



BEGINNING BAND INSTRUMENT CHOICES

LET'S GET STARTED!

The most important quality to succeed in a band is a group mindset and good sportsmanship. A band is a team (just like a sports team) that requires players in all positions (instruments) in order to be successful. For performances, competitions, and the like, the most important qualities that we can demonstrate as an ensemble are blend, balance, and good tone. We only sound our best (and judges only can give us high scores) when we have strong players on every instrument or else our group will fail.

Over the next few classes, we will be taking students through instrument and mouthpiece “fittings” (trials) to help figure out which instruments are best suited for them and noting their interests, balