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BEGINNING BAND: FIRST STEPS INSTRUCTING STUDENTS WITH WIND INSTRUMENTS

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Music Education

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Pittsburg State University

Pittsburg, Kansas

November 2022

BEGINNING BAND: FIRST STEPS OF INSTRUCTING STUDENTS WITH WIND INSTRUMENTS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my co-worker Gae Phillips for giving me the faith to believe in myself when I thought otherwise. You are an outstanding mentor and I could not thank you enough for what you have done for me over the years. Thank you for pouring all your wisdom and knowledge into me and making me the teacher I am today.

Also, I would like to thank the Music Department at Pittsburg State for letting me have this opportunity. Anytime I have struggled or had questions, the faculty have been supportive and reached out a hand to help. I have so much gratitude for Mr. Kehle, my trombone professor, who has always shown me a positive light to go into teaching. The knowledge he taught me in my undergrad has been a tremendous help when working with students.

Lastly, I would like to thank my students in Columbus, Kansas. When I could not see the light at the end of the tunnel, my students had faith I could press on and finish this degree. My students are very special to me and have always been my rock even when they did not know at the time.

## BEGINNING BAND: FIRST STEPS OF INSTRUCTING STUDENTS WITH WIND INSTRUMENTS

An Abstract of the Thesis by  
Christine Lovell

One of the most important moments in beginning band is when a student first learns how to assemble and hold the instrument. As a band director, it is vital to be precise in explaining each element of this process. If steps are skipped over in this process, bad habits can form quickly and will cause more issues for the director. Instrument assembly and holding the instrument are covered in detail to help young band directors know how to explain this process. Additionally, this will help to find the bad habits quickly so problems do not snowball over time. It is always important to be proactive in the first steps. The next chapter covers core concepts such as learning the note names, rhythm, and practice habits in detail. The purpose is to help young band directors know where to start once the beginning band book is opened and ready to start the year.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. ASSEMBLING THE INSTRUMENT .....	3
FLUTE.....	5
CLARINET.....	7
SAXOPHONE.....	10
FRENCH HORN.....	12
TRUMPET.....	15
TROMBONE.....	18
EUPHONIUM/TUBA.....	20
III. HOLDING THE INSTRUMENT.....	23
FLUTE.....	24
CLARINET.....	27
SAXOPHONE.....	29
FRENCH HORN.....	31
TRUMPET.....	34
TROMBONE.....	36
EUPHONIUM/TUBA.....	39
IV. ESTABLISHING CORE CONCEPTS.....	43
NOTE NAMES.....	44
RHYTHMS.....	46
PRACTICE HABITS.....	49
V. CONCLUSION.....	53
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	55

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE .....	PAGE
1. Flute Middle Joint Aligned to Foot Joint	5
2. Flute Embouchure Hole Aligned With Top Keys of Middle Joint.	6
3. Clarinet Bridge Mechanism Aligned with Lower Joint	8
4. Clarinet Ligature Pin Placement	8

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most important weeks of the beginning band class is when the student first receives their instrument. The first few days can be the most crucial time for the director because of how detail-oriented they have to be. The more thorough this is explained, time will be saved for the director later on. If instrument assembly is explained in detail, the beginning of class each day will not be taken up by having to fix instruments. If a beginner is not taught thoroughly the basics of each instrument, later the student struggles in middle and high school.<sup>1</sup> From flute to tuba, the director will need to lead each student carefully through assembling their instrument.

Once the student assembles the instrument, holding the instrument correctly should be explained in detail. If the student develops bad habits in the beginning, the success of that student may be jeopardized because it may be harder to play their instrument. When explaining how to hold the instrument, the director should always try to have the same instrument to hold in front of them to be a visual example.

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Banister. "Another View on Beginning Bands." *The Instrumentalist* 57, no. 4, (November, 2002): 30.



Once these instructions are explained the first few days, the director will need to focus on core concepts to establish a foundation of the knowledge of music. It is important to go over these concepts every day to solidify the knowledge a student will need to have throughout high school. Students who do not learn the fundamentals in the beginning will continue to have trouble later.<sup>2</sup> Knowing notes and rhythms are essential, but do not forget to add practice to go along with it. Having an established practice time individually will help the student soar in their playing ability. Chapter four will help guide the young band director by introducing a few key concepts to keep in mind throughout the year. It is imperative to keep going with these concepts and create a routine in class to help build the knowledge of music all throughout the first year of band.

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<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Banister. "Another View on Beginning Bands." *The Instrumentalist* 57, no. 4, (November, 2002): 31.

## CHAPTER II

### ASSEMBLING THE INSTRUMENT

When details are not explained on how to assemble instruments correctly, bad habits are formed quickly and problems will start to snowball over time. Different parts of the instruments will not last as long and some will break if the bad habit keeps happening. For example, if a student repetitively keeps pushing the lower joint over the bell of the clarinet instead of twisting them together, the cork will start to break off. Another problem is warped or stuck valves on brass instruments, due to mishandling or improper valve assembly. This can be avoided by taking time to instruct students on proper valve care, disassembly, and reassembly in the first days of instrument ownership.

When a student receives their instrument, they are excited to go home and immediately try out their instrument. This is a positive thing, but there are some things the band director should keep in mind. Normally, the student will go home, pick up all the parts of the instrument and try to figure out how to put it together. Many times, the student will develop a bad habit because they do not have their instructor to help them at home before coming to class the next day.

When the student comes to class after receiving their instrument, the zeal within the student will continue. They will want to show the band director they already know how to put the instrument together. If the teacher is not aware, the student will show off what they already know. In order to keep the class from getting out of hand, it is smart to have each student go to their seat and put their instrument cases on the floor and not open them yet. This helps the band director to focus on each instrument and properly walk through each step. Missing a step with an instrument can cause headaches for the band director later on. It is very important to take the time to talk each section through how to assemble and disassemble the instrument. For each instrument, the first step should be to find the brand of the instrument on the top lid of the case. The director should emphasize the importance of opening the case from the top so the instrument does not fall out on the floor and cause damage.<sup>3</sup> Directors should talk about the top lid for about a week so students do not damage their instrument.

Depending on how the classes are divided up, the band director should have a plan on how to explain to each section these instructions. Some programs have all the instruments in one class, when some programs will have woodwinds in one class, brass in one class, and percussion in another class. No matter how the classes are divided, the

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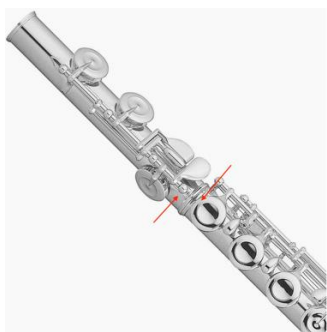
<sup>3</sup> Dan Bachelder and Norman Hunt, *Guide to Teaching Brass*. 6th ed. McGraw Hill, 2002: 6.

band director should not try to have all the students get their instruments out at once for the first time. Take the time to walk through each instrument.

## Flute

The first step for the band director is to identify the three parts of the flute. The students need to know the difference between the foot, middle, and the head joint. Students need to know the head joint is the part that is closest to their head and the foot joint is what is furthest away from their body. The director should have the student pick up the foot joint first and twist it into the middle joint of the flute. Figure 1 shows where the students should align the last button on the middle joint even with the bar on the foot joint.

Figure 1: Flute Middle Joint Aligned to Foot Joint



Once the students have the two parts connected correctly, move on to the head joint.

Figure 2 demonstrates how to line the embouchure hole with the top keys of the middle joint on the flute.

Figure 2: Flute Embouchure Hole Aligned With Top Keys of Middle Joint



It is important to emphasize this so a student will not struggle holding the flute when they start playing. If the keys are not aligned, the student will struggle to hold the flute correctly.<sup>4</sup> Also, the keys will need to line up together so there will be no struggle to play harder passages later on in class.

Once the student knows how to put the joints together, explain any components that are inside the case. Students need to be informed of everything that have in the case and what it is for. In a flute case, each student should have a cleaning/tuning rod. The director should demonstrate how to use the cleaning rod with the cloth. It should be explained to clean the flute each day after it is played so dirt will not accumulate over time and the instrument will remain clean.<sup>5</sup> If the flute comes with a swab instead, demonstrate how to use that as well. The tuning part of the rod can be explained later for when the student starts playing. Sometimes the flutes come with a polishing cloth and that can be demonstrated quickly as well.

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick W. Westphal, *Guide to Teaching Woodwinds*. 5th ed. McGraw Hill, 1962: 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

## Clarinet

When starting to instruct clarinet players, the first thing is to show each part of the instrument. The band director should be prepared and have a clarinet to help explain each part. This instrument has so many different parts that it can be confusing to a student. Visual learning is key when it comes to showing how to put this instrument together.

Before learning parts of the instrument, cork grease needs to be emphasized to the students. The director should make sure each student owns their own cork grease. It needs to be explained that if the cork is dry and hard, then cork grease should be used.<sup>6</sup> Do not force a part onto the cork if it is dry. This could cause the cork to rip off and will not connect properly without it. Always talk about the use of cork grease and should use it when needed.

Next, introduce the parts of the clarinet before assembling. Start with the bell, the lower joint, the upper joint, the barrel, and last the mouthpiece. Once the students know the difference, have each student pick up the bell and the lower joint and twist the parts together in a back-and-forth motion.<sup>7</sup> Once these two parts are together, have the student pick up the upper joint of the clarinet. It is vital to visually show what happens when the second hole is pressed down. The bridge mechanism lifts up and will avoid hitting any keys on the clarinet.<sup>8</sup> If the student does not do this, the bridge

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<sup>6</sup> Frederick W. Westphal, *Guide to Teaching Woodwinds*. 5th ed. McGraw Hill, 1962: 57.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 53.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

mechanism can break and rub against other keys. Figure 3 illustrates the importance of the bridge mechanism lining up correctly with the bridge from the lower joint.

Figure 3: Clarinet Bridge Mechanism Aligned with Lower Joint



Next, twist the barrel to the upper joint of the clarinet. The same function should happen with the clarinet mouthpiece to the barrel.

The ligature is crucial for every student to fully understand. Failing to explain this can form bad habits that are hard to break. The director should pick the ligature up first and explain the head of the screws are always to the right of the mouthpiece from the student's point of view. Figure 4 exhibits some ligatures face inward and some face outward.

Figure 4: Clarinet Ligature Pin Placement



Always remember the rule of the screws should be on the right. Have each student place the ligature loosely on the mouthpiece.<sup>9</sup>

Each student should have their own reed and should have at least 2 or 3 reeds in their case.<sup>10</sup> Directors should check the students' reeds to make sure they do not have too strong of a reed to start with. Always keep in mind that students may not know there are different sizes of reeds. Not knowing this, students could buy size 4 reeds and going over this now can fix issues before getting frustrated later. Do not assume each student has the correct equipment. It is essential for the director to say the size of the reed the clarinet section to play on at this time. Also, it is vital to talk about chipped or cracked reeds. These reeds should not be used and should be thrown away immediately. Keep in mind some students probably went home the night the instrument was bought and tried to play it. In that process, the reed could be chipped already and the director could catch it now if talked about. After reeds are discussed, the students should place the reed in the mouth to make it wet and talk about never using a dry reed.<sup>11</sup> Once this is emphasized, demonstrate how to put a reed on with the ligature. Put the reed under the ligature and place it where the tip of the reed is lined up with the tip of the mouthpiece. Next, tighten screw heads on the ligature. Failure of placing the reed in the wrong spot can cause many playing issues and bad habits.

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<sup>9</sup> Frederick W. Westphal, *Guide to Teaching Woodwinds*. 5th ed. McGraw Hill, 1962: 57.

<sup>10</sup> Larry Combs and Victor Bordo, "Basics for Beginning Clarinetists." *The Instrumentalist* 52, no. 1 (August 1997): 34.

<sup>11</sup> Larry Combs and Victor Bordo, "Basics for Beginning Clarinetists." *The Instrumentalist* 52, no. 1 (August 1997): 34.



Once the clarinet is assembled, it is important to inform the students to take apart the clarinet opposite of the way it was put together. The order putting the clarinet away should be: reed, ligature, mouthpiece, barrel, upper joint, lower joint, and the bell. The director should reiterate throughout the school year about how the reed needs to be taken off the mouthpiece to prevent mold.<sup>12</sup> It is prudent to show moldy pictures of reeds to the students to show them what it will look like if they do not take their reed off every day. The reed should be put in a protective case and not be left out because it could get chipped and damaged as well. The director should show each student the swab that comes with their instrument. Explain to slide the swab through each section of the instrument every time the student plays. Moisture left in the instrument could cause mold to form, and could lead to pads being damaged over time.

### Saxophone

During the first lesson on the saxophone, start by discussing the proper way to hold the neck. It is crucial to explain if the octave key is grabbed too hard, it could bend easily and the instrument will not work properly. It should be pointed out there is a cork on the neck where the mouthpiece goes. Each student should have cork grease and should be instructed to never let the cork be dry. Any time the cork is dry, cork grease should be applied. The mouthpiece should be twisted on the cork, not pushed down. If

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<sup>12</sup> Frederick W. Westphal, *Guide to Teaching Woodwinds*. 5th ed. McGraw Hill, 1962: 109.

the mouthpiece is pushed down, the cork can rip off faster and it will have to be replaced.<sup>13</sup>

Once the mouthpiece has been twisted onto the neck, the ligature and reed should be introduced. Always put the ligature on the mouthpiece with the screws on the right side. Some students will try to put the ligature on backward so be aware. The director should introduce the reed and make sure each student has 2 or 3 extra reeds just in case one gets chipped. Some students may already have a chipped reed because they may have played the instrument at home. The director should be aware that bad habits could have already happened so they should make sure all reeds are not chipped. Have the student place the reed in their mouth and explain the importance of wetting the reed before playing to make the best sound possible. The reed should be placed on the mouthpiece under the ligature showing a sliver of black of the mouthpiece.<sup>14</sup> Failure to place the reed in the right spot can cause frustration for the student because more than likely a sound will not be produced when starting to play.

Once the reed is on correctly, the students should learn about their neck strap and the body of the saxophone. The neck strap should be put on first so when the body of the saxophone is picked up, the student can automatically hook the saxophone.<sup>15</sup> If the saxophone does not get hooked onto the neck strap there is a chance it will fall.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 123.

<sup>14</sup> Frederick W. Westphal, *Guide to Teaching Woodwinds*. 5th ed. McGraw Hill, 1962: 124.

<sup>15</sup> J. Terry Stewart, "Saxophone Tips." *The Instrumentalist* 61, no. 1 (August 2006): 40.

Quality of the neck strap is important as well. Some neck straps are cheaper, which will not close. Directors should avoid letting students use these and go for the straps that completely close so the instrument will not fall.<sup>16</sup> Next, introduce the body and the bell of the saxophone. The director will need to show the students how to pick the saxophone up by the bell, not by grabbing the keys or another part of the body. It is crucial to pick up the saxophone correctly because the keys on the instrument could get bent. Now all the student has to do is to twist the neck onto the body of the saxophone and tighten the pin to make the neck not slide around.<sup>17</sup> It is essential to put together the saxophone in this order. Switching the order and doing the body and neck strap first can cause unnecessary damages to the instrument which will cause frustration to the student.

### French Horn

Some bands in the beginning years do not introduce the French horn. This information is for when the director wants to start a student on this instrument. One thing to consider is to have a private lesson with your French horn students to introduce all the parts. If the student will be playing a double horn, it is hard to understand the front and back side until the student plays it.

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<sup>16</sup> Alecia Steen. "How to Hold a Saxophone Properly and Play Better," PrimeSound.org, August 16, 2022, <https://primesound.org/how-to-hold-a-saxophone/>.

<sup>17</sup> Frederick W. Westphal, *Guide to Teaching Woodwinds*. 5th ed. McGraw Hill, 1962: 121.

The first piece to discuss is the mouthpiece. Explain to the student not to drop the mouthpiece because the shank could dent. Showing different pictures of bent shanks on the mouthpiece will help students visually see what could happen. This will teach the students to care their instrument properly.

Next, pick up the body of the French Horn and twist the mouthpiece inside the mouthpiece receiver. The student should use two hands every time to pick the instrument up out of the case. The director should emphasize that one hand should pick up the horn by the bell and the other hand should pick up the horn close to the mouthpiece receiver. A student should never pick up the horn by the key levers. It is good to teach students at this time how fragile the key levers can be and to never put pressure on them if you do not have to.<sup>18</sup> Only while playing should the key levers be touched. The student should take the mouthpiece and place it into the leadpipe and twist. Students should always twist the mouthpiece because if the student turns the French horn upside down, the mouthpiece will not fall out. An interesting way to tell students is to “Dairy Queen”, meaning that when a student twists the mouthpiece they can turn it upside down and the mouthpiece will not fall out. The students will more than likely remember that all the way through high school. The next two paragraphs would be good for a director to do if private lessons with the students can happen.

Once the student understands how to assemble the French horn, the front and back of the valve slides should be explained. The director should always have slide grease and paper towels on hand before starting this process because it could get a little

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<sup>18</sup> Max Pottag, “The Beginning French Horn Player.” *The Instrumentalist* 1, no. 3 (1947): 10.

messy if one valve slide is not pulling out smoothly. It is important for a student to know what the slides are for on the horn so they can properly care for the horn. The director should explain that spit can get stuck in the slides and the student will have to pull the slides out to take care of the issue. When pulling any slide out, the student should always hold the levers down so the oil in the valve will not be displaced into the horn. This could cause the valve to dry out quicker than normal. Starting with the first lever and trigger, have the student hold it down with their left index finger and thumb and pull the front slide out. Turn the slide upside down to empty any spit that was inside on the floor. Next, pull the first back slide out and do the same. Once both have been emptied, put the slides back in. The student should do the same for the second lever and trigger, and the third lever and trigger. It is always good for a student to know the back third slide is usually where most of the spit gets trapped.

After doing the front and back slide valves, have the student turn the horn over and introduce the tuning slides. One slide is the main tuning slide, and the other is the Bb tuning slide. It is difficult to remember which is the right slide because different brands have their slides in different places. One good reference to help someone know which slide is from Colin Dorman.<sup>19</sup> Do not guess which slide is the right one to a student, always make sure that each one is explained correctly the first time or it gets confusing.

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<sup>19</sup> Colin Dorman, "Tuning the French Horn [in-Depth Guide w/ Images]." Colin Dorman, June 16, 2021, <https://colindorman.com/tuning-the-french-horn/>.

An easy thing to explain to a student is how to remove spit from the outer tubes of the French horn. The simple way to do it is to remove the mouthpiece, and rotate the horn counter clockwise until the end of the lead pipe is facing the ground. This is the fastest way to remove spit from the horn, but always remind the student to also check the valve slides as well. Once the student has been informed of all this, remind the student for about a week to remove the spit from their horn before putting the horn away after rehearsal. This will teach them good habits and get faster at removing valve slides. The student will go slow the first few days but will catch on later and it will not be an issue.

A thorough knowledge of all parts and equipment of the French horn will help students avoid damaging the instrument. Some cases have rotor valve oil in the case. Students will think this is the same as valve oil and try to use regular valve oil on the rotors if not explained. The director should make sure and explain to not borrow someone's valve oil if their levers are not going down. Always use a little bit of rotor oil by opening the cap on the front side of the horn and putting a small dose on the top. Let the rotor oil sit for a few minutes and the levers should work quicker.

### Trumpet

The first part to introduce on the trumpet is the mouthpiece. The director should point out that the mouthpiece should be taken care of and not dropped on the floor. If the mouthpiece falls on the floor it could dent the shank of the mouthpiece. Take the

opportunity to show the students what it looks like when the shank is dented too many times. This will teach responsibility and care for their instrument the first day.

Next, introduce the body of the trumpet and care for the valve casing. The student should pick the trumpet up by grabbing the valve casing. Do not let a student get in the habit of picking up the trumpet by only the bell. By doing this, the rest of the trumpet can be hit on either the case or a music stand. Always stress to the student how delicate the valve casing is and how it should never be hit on anything.

The next part to stress is the valves of the trumpet. Introduce the first valve as the one closest to the student when they are playing and the third valve is the farthest away. The second valve is the one in the middle. This makes it easier for them to remember. The director should talk about valve oil and make sure that each student has their own. More than likely, there will be a student that will try to borrow someone's and never buy their own. Try to hold the students accountable to having their own equipment. Have each student twist the valve cap to pull the valve out. Once the student is holding the valve, the director should hold a valve up and show how to apply valve oil. It is vital to talk about putting too much valve oil on and how that could make the valve stick too much. Demonstrate to the students on how to put a small amount around the valve piston. After the students have oiled their own valve, have them find the number above the piston and have it face toward the mouthpiece. Once it is aligned with the mouthpiece, have the student gently put the valve into the valve casing. Twist the valve cap to secure the valve and then twist the finger button clockwise. If the student fails to do so, the trumpet will not play. The valve will be in the wrong place and

pressure will come back at the student as they try to play. Some students will try to oil their trumpet by adding oil through the bottom caps, which does not do anything for the valve. The oil will wash the dirt onto the valve surface, but not help the valve go quicker.<sup>20</sup>

The next parts of the trumpet to introduce is the four tuning slides. One slide is for the first valve, second valve, third valve, and the main tuning slide. When pulling the first slide out, the student will need to hold the first valve down while sliding out the slide. The same applies for the second and third tuning slides as well. On the main tuning slide, nothing needs to be pushed down to pull it out. If any slide is hard to pull, the director should introduce slide grease. It is imperative that each student understands to apply slide grease when the slides become harder to pull. If the slide is left in the same place and never moved, more than likely the slide will be stuck.

Have the student put the mouthpiece into the mouthpiece receiver and twist slightly. This prevents the mouthpiece from falling out of the trumpet. Like the French horn, explain the “Dairy Queen” method to help students remember to do this step.

Like any other instrument, it is important for the band director to explain everything that comes in the instrument case. The only things left that may be in the trumpet case would be a mouthpiece cleaner and a polishing cloth. It is crucial for the students to know that if they get sick anytime in the school year, they should use the

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<sup>20</sup> John Huth, “Oiling and Caring for Brass Valves and Rotors,” *The Instrumentalist* 55, no. 10 (May, 2001): 66.



mouthpiece cleaner. The director should explain the polishing cloth by having a trumpet to the side that smudges on it and show what the cloth can do after rubbing it down. Explain to the students not to use their hand to try to get dirt off of their trumpet. Use the cloth as it will not leave smudges anywhere.

### Trombone

The first part to introduce on the trombone is the slide and the slide lock. It would be good for the director to use their own trombone to demonstrate how to go through all the steps. When handling the slide, hold the slide with the right hand having the slide receiver closest to the student. Once the student is holding the slide, show the slide lock and how it works to prevent students from having their slide fall on the ground. The director should emphasize to the students to use the slide lock all the time so the slide is not damaged by falling on the floor. One other vital part to stress to the student is to not hit the slide on anything because it could dent easily.<sup>21</sup> The slide will be much harder to use with dents and the playing ability will not be at full potential.

The next part to introduce is the bell and tuning slide. The director should connect the bell receiver into the slide receiver with the bell being on the left side.<sup>22</sup> It is necessary to watch each student do this step, because students will put the bell whichever way they can. This step is crucial to watch because if a student develops a

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Vernon and Gail Wilson, "Beginning Trombonists With Good Basic Skills." *The Instrumentalist* 52, no. 4 (November 1997): 28.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

bad habit in putting their trombone together, the trombone will be harder to hold later on. Some students will try to put their bell on the other side because they are left-handed. It is crucial to explain that all trombones go the same way and they will need to move the bell on the left side. Some students will struggle twisting the bell lock and making it secure to where the slide and bell receivers do not move. Have each student use the inside of their middle finger to wrap around the bell lock and twist hard. Now that both parts are secure, the director should take the time to talk about the bell and how to be careful when carrying the trombone. Show students it will be easy to hit the bell on a music stand when walking to their seat and how this should be prevented. For the main tuning slide, the director should make sure each student can move their slide up and down easily. If not, explain how important it is to use tuning slide grease to prevent the slides from getting stuck. This will prevent tuning problems later on in class.

Once the two big parts of the trombone have been explained, have the students locate and learn about the mouthpiece. It is essential to explain to be careful when picking it up. If a student drops it on the floor, there is a possibility of denting the shank of the mouthpiece. If the director has some mouthpieces laying around that are dented, it would be good to demonstrate what could happen. By explaining this, it will teach students responsibility of caring for each part of their instrument right away. The director should have the students put the mouthpiece into the mouthpiece receiver and twist it slightly. By doing this, it prevents the mouthpiece from falling out of the instrument. Just like the French horn, explain the "Dairy Queen" method and it will help students remember to do this step.

