it by the bell if that is the method you use in your beginner class.

IV. Coordination

A. Woodwind Instruments

1. Have students perform basic finger patterns against their thumb so you can see how their fingers move.

B. Brass Instruments

1. Check dexterity (ease of movement) of fingers.
2. Can students keep their hand in a relaxed/ natural state and move their fingers up and down?

3. Do students have the same control between both hands? If yes, you may want to consider steering those students toward a woodwind instrument.
4. If the student does not have good finger dexterity—and has arms long enough to reach 6th position—then playing trombone may be a great option.

V. Probability of Staying with Music

A. Family Background

1. Do the students have siblings in band/music?
2. Economic restrictions of parents
3. Probability of continuing to live in the same area

B. Consulting with Elementary Teachers

1. Which students enjoyed music?
2. Which students seemed to have a good aptitude?
3. Recommendation Form (created/provided by you)
 - a. Allows academic teachers and the music teacher the opportunity to make additional comments about student behavior, participation, etc.
 - b. Must be completed and returned by a specific date
 - c. If a Selmer-like test is administered, this information can be later transferred to student's information card.
 - d. Forms must be confidential and kept in a safe place

VI. Caution in Placing All “Gifted/Talented” Students on Double Reed and “Color” Instruments

- A. Gifted/talented students should be evenly distributed in ALL instrument classes, determined by their physical characteristics.
- B. Future instrumentation of your **top** performing band must be a factor when determining the appropriate number of gifted/talented students on each instrument. If this is not considered, you run the risk of having too many gifted/talented students in non-varsity groups who will most assuredly become bored and may lose interest in remaining in your program.

VII. Other Extra-Curricular Interests

A. Sports/Gymnastics

1. How willing are you to make your before and after school schedule flexible enough for students who will have either before or after school athletic activities? Most students, when given a choice as a

6th or 7th grader, will choose athletics if forced to do so. This is a reality of our society today. ☹

2. If you know that students will eventually be unable to participate in “outside of the school day” marching band rehearsals in high school, steer these students toward woodwind instruments. There will be plenty of woodwinds in the high school marching band.....but the number of brass players will affect the overall strength of the marching band.

B. Cheerleading/Drill Team

1. Cheerleading/drill team conflicts can be avoided by using the above-mentioned philosophy.

VIII. Beginner Drives

- A. Importance of Having Projected 6th/7th Grade Enrollment Numbers for Next Year
- B. Personal Interviews at Elementary Schools
- C. Family Interviews
- D. Large Instrument Fair

Establish the normality of daily home practice, validated by some sort of weekly practice record, as a part of your beginner program. The time allotment can begin with as little as 10 minutes....and progress to whatever you feel is appropriate, depending on the amount of physical and mental information the students have at any given time.

Never neglect the needs of a complete instrumental program (middle school/junior high school and high school) as you plan your overall recruiting process. ☺

CHARACTERISTICS WHEN RECRUITING AND SELECTING FLUTE PLAYERS

Physical Characteristics/Factors

- The length of tissue between the bottom of the nose and the bottom of the upper lip must be large enough to pull down and cover the top teeth. This will help students to aim their air down into the embouchure hole better for certain notes.
- Medium, but full lips are preferable—especially the lower lip.
- A very thin top lip makes it very challenging for students to play with a correct sound.
- Hands and fingers need to be large enough to cover the holes when there are no plugs in the keys.
- Avoid putting students on flute who have a tear drop or “Betty Boop” lips. A tear-drop occurs when the lips come together at a point, resulting in air that splits. Students with teardrops should be steered toward another instrument.
- There are many outstanding flute players that play to the side, but unless you are experienced at teaching this type of flute embouchure, you should avoid placing students on flute if they have an extreme teardrop or “crooked embouchure” and must play to the side. It is very time consuming, and could be very frustrating at first for the student and teacher. Many times, it can take days.....or even weeks.....to produce acceptable first flute sounds.
- Avoid placing students on flute who have an extreme overbite or underbite.
- Students playing flute must have a jaw that is flexible that can move forward and backward.
- If a student has a protruding tooth, have them close their lips and push where the headjoint will end up being placed. If that “sensation” is painful to the student, then they should be steered toward an instrument that goes into their mouth.
- Students with braces will most likely struggle in general, especially if they start in beginning class without braces. Encourage parents to inquire with their child’s dentist regarding the possibility of using *Invisalign*.
- Avoid recruiting students on flute who are double-jointed.

Non-Physical Characteristics/Factors

- There should be no gender bias when selecting flute players; however, you must consider the school climate/demographics when choosing a boy to play the flute. Keep in mind that some of the most famous flautists in the world are male (i.e. Sir James Galway, Jean-Pierre Rampal, Julius Baker, etc.) Therefore, if a boy expresses genuine interest in playing the flute, then move forward from that point.
- Be prepared to do whatever you must in order to convince parents—especially fathers—that boys can play flute. You may need to do this without the student there;

students should not be present during a discussion that may be getting uncomfortable.