It is always essential to go over any other items in the case so students do not wonder how to use it and develop bad habits. More than likely, there will be slide grease (already explained), slide oil, mouthpiece brush, and a polishing cloth. Sometimes there is a trombone snake and mouthpiece cleaner. When talking about slide oil, have the student hold the trombone up with the slide lock unlocked. Have the student apply the oil from the top and let it drip down to be applied on the entire slide. Like the trumpet or French horn, a mouthpiece brush is always good to have on hand to show how to use on a mouthpiece when it gets fragments inside the shank. When talking about the polishing cloth, it is always good to say when there are smudges on the trombone, use the cloth instead of a finger to try to wipe it off.

### Euphonium/Tuba

The first detail to explain for euphonium or tuba is how to handle the instrument carefully without doing any damage. When picking up the instrument, have the student use two hands. Demonstrate to the students to pick up the bell first and have the instrument stand up vertically. This way it helps the student to have a good balance to pick it up easier. It also helps prevent hitting the instrument on the top lid of the case when picked up vertically. When it comes to beginning band students, the bigger the instrument the easier it is to dent.

One of the biggest things to emphasize are the valves of the instrument. Like the trumpet, the order of the valves should be explained. The closest valve to the mouthpiece receiver is always valve one and count over from there. Explain that taking

care of valves is essential to playing the instrument well. The director should have an instrument themselves and instruct the students to twist the valve cap and take out the valve. The director will need to stress out about the importance of valve oil and everyone should have some in their case. Before starting the process, it is crucial to explain that applying too much can cause the valve to stick even worse. The director should demonstrate how apply the oil onto the piston area of the instrument. The students should be supervised when they are applying their own because many will try to put oil in the wrong spot. This will prevent problems later on when trying to play their instrument. Once the oil is applied, have the students find the number above the piston and have it face toward the mouthpiece receiver and slide it back into the valve casing.

Next, talk to the students about valve slides and how they function. This step is very similar to the trumpet, but it is worthwhile to explain again in front of the trumpet players to help remember. The director should have each student point at their first valve and follow the piping down and show what a valve slide is. Have the student pull the valve slide out while pressing the first valve down to prevent any pressure. Like the French horn, emphasize that holding the valve down will not displace any oil into another part of the instrument. If the valve slide is too hard to pull, the director should talk about slide grease and to always check these valve slides once a week. Doing this avoids issues later of having all the slides stuck when spit will be in the bottom of a valve slide.

The last part of the euphonium and tuba is the mouthpiece. The director should explain it is necessary to be careful while picking up the mouthpiece out of the case. Like

any other brass instrument explained, the same issues can be caused. By dropping the mouthpiece on the floor can make dents in the shank of the mouthpiece. By taking care of the mouthpiece carefully, the students are learning responsibility and will treat their instrument better.

Some items that may be in the case are a mouthpiece brush and a polishing cloth. The director should take the time to explain to use the mouthpiece brush if there are particles inside the mouthpiece shank. The more emphasis on cleaning the mouthpiece, the more students will take care of their instrument in general. It makes them aware that they have full responsibility. Lastly, explain the polishing cloth the same way as the other instruments. Keep the smudges of the instrument by always using a cloth instead of a finger.

## CHAPTER III

### HOLDING THE INSTRUMENT

The first few days of being detail-oriented on holding the instrument is important so bad habits do not form. It is essential for a director to explain how to hold each instrument step by step so bad habits do not snowball over time. For a director, this can take up a lot of time in class later on if the issues do not get handled as quick as possible.

Holding the instrument is essential to be checked over and over the first few days with students. In this stage it is tempting for the director to move as quick as they can, but it is worth it in the long run to be precise on holding students accountable to do what they are asked. If a student ends up forming a bad habit on holding an instrument incorrectly, it will be problematic for the director when harder passages come along in music. For instance, if it is not addressed for woodwind students to keep their fingers closer to the keys while playing it will be harder when passages with sixteenth notes come along. Another example would be if a trombone player held their hand slide by gripping it with all their fingers, it would much harder for them when faster tempos are introduced. Going over and over holding the instrument can get tiring at times, but it pays off in the end when there are less problems in class to take care of.

## Flute

Starting on the flute, it is important to talk about the first balance point and where to put fingers down on the keys with the left hand. If these are done incorrectly, the students will experience frustration when trying switch between notes. The first balance point to talk about is letting the flute balance on the back side of the left index finger.<sup>23</sup> When placing the flute on the back side, let the flute rest where the palm meets the index finger in between the spaces of the first and second key. A good way to help students remember this balance point is to call it the left hand shelf.<sup>24</sup> A lot of times, students will try to put the flute below this balance point. Doing this will cause irritation when the instrument starts to slip when switching between notes C and D. Once the balance point is established, the students will need to place their left index finger on the second key, middle finger on the fourth key, and ring finger on the fifth key. Some students will try to put their fingers on different keys and move their balance point over underneath the second key where their index finger is placed. It is vital for students to know their fingers should be curved over to the side pressing the keys down.

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<sup>23</sup> Kathleen Goll-Wilson and Michel Debosi. "Basics for Beginning Flutists." *The Instrumentalist* 51, no. 6 (January 1997): 12.

<sup>24</sup> Rebecca Fuller, "How to Hold the Flute - Learn Flute Online: Flute Lessons for Learning Beautifully and Fast," Learn Flute Online, accessed November 1, 2019. <https://learnfluteonline.com/how-to-hold-the-flute/>.

The director should say many times to keep fingers curved because it will become difficult if students try a different way.

The second and third balance points to explain is to have the right hand pinky curved and the right thumb underneath the flute.<sup>25</sup> When students start to play, they will have a tendency to straighten out their pinky. This is possible, but there will be struggle with harder passages because the students' fingers are not relaxed. This is probably the easiest to explain to the student, but the director should watch for curved pinkies when playing the first few days. When explaining the third balance point, the director should be very detail oriented when it comes to where the thumb is placed. If the thumb is placed parallel with the flute, the student will struggle in the early stages and the bad habit will take a week or two to fix. This is one of the common problems that a director needs to keep in mind. The student will need to place their thumb opposite of parallel under the flute between the first and second key. The right hand thumb supports the weight of the right side of the flute. Between the thumb and pinky, the flute will be balanced. Once the balance points are established on the right side, the director should show the students which keys to press on the right side. The students will do this with ease since the right-hand pinky has already been talked about.

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<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Goll-Wilson and Michel Debosi. "Basics for Beginning Flutists." *The Instrumentalist* 51, no. 6 (January 1997): 12.



When the students have their balance points correct, it is imperative to talk about having a “C” shape in the left and right hand when holding the flute.<sup>26</sup> Bad habits will form the fastest with a beginning student if this is not mentioned. Students will have their flute sliding all over the place and frustration will happen fast. Also, posture will start to decline as well since students will have a negative attitude toward the instrument. The director should always be looking for the c shape when it comes to flute players. When the student has the right shape, posture almost comes naturally for the student.

The last step that should be emphasized is posture. Students will try to get lazy and slouch at the beginning of playing their instrument. When the slouching happens, the flute starts to drop lower and lower. When the student plays, the director needs to be aware that the embouchure hole should be parallel to the lips.<sup>27</sup> Student should be told to make sure the right shoulder not pushed back too far. A lot of times a student will try this technique and make the head tilt.<sup>28</sup> If the head tilts, this will cause some shoulder strain and also the student will have difficulty having a good tone on their instrument.

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<sup>26</sup> Richard J. Colwell. *The Teaching of Instrumental Music*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980), 140.

<sup>27</sup> Kathleen Goll-Wilson and Michel Debosi. “Basics for Beginning Flutists.” *The Instrumentalist* 51, no. 6 (January 1997): 14.

<sup>28</sup> Zach VanderGraaff, “How to Hold the Flute (and Avoid Pain!),” Dynamic Music Room, accessed June 6, 2021. <https://dynamicmusicroom.com/how-to-hold-the-flute/>.