- If you have boy flute players in your top ensemble, it is an excellent idea to have them demonstrate the flute at your recruiting concert(s)...regardless of their chair.

CHARACTERISTICS WHEN RECRUITING AND SELECTING OBOE AND BASSOON PLAYERS

General Physical Characteristics for Oboe and Bassoon

- Students having overbites are fine; however, underbites are not recommended.
- The length of tissue from the bottom of the nose to the bottom of the upper lip must be long. This is vital in order to achieve the desired double reed embouchure.
- Students should have high cheek bones.
- Students should have developed thighs to better balance and support the diaphragm area in order to achieve a more mature and resonant tone quality.
- Students with well-defined hands will have better finger dexterity.
- Avoid recruiting students on double reed instruments who are double-jointed.

Additional Physical Characteristics for Oboe

- Students recruited to play oboe need to have long enough fingers to cover the middle holes of keys.

Additional Physical Characteristics for Bassoon

- Students recruited to play bassoon need to have a large stretch between their left hand thumb and middle finger, in order to eventually be able to activate all of the necessary thumb keys.
- Ideally, students recruited to play bassoon need to be taller and have longer arms.
- Students recruited to play bassoon need to have big enough hands to reach around the instrument.

Non-Physical Characteristics

- Students need to have a genuine interest in the instrument. Since it is challenging to find 5th grade students who want to play the oboe or bassoon, make sure that you successfully represent these instruments at your 5th grade recruiting concert.
- Students must score in the higher percentile on the musical aptitude test you administer (if applicable). At the very least, strive to select students that have good ears.
- Specific to oboe, select students who will not be afraid to be heard.
- Students recruited need to be passionate about music in general.

- Parents of perspective double reed students need to be very pro-active and/or involved. They also need to understand the importance of providing their children with financial support in terms of equipment and taking private lessons.
- Students recruited to play double reed instruments need to be academically strong, responsible and be overachievers.
- Piano background is a plus--but can not/should not be required.
- Students officially recruited to play double reed instruments need to not only show commitment for the duration of their middle school/junior high band experience (3 years).....but should be strongly encouraged to think of this experience as a **long-term commitment** (through high school).

Miscellaneous

- All perspective double reed students should be capable of academic and curricular excellence. Students facing this challenge could eventually be encouraged—by some parents—to replace their band activities with AP and/or advanced academic track courses **in high school**.
- Be cautious of putting your only tall boys on bassoon, especially if they express interest in athletics down the road.
- You are recommended in starting oboes in groups of 3 or 4 students—and bassoons in groups of 3 or 4 students---as opposed to starting only 2 (in the event that 1 student quits at the semester or end of the year, etc.).
- Do not have students switch from oboe to bassoon or vice versa. You need to be certain that you are putting the right student on the right instrument from the beginning!

CHARACTERISTICS WHEN RECRUITING AND SELECTING CLARINET PLAYERS

Physical Characteristics/Factors

- Fingers must be long and big enough to cover the holes.
- Avoid placing **very small** students with short arms on clarinet, because they will have a hard time reaching the bottom joint.
- A full bottom lip is an attribute for success when possibly switching a student to bass clarinet.
- Students that are taller in stature and have longer arms could also be great candidates for bass clarinet.
- Students playing clarinet must have a jaw that is flexible that can move forward and backward.

- Unlike playing the flute and high brass instruments, having braces does not hinder students playing clarinet.
- Avoid recruiting students on clarinet who are double-jointed.
- There are fewer physical characteristic factors when considering clarinet than most other woodwind instruments.

CHARACTERISTICS WHEN RECRUITING AND SELECTING SAXOPHONE PLAYERS

Physical Characteristics/Factors

- As the embouchure is rather simple to form correctly, many students are able to play saxophone with the exception of those that have severe underbites.
- Unlike playing flute and high brass instruments, having braces does not hinder students playing saxophone.
- It is actually acceptable to recruit students on saxophone who are double-jointed, because the size of the instrument and the strength of the key springs support the fingers more than smaller woodwind instruments.
- There are fewer physical characteristic factors when considering saxophone than most other woodwind instruments.