## Clarinet

The director should focus first on the left and right hand being placed on the clarinet. Many times, students will try to put their dominant hand on the upper joint and their non dominant hand on the lower joint. The director will need to catch this quickly and make sure the left hand is on the upper joint while the right hand is on the lower joint. Once the hands are established on the correct part, the right-hand thumb will need to balance the clarinet underneath the thumb rest. Most of the time this comes natural for a student. One thing the director should watch out for is to make sure the thumb rest is resting around the area of the thumb knuckle.<sup>29</sup> If the student puts the lower half of the thumb under the thumb rest, it will be difficult for the student to cover the holes correctly. For the lower joint, the students will more than likely find where their index, middle, and ring finger need to go. What the director needs to make sure of is that the fingers cover the holes and the student is not gripping the clarinet too hard. If the student is not relaxed while holding the instrument, playing the instrument will be frustrating.

The next part of the clarinet to focus on is the upper joint. The student should automatically feel where to put their left hand down to cover the holes. The director should make sure the index, middle, and ring finger are covering the holes on the upper joint. Similar to the right hand, make sure the student is not gripping down too hard on

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<sup>29</sup>“Clarinet Tips on 4 Important Topics,” Band Directors Talk Shop, accessed November 2, 2022. <https://banddirectortalkshop.com/clarinet-tips/>.

the instrument. The student will need to use the finger pads to cover the holes, and be sure not to use the tips of their fingers. The left thumb should be hovering over the back hole of the upper joint, while allowing the weight of the instrument to be in the right hand. Directors should make sure and check that the left index finger is not hitting the G# key. Once the hands are positioned, make sure the students are having both their hands make a C shape so the fingers are putting all their strength against the holes.<sup>30</sup> This C shape is good to include with clarinet posture every time.

The last step is to address posture. When a student is starting to play, the clarinet should be straight in front of them. The director should make sure the clarinet bell is slightly above the knees, and not resting on the knees.<sup>31</sup> Most students will do this automatically, but there may be a student who tries to play the clarinet to the side like a saxophone. When a female student has a dress on, the clarinet should still be in the front of the body, never to the side.<sup>32</sup> The elbows should be relaxed, away from the students' body. Slouching while playing the clarinet happens when this rule is not addressed and also with the body and fingers. Once a student notices that they can get away with slouching, the C shape in the hands will decline. Posture is very demanding on clarinet, because it can determine how well the student will play.

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<sup>30</sup> Larry Combs and Victor Bordo, "Basics for Beginning Clarinetists." *The Instrumentalist* 52, no. 1 (August 1997): 39.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce Pearson, *Standard Of Excellence Clarinet*. (San Diego, CA: Neil A Kjos Music Company, 1993), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Carola K. Winkle, "Teaching Clarinet Fundamentals," *The Instrumentalist* 67, no. 1 (August, 2012): 24.

## Saxophone

The first time holding the saxophone will be hard for the student if the length of the neck strap is not talked about first. Most of the time, the student will try to make the neck strap too long.<sup>33</sup> The problem that will occur is the student will start to bring their neck forward. This is extremely uncomfortable and will cause tension. Not only tension, but the air stream will be strained. These issues will make the student frustrated because it will be very hard to play any notes on the instrument. Another issue with the neck strap being too long is the right hand will have unnecessary weight that should not be there.<sup>34</sup> The hands need to be able to work freely. When the neck strap is too high, there will be difficulty when the student will start to play. The student will be looking up instead of straight forward, which will make the air stream be strained.<sup>35</sup> One way to help students remember how to position the neck strap is to think the mouthpiece should come straight to the mouth. The instrument comes to the student, the student should not go to the instrument. The director should check neck strap lengths occasionally.

Next, the director should explain how to place the right hand on the saxophone. First, the student should place their thumb under the thumb rest. They will notice the white pearly keys and automatically find where to put fingers. The student should have

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<sup>33</sup> J. Terry Stewart, "Some Common Adjustments For Better Sax Sections." *The Instrumentalist* 52, no. 9 (April 1998): 40.

<sup>34</sup> J. Terry Stewart, "Saxophone Tips." *The Instrumentalist* 61, no. 1 (August 2006): 40.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

their pinky hovering over the Eb key instead of sticking straight up. One thing to address is to have a C shape with the hand so there is no part of the hand pushing any other keys down. Directors should keep an eye out for students not doing the C shape correctly and accidentally hitting the Bb key on the side.

When the student learns where to put their left hand, they will find it is much more difficult to remember where the fingers go. The student will have more options to put the fingers and will tend to forget at first where the hands go. The first finger to show is the thumb on the back. Most of the time it is a black circle. Next, explain how to find the second pearly white key for the index finger. The middle and ring finger will quickly find the two bigger pearly keys. Students will tend to mess up at the beginning by placing their index finger on the first white key which will quickly make the hand placement off. Teach the students early to keep their pinky hovering over the G# key and sticking straight up. This will help students later on to keep their fingers close to the keys when they play. The fingers should not be stiffly open, and the knuckles should not be collapsed when playing.<sup>36</sup> As always, have the students practice the C shape with their left hand. If this is not addressed, other keys will be pressed with the palm of the hand. The director should address the C shape often.

The next step is to determine whether the saxophone should be held to the right or the middle of the student. The director should determine this by height. A good rule

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<sup>36</sup> Zach VanderGraaff, "How to Hold a Saxophone the Right Way," Dynamic Music Room, accessed November 4, 2022, <https://dynamicmusicroom.com/how-to-hold-a-saxophone/>.

to go by is for the tall students to have their saxophone go in the middle, and the shorter students to go on the side.<sup>37</sup> If a shorter student holds their instrument in the middle, the right wrist placement will be awkward. If the saxophone is on the side of them, the keys are accessed easier and there will be less strain on the wrist. For a tall person, it is perfectly fine to have the saxophone in the middle because the keys will be easy to access and the wrist will not be strained. Once placement of the saxophone is determined, the director should check neck straps again and make sure it is in the correct position. This will also determine the position of the mouthpiece. If the saxophone is to the right side, the mouthpiece will need to be at an angle that will still keep the student's head vertical. It is crucial for the director to make sure that every instrumentalist has their head facing straight forward and not an angle.

### French Horn

In the beginning stage of holding the French horn, the first step to is to talk about posture. When looking at the French horn, it is awkward to figure out how to hold correctly. The best way a director can show a student how to hold the horn with good posture is by holding a horn themselves and doing it with them. It should be explained that the student needs to sit up straight and have their right leg at a slight diagonal.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Zach VanderGraaff, "How to Hold a Saxophone the Right Way," Dynamic Music Room, accessed November 4, 2022, <https://dynamicmusicroom.com/how-to-hold-a-saxophone/>.

<sup>38</sup> Douglas Hill, "Starting Fresh On French Horn." *The Instrumentalist* 40, no. 3 (October 1985): 68.

The rim of the bell will need to be rested in this area. When the rim of the bell is on the right leg, it will need to be explained that the bell should face out away from the stomach of the student. Many times, the student will want to put the bell on their leg and have it aimed straight into their stomach. Doing this will cause major intonation issues and the student will start to slouch in their chair over time. When the bell is aimed away from the stomach, it will be easier for the director to explain how to place the right hand into the bell.

One huge fact to talk about is that the French horn mouthpiece should be brought to the students' lips.<sup>39</sup> One of the biggest problems with beginning students is that students will start to lean over and bring themselves to the instrument, not the horn to them.<sup>40</sup> Not addressing this can cause major posture issues and the right hand will not be able to be placed correctly inside the bell. The student should adjust their right leg to where the mouthpiece is in the correct position to start playing. If the mouthpiece is too high, lower the leg. If the mouthpiece is too low, raise the leg. At all times, the student should feel comfortable holding their instrument.<sup>41</sup>

The next step is to show students where the left hand goes on the levers. Automatically, a student will try to find a way to use their right hand to press the levers down because that is their dominant hand. The left hand should be placed on the

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<sup>39</sup> Douglas Hill, "Starting Fresh On French Horn." *The Instrumentalist* 40, no. 3 (October 1985): 70.

<sup>40</sup> Kelly Connell, *A Comprehensive Beginner Method for French Horn* (Ellensburg, WA: Central Washington University, 2019), 22.

<sup>41</sup> Max Pottag, "The Beginning French Horn Player." *The Instrumentalist* 1, no. 3 (1947): 10.

trigger (thumb ring), letting the index, middle, and ring finger resting on the levers. The director should emphasize that a firm grip is not needed and the fingers should be able to work freely with the levers.<sup>42</sup> One big mistake students will tend to make is to stick their left elbow out while holding the levers and this causes strain on the shoulder after a while. The student should be relaxed while playing.<sup>43</sup>

The final step of holding the French horn is the right-hand placement. Most of the time, students will try to let their hand hold on to the rim of the bell instead of putting their hand inside the bell. The biggest component of holding the horn is how to position the right hand correctly. When placing the hand inside the bell, have the students cup their hand. If viewing the bell as a clock, the hand should be at four o' clock inside the bell. It is important to emphasize the wrist does not go into the bell, just the hand. If the hand is placed too far inside the bell, intonation issues will happen immediately.<sup>44</sup> The student should have their hand relaxed inside of the bell and should be able to move it freely. At first, the student will not understand why the hand goes inside. The director should have a tuner out and show them what the hand does and how it helps the instrument stay in tune. It is crucial to say that consistency with the right hand is key to playing in tune on the French horn.<sup>45</sup> The director should be aware

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<sup>42</sup> Max Pottag, "The Beginning French Horn Player." *The Instrumentalist* 1, no. 3 (1947): 10.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Colin Dorman. "French Horn Right Hand Position: Two Approaches," Colin Dorman, accessed November 4, 2022, <https://colindorman.com/french-horn-right-hand/>.



the right hand should always be in the bell while playing. Once the student has these steps down, it is important to double check posture.

### Trumpet

Directors should emphasize posture as the first step on holding the trumpet. The student should be sitting with both feet flat on the floor and have their back off the chair. Some things for the director to watch for is slouching, legs straight out, and not bent.<sup>46</sup> The student may have their back off the chair, but their back could still be curved. The legs should be bent and the back should be straight so breathing will not be an issue when starting to play. Having good posture helps with confidence in the student as well. When sitting up straight, the student will be attentive to read their music and pay better attention.

Once posture is addressed, the director should talk about where the left hand is placed on the trumpet. Left-handed students will attempt to put their fingers on the valves and have the right hand hold the trumpet.<sup>47</sup> Directors need to make sure each student has their left hand gripping on to the three valve casings to hold the weight of the trumpet.<sup>48</sup> When gripping the casings, the left ring finger will need to be inserted

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<sup>46</sup> Bernard Fitzgerald, "Brass Clinic: Tone Production." *The Instrumentalist* 3, no. 3 (1949): 15.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Steven Orcutt and Forrest Buchtel, "First Lessons on Cornet." *The Instrumentalist* 62, no. 12 (July 2008): 42.

into the third valve ring. Starting this habit now will make it easier for students to use the third valve ring tuning the note D. Make sure that all fingers are around the valve casings and that there are no fingers underneath the trumpet holding it up. When this habit is formed, the balance of the trumpet is off and there is unnecessary strain when having to hold the trumpet up for a long time. Another way some students try to hold the trumpet is to have their left index finger up above the valve casing. The student will say all of their fingers will not fit in the small space so they will find a way to move their left index finger out. If a student's hand is too big, have them put the pinky on the bottom of the trumpet.<sup>49</sup> The director should make sure the student's thumb is straight and inserted into the first valve ring. Some students will try to bend their thumb and the trumpet will not be balanced correctly. When all of the hand is placed correctly, the last detail to mention to the student is to keep the wrist flat and not slanted. This allows the student to support most of the weight while learning to move the first and third slides.

The final step in holding the trumpet is to talk about how to use the right hand correctly. When placing the right hand on the valves, it is important to make sure the finger pads touch the top of the finger buttons. The fingers should be curved and not flat. If a student has their fingers flat, the valves will not go straight down into the valve casing and cause the valve to stick over time.<sup>50</sup> Also, the knuckle part of the fingers will

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<sup>49</sup> Jeff Purtle, "Correct Hand Position for Trumpet and Brass," Trumpet Lessons Online, accessed November 13, 2022. <https://www.purtle.com/jeff-correct-hand-position>.

<sup>50</sup> Steven Orcutt and Forrest Buchtel, "First Lessons on Cornet." *The Instrumentalist* 62, no. 12 (July 2008): 42.

be pressing on the valve buttons making it harder to play faster passages. The director will need to talk about this often with trumpet students to make sure no bad habits are formed. The student should put their right pinky on top of the finger hook. When keeping the finger on top, it makes it easier for the fingers on the valves to move freely and not have any restraint.<sup>51</sup> When placing the pinky inside the hook, it is harder to have proper placement on the valves and will make it difficult. When the student has these steps down, always check for posture again.

### Trombone

The first step to start on trombone is the left-hand placement. The first question from students is if they can hold the trombone with their right hand instead of their left. There will be attempts before the director even knows about it to hold the trombone backward. Insist that all students hold the trombone the same way. The left hand will hold the weight of the trombone while the right hand controls the slide.<sup>52</sup> The easiest way to explain how to hold the slide is to have the student make an “L” with their left hand. The thumb will need to go under the second bell brace with the index finger going straight up to relax on the mouthpiece receiver. The director will need to be careful to make sure each student puts their index finger in the correct spot instead of grabbing

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<sup>51</sup> Wesley Campbell, “Grip - Trumpet on Your Own.” Your First Notes, accessed November 5, 2022, <http://www.campbelltrumpet.com/toyo/tag/Grip>.

<sup>52</sup> Dan Farrant, “How to Hold a Trombone: A Beginners Guide to Proper Grip,” Hello Music Theory: Learn Music Theory Online, accessed November 6, 2022, <https://hellomusictheory.com/learn/how-to-hold-trombone/>.

slide receiver. The index finger helps to control the weight of the bell of the trombone from going to left or right of the mouth while playing. Without the index finger, the trombone will not be stable and it will be difficult for the student to play correctly. The middle, ring, and pinky finger should be wrapped around the first slide brace and slide receiver making sure the pinky finger does not hang off into the slide area. When the slide is out to a different position other than first, the pinky has the tendency to slide down and eventually give the pinky a blood blister.<sup>53</sup> The fingers should sit comfortably against the first slide brace and slide receiver, letting the index finger still balance the weight of the bell. It should be pointed out that the elbow should not be sticking out trying to hold the weight of the bell on it. This creates bad posture issues, and also makes it extremely uncomfortable for the student. The elbow should be relaxed and facing down toward the ground, letting the left hand do the work.

When explaining right hand placement, the director will need to be precise on where the fingers go on the slide. Students will automatically do a death grip on the trombone slide, causing a lot of tension in the arm and shoulders. The longer the student holds the slide incorrectly, the longer it is to break the habit. It is vital for the director to explain that the wrist is what controls the slide, not the fingers. Relaxing the arm and shoulders is key to holding the trombone correctly. When directing students where to put their thumb, index, and middle finger on the second slide brace, they

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<sup>53</sup> Lacey Jackson, "How to Hold a Trombone Guide," Brass 'n Wind, accessed November 6, 2022, <https://brasswind.com/trombones/how-to-hold-a-trombone/>.

should be above the outer slide.<sup>54</sup> The ring and pinky finger should be under the outer slide, not bent but relaxed. Having these fingers underneath will help the student when needing to reach seventh position.<sup>55</sup> The director will need to check right hand placement as much as possible to make sure a student does not have all their fingers on the second slide brace. The right elbow should be relaxed as much as the left elbow, pointing toward the ground. If the elbow is lifted, tension will be caused and the wrist will not be able to properly move the slide. The student will become fatigued quicker and complain they do not like holding the instrument. The weight of the trombone should be in the left hand, not any part of the right hand.

The last step to address with trombone players is posture. When starting to lift the trombone up to play, the instrument should slightly lower than parallel to the ground.<sup>56</sup> When the students start to learn sixth position C, the tendency is to lay the tip of the outer slide on the ground. This causes the student to slouch and have bad posture. The slide should never touch the ground when holding out any notes. Another tendency of students is to lay their right elbow on their thigh, helping to hold the trombone up. This causes weight issues carrying over to the right side which should never happen. The trombone should always be slightly lower than parallel not matter

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<sup>54</sup> Charles Vernon and Gail Wilson, "Beginning Trombonists With Good Basic Skills." *The Instrumentalist* 52, no. 4 (November 1997): 27.

<sup>55</sup> Dan Farrant, "How to Hold a Trombone: A Beginners Guide to Proper Grip," Hello Music Theory: Learn Music Theory Online, accessed November 6, 2022, <https://hellomusictheory.com/learn/how-to-hold-trombone/>.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Vernon and Gail Wilson, "Beginning Trombonists With Good Basic Skills." *The Instrumentalist* 52, no. 4 (November 1997): 27.

what note is played. The student should always have their feet flat on the floor with their back straight to help with breath support.