Non-Physical Characteristics/Factors

- The alto saxophone is the most expensive student-owned instruments; thus, use the cost to limit the class size.
- Parents need to understand that the monthly cost can be anywhere from \$50-\$70 per month—**excluding** the maintenance kit.
- As much as possible, avoid placing students on saxophone whose family would have problems supporting the cost of the instrument, upkeep and accessories.
- Even though it is easy to place students on saxophone, it should not be treated as a “dumping ground”. Depending on the number of returning students, the goal should be to allow between **six to nine** students in your saxophone class.
- Try to have a separate class for your saxophones. If this can not happen, combine the saxophone class with your double reed class. Your double reed class will move as fast—if not faster—than your saxophone class.
- If combined with double reed students, find a private teacher or a specialist to periodically instruct your saxophone students. If a specialist cannot be found for your saxophone students, find a specialist/private teacher for your double reed students and pull those students out periodically.
- **DO NOT** combine your saxophone class with your flute or clarinet classes. Flute and clarinet classes will move much slower than your saxophone class because of the

amount of time spent on the embouchure, hand position and flexibility (flute). Your saxophone students will become bored and possibly cause classroom management problems.

- The saxophone class needs to be taught in a smaller room. Not only will you be able to limit the class size to 6-9 students, but you will find it easier to dissuade pushy parents/administrators from trying to force additional students into the class. Place your saxophone class opposite a larger class like trumpet, clarinet, or flute. Place the larger class in the band hall and the saxophone class in a smaller room.
- Allowing a student to play the tenor saxophone in a beginner class should only be allowed under extreme financial circumstances.....or with an unexpected move-in that allowed the student to play tenor saxophone at their previous school.

CHARACTERISTICS WHEN RECRUITING AND SELECTING BRASS PLAYERS

Physical Characteristics/Factors

- When centering a mouthpiece on a **high brass** embouchure, look to see how it sits **vertically**. Be sure the most northern and southern rim of the mouthpiece do NOT touch red flesh. The rim should not be seated on the red part of the lip—top or bottom.
- When dealing with students recruited to play **low brass** instruments, judge the placement **horizontally** and make sure the corners of the natural face sit outside of the most left and right edge of the rim.
- Keep in mind that currently, some of the best tuba players in the world have thin lips; therefore, we must not naturally assume that only students with thick lips can successfully play tuba.
- Perspective trombone students must have an arm length with an extended hand and arm that can reach 6th position without contorting their bodies.
- Students with braces will most likely struggle in general, especially if they start in beginner **high brass** classes without braces. Encourage parents to inquire with their child's dentist regarding the possibility of using *Invisalign*.

Non-Physical Characteristics/Factors

- Each brass class requires bright, charismatic peer leadership students. You must seek out these students.
- Do not use your low brass class as a “dumping ground”. Too commonly you will find that the social identification within the class will cause the interested students to be uncomfortable if surrounded by others who were simply placed into the class without much consideration of interest and/or aptitude. ☹

- When selecting low brass students, select someone who could ultimately be, for example, the drum major in high school.....or someone who could make All-State. Every class needs a leader.....or preferably **LEADERS!!!**
- Perspective trombone students should understand sequencing. For example, give students a very simple series of numbers (1, 3, 5).....and “7” would be the correct answer in a sequence of “2’s”-----or another series of numbers (2, 4, 8)and “16” would be the correct answer in a sequence that doubles!
- Trombone slide position choices require students with brains that are wired to understand what would logically come next.
- Perspective French horn and trombone students should be given some sort of hearing check.....whether it is through the results of their Selmer-like aptitude test and/or simply asking them to sing or hum specific pitches back to you. Remember that really good French horn players must be very discerning in regard to pitches and intervals. The older and more experienced they become, pitch recognition is paramount.
- The inability to discern pitch differences restricts the future development of beginning French horn and trombone students.

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT FOR BEGINNER BRASS AND WOODWIND CLASSES

Oboe

Hand-made reed preferred; recommended contacts:

Michael Gathings – MG Double Reed Supply

michael@mgdoublereeds.com

(214) 603-6290

www.mgdoublereeds.com

Bassoon

Hand-made reed preferred; recommended contacts:

Michael Gathings – MG Double Reed Supply

michael@mgdoublereeds.com

(214) 603-6290

www.mgdoublereeds.com

Dr. Jennifer Auerbach
Jennifer@bocalmajority.com
(940) 206-4527
www.bocalmajority.com

Clarinet

5 RV-Lyre Mouthpiece
Bonade Inverted Ligature
Vandoren 2 ½ Reed

Alto Saxophone

Vandoren Optimum AL3 Mouthpiece
BG Ligature
Vandoren 2 ½ Reed

Cornet/Trumpet

Bach 5B Mouthpiece

French Horn

Holton Farkas MDC Mouthpiece

Trombone and Euphonium

Bach 6 ½ AL Mouthpiece

Tuba

Conn Helleberg (make sure it is the true Helleberg and not the numbered one)

DESIRED PITCHES ON THE VARIOUS WOODWIND EQUIPMENT

Flute Headjoint

In the vicinity of concert A-flat and A above the treble clef staff

Clarinet Mouthpiece and Barrel

In the vicinity of concert F# 5th line treble clef

Alto Saxophone Mouthpiece and Neck

In the vicinity of concert A-flat 2nd space treble clef