### Euphonium/Tuba

During the first lesson on holding the euphonium or tuba, the director should talk about how to balance the instrument correctly. On euphonium, many students will want to balance the instrument on their right leg and lean in to play.<sup>57</sup> If this habit is established early, it is hard to break the habit. Playing the instrument this way will cause shoulder and back strain. Also, slouching to play the instrument will cause breathing issues as well. It is vital to talk about having the euphonium be held up against the student. A good way for the director to explain this is to always bring the instrument to the student, not themselves to the instrument. It should never be explained to put the euphonium on any part of the thigh.

When starting to hold the tuba, addressing balance is important to talk about first. When the student sits in the chair, it is important for them to have their back straight and their body facing forward.<sup>58</sup> For a beginning player, more than likely the tuba will need to be placed in between the students' legs in order to hold it correctly.

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<sup>57</sup> Craig Aarhus, "Holding the Euphonium Properly Can Make a Difference," Band Director Media Group, accessed November 7, 2022.  
<https://banddirector.com/brass/low-brass/holding-the-euphonium-properly-can-make-a-difference/>.

<sup>58</sup> Harvey Phillips and Roger Rocco. "First Lessons on Tuba." *The Instrumentalist* 62, no. 6 (January 2008): 43.

Another way is for the student to have a tuba stand, requiring the student to sit on their edge of their chair to reach the tuba to play. There should be no part of the body holding any weight of this instrument.<sup>59</sup>

The next step to address is the left-hand placement on the euphonium and tuba. The main function is to balance the instrument and to keep it stable.<sup>60</sup> The left hand should not be holding any weight of the instrument, but should simply hold the instrument in place. For the euphonium, the left hand can help pull the instrument toward the student to help keep balance<sup>61</sup>. The left arm should stretch comfortably and hold onto the third tuning slide, which helps keep the instrument close to the student. Some students will try to let their arm hang down on their left thigh and barely hold onto the euphonium. Doing this will not help balance the instrument, but cause stability issues and the euphonium will move left and right while the student tries to play. The left arm is very important to hold the euphonium as stable as possible. Students should do the same thing with the left hand for the tuba. The only difference is that the tuba should not be sitting in the student's lap, but on a chair or tuba stand. The student will try to hold the tuba by laying their left arm on their left thigh and barely gripping the

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<sup>59</sup> Brian N. Weidner, *Brass Techniques and Pedagogy. The Tuba* (Montreal, Canada: Pressbooks), <https://pressbooks.palni.org/brasstechniquesandpedagogy/chapter/the-tuba/>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Craig Aarhus, "Holding the Euphonium Properly Can Make a Difference," Band Director Media Group, accessed November 7, 2022. <https://banddirector.com/brass/low-brass/holding-the-euphonium-properly-can-make-a-difference/>.

body. Doing this will cause stability issues and the tuba could slip off the chair or tuba stand. The director should check for students holding their instrument closely with their left hand often.

When it comes to the right hand, the same process should go for both the euphonium and tuba. The hand needs to be as free as possible, not holding any weight of the instrument.<sup>62</sup> Once the left hand is established, the student will automatically put their right hand in position. The student should use their index, middle, and ring finger for the valves. The most important thing directors should make sure and establish early is how to press down on the valves correctly. The fingers should not be flat, but curved so the fingers will be pushing straight down instead of at an angle. When a student presses a valve down with straight fingers, it can cause the valve to stick more than usual because the valve is being pushed to the side. Doing this repetitively can cause the valve to start rubbing up against the side of the valve casing, creating the valve to stick often.

In conclusion, directors should always check at the beginning of class how the students are assembling and holding their instrument. Students will start to develop their own way in how they do things and it is important to be aware if a bad habit is formed. One thing to remember early on is that students need repetition in order to understand the director is serious. When it comes to caring for the instrument, students need to be reminded of this every week. Some directors will check once a week and

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<sup>62</sup> Harvey Phillips and Roger Rocco, "First Lessons on Tuba." *The Instrumentalist* 62, no. 6 (January 2008): 44.



establish a day to go around and watch students put together their instrument and check how they are holding it.

## CHAPTER IV

### ESTABLISHING CORE CONCEPTS

In beginning band, students will need to develop a variety of concepts that will form the foundation of the rest of their music education. In any beginning band book, the core concepts are on the first pages, regardless of how the book is organized.<sup>63</sup> It is the responsibility of the instructor to make sure these concepts are understood and mastered by all students. Concepts need to be addressed each day to help students remember the foundations behind playing music. If some of these fundamentals are left out in the beginning, music making will not be enjoyable for the student.<sup>64</sup> In this chapter, core concepts such as learning note names, rhythms, and practice habits will be addressed. This chapter provides a framework to get started teaching these concepts. The director will need to build a routine to continue building musical knowledge in the classroom.

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<sup>63</sup> Laura Singletary, "Instructional Content And Frequency In The Beginning Band Setting: Defining The Fundamentals," *Journal of Band Research* 54, no. 1 (Fall 2018): 49.

<sup>64</sup> Michael D. Worthy, "Master the Fundamentals," *Teaching Music* 10, no. 1 (August 2002): 40-43.

## Note Names

At the beginning, the staff should be introduced. The students will memorize what the staff is quickly, but will need reminders once a week. Visually, have the students hold up their hand for learning about the staff. The director should have the students hold their hand up with their pinky closest to the floor and thumb toward the ceiling. Present to the students on how to count from the bottom for the lines starting with the pinky. The pinky would be one then up to the thumb being the number five. Show the students the space between the pinky and ring finger would be one up to the space between the thumb and index finger being four. Doing this now will help the students later on when the notes of the staff are explained.

After learning about the staff, the director should be clear with who plays on the treble and bass clef. If the director has access to a treble and bass clef instrument, it is easy to explain that the treble clef instruments play in a higher range compared to the bass clef instruments. Explain that the bigger the instrument, the lower it sounds, which makes it a bass clef instrument. When explaining the bass clef, it is good to explain that it is low brass. Make sure the French horn and trumpet students know they are high brass, not low brass instruments before moving on to learning the notes of their staff.

There are a variety of ways that can help students memorize the clefs quickly. For the treble clef, the most popular saying for the lines is Every Good Boy Does Fine, or Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge. The spaces of the treble clef spell the word Face. For the bass clef, the most popular saying is Good Boys Do Fine Always, or Good Burgers Deserve Fries Always. For the spaces of the bass clef, the most popular is All Cows Eat

Grass. It does not matter which saying the student learns, as long as it is catchy enough for them to remember it. A good game for students to play is to make up their own saying, which helps the director out because students normally do not forget their own saying they come up with. Since the students know how to hold up the staff with their hand, have them start with line one being the bottom and count up using whatever saying they like the best. Once the students understand the lines, do the same for the spaces as well. Have treble clef students start first, and then quiz them by saying one note at a time and have them point to the correct finger the note falls on. Next, have bass clef students do the same. To keep students involved, each day the winner that knows the notes the fastest gets to call out the notes the next day so it creates some competition. This is a good way to start the class, and students will have fun learning the notes on the staff. It is tempting to open the beginning band book and start to teach one note at a time at first to the students. The book or a music stand is not needed the first day for learning music, it will be in the way of the visual learning process.<sup>65</sup> In order for students to have retention, the director should come up with their own way of testing the notes for their range of instrument throughout the semester. Some ways to do this are to point at a note on their music and ask what the note is, or to pass out a test asking what each name of the note is. If the notes are only brought up at the beginning

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<sup>65</sup> Matthew Clauhs, "Beginning Band without a Stand: Fostering Creative Musicianship in Early Instrumental Programs," *Music Educators Journal* 104, no. 4 (June 2018): 39-47, doi: 10.1177/0027432118768383.

of the school year, the students will forget the note names quickly. Spending one minute a day will help the class as a whole know their note names.

### Rhythms

Another concept that will need to be brought up daily is rhythms. The best strategy for the young band director is to assume that not all students have learned about rhythms before beginning band. More than likely, some will already know and understand rhythm, but not all will know the concept. Spending time at the beginning of class explaining rhythms is essential to the success of the program.<sup>66</sup> The better the class understands the concept of rhythm, sight-reading will not be as hard when passing out new music. When looking at the bigger picture in the band program, it is crucial to help improve the student's rhythm-reading at an early age.<sup>67</sup>

The beginning band book does explain what the whole, half, and quarter notes mean toward the beginning, but that does not mean the student will understand. The metronome needs to be introduced as quick as possible to establish the beat and show students how to count. Most beginning band books will start with the whole note and the whole rest in 4/4 time. The director should take the time to explain what 4/4 time is, emphasizing the top number of the time signature. When students understand there

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<sup>66</sup> Frederick W. Westphal, *Guide to Teaching Woodwinds*. 5th ed. McGraw Hill, 1962: 1.

<sup>67</sup> Anthony Pursell, "The Effectiveness of Iconic-Based Rhythmic Instruction," *Journal of Band Research* 43, no. 1 (Fall, 2007): 38.

are four beats, that is when the whole note should be introduced. The best way for students to understand this is for the director to play the whole note while students count to four at the same time. After the director plays, the question should be asked if the note was held for four beats. When the director feels that the students understand the concept, play the note shorter than four beats and ask the question again. If the students get it right, then it is time to have the students play the whole note themselves. Students will enjoy playing a whole note individually and counting to four for the class which will help the sense of counting be enforced. After the class has a good handle on this concept, start in the beginning band book with the first note. Explain that the whole rest is the same as a whole note, except they rest four beats. The director should imitate the first exercise for the students and count out loud during the whole rests to show how to count. Most of the time the first page of a beginning band book has a whole note then a whole rest to help students learn between three different notes. The two concepts of rhythm and notes start to combine quickly. The director should spend a good amount of time reinforcing good habits with learning notes and rhythms. One mistake is to move quickly through the first page with three notes. The students may get bored by playing the same notes and rhythms over and over, but remember this is valuable time to reinforce rhythm and the notes.

On the next page, half notes and half rests will be introduced. The director should not hesitate to spend some time enforcing counting between whole notes and half notes. Always model for the students counting half notes first and then the students repeat back. When the director feels like half notes are understood, switch

between half notes and whole notes using a metronome and ask which note was played. If the class has a grasp on half notes, have a student do the same and pick between the two notes and have the class guess which one it is. Half rests should be introduced at this time as well. Make it known that there is a difference between the half and whole rest. At first, it is difficult for the students to pay attention to the detail if it is a half or whole rest. The director should be very clear to talk about paying attention on which rest it is. In the beginning band book, pick a measure with a half note and half rest in it and have the students play. More than likely, this will have to be repeated many times before everyone starts to understand the difference. This is a good exercise to do each day for a while and switch the rests around to make sure the students are paying attention. The director will need to spend a lot of time reiterating the notes and rhythms before moving any further in the book. Once again, do not move too fast. It should be taken into consideration on how fast the students are learning and work at their pace to make sure good habits are being established.

Before moving on to quarter notes, make sure the students have a grasp on knowing the notes and rhythms. In most beginning band books, take into consideration that quarter notes are not introduced until the third page of playing. By this time, the students should be reading the notes quicker and understanding whole and half notes. The same process should happen with quarter notes and rests just like the other notes previously learned. This time, the director should play three different times demonstrating a whole note, a half note, and then a quarter note. Students will understand quarter notes and rests quicker if the whole and half notes are understood

well. When going back to the book, the director will need to be cautious when the notes start to switch every beat. Go over the certain measures that change notes on every beat before going through the entire song. This will help the students not get frustrated quickly and will be a good reinforcement of remembering the notes. Do not play too fast and always be patient. It is hard to realize that a student is putting many different concepts together and trying to execute them all at the same time.

Once the students start to learn these rhythms, spend a couple minutes at the beginning of class switching up rhythms and asking how to count them. Once the rhythm is counted, have the students play the rhythm on one note. When new rhythms are introduced, the beginning of class is a good time to remind students of how they are played. Sometimes there are rhythms in the back of beginning band books that directors can use to start the beginning of class. If rhythms are not mentioned all the time, the concept will fade and the class will struggle sight reading anything new.

### Practice Habits

The first year of learning how to play an instrument can be frustrating at times so it is essential to develop good practice habits early. The first week of band, students will go home and practice playing their notes over and over. As the weeks go on, students will get busier and will bring their instrument home less often. The director will want to establish a plan early with the students on how to practice each week, even if it is for a



short amount of time. Keep in mind that habits can be hard to break, but also can be hard to form as well.<sup>68</sup>

Before having students practice at home each week, it is important to show students how to practice. Each student should know how to access a metronome and always bring their music home to practice with. There are times when the student will bring their supplies home to practice, but only practice the parts they know. What needs to be practiced is the hard parts. Students will often want to avoid these passages, so it is important for the director teach them how to break down the music so they can figure it out themselves. By going over the concepts of rhythm and notes every day, it will help students be able to count through a rhythm at home and go over their notes without being clueless on how a measure goes. A good example on how to teach students in class how to practice is to pick a hard measure that everyone is struggling on and break it down together. Talk through the rhythm and the notes and then try to play that measure alone with a metronome. Show the students it is okay to slow the metronome down to play through the measure and then slowly speed up the tempo to where it needs to be. The director can explain to do the same process at home when trying to work out a passage. By giving this example in class, students will understand

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<sup>68</sup> Richard J. Colwell. *The Teaching of Instrumental Music*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980), 141.

how to practice correctly and go over the harder passages and know how to do it individually.

One way to help students make a plan to practice is to establish practice charts that are due each week in the class. Thirty minutes to an hour is better than not having anything required at all. By requiring practice charts, this helps the director have a grade to put in the gradebook each week and parents will be able to see that students should be practicing. The goal for any director is for a student to develop a good habit of practicing the first year so it will continue throughout high school. There are many different examples of practice charts online that a director can use. Some beginning band books have a place where students can write in their practice time with a parent signature required. Be aware that students will struggle with the idea of practicing each week. Students are busy with things outside of band class and the director should be aware of that. It is important to create a balance between conflicts and practicing each week, which will help students develop better time management.<sup>69</sup>

Another way to help students develop practice habits is to practice with the students after school one day a week. Alongside with the practice charts, give the students an option to come in one day for thirty minutes after school and practice in sections with the director or an older high school student. Doing section practice helps both the student and the director. Students will get their grade by earning time for their

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<sup>69</sup> Donald L. Hamann, Keitha V. Lucas, Peter McAllister, and David Teachout, "An Investigation Into The Factors Contributing to Individual Practice," *Journal of Band Research* 34, no. 1 (Fall 1998.): 64.

practice chart, and the director will have an advantage to give needed attention on something the section is struggling with during class time. If the director has high school students, this is a great leadership opportunity to let them teach the section. The director would need to take the time to teach the high school students what needs to be shown to the beginning band students. By having high school students teach the beginning band students, it will inspire the beginners to want to teach someone in their shoes one day. Another advantage is the high schoolers will be practicing after school. Overall, having beginning band students come and practice with the director or high school students is helpful for all parties involved and the program has the opportunity to grow.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The first few weeks of beginning band are the most important times for the director to be as detailed as possible. The class period may seem very slow at the beginning because there is so much to explain. It is worth it to go slow and work at a pace that will let each student hear every detail. Some students may get impatient, but it will not hurt them to hear the details again to make sure every person is on the same page. It is common to feel drained at the end of the class period, because it should take every bit of concentration to make sure the students will have the knowledge of how to do things correctly when playing their instrument.

During the first year of beginning band, the director should never forget to go over notes and rhythms as much as possible. The very beginning is crucial to explain the notes and rhythms in detail, but just remember that forgetting to keep going over it during the year will hurt the program. Students will only remember the points the director goes over many times during the first year, not the points only said at the beginning. The director should never think that they are going over these concepts too much. It is always good to keep pushing forward and make their students the best they can be.

Lastly, students should constantly hear in the classroom that practicing their instrument will make things easier for them. Some students will listen to the director say these things, but sadly they will not practice. Do not let this be a negative thought in the classroom. Make practicing a positive, fun experience for the students. If there is a way to have students practice in the band room after school with the director or a high school student, make it happen. If the director is willing to spend extra time with beginners after school, the students will enjoy practicing and develop good habits. If it is explained how to practice correctly, students will soar as musicians and reap the benefits from the program. Always remember to remind students of these positive core concepts that can make the program soar.

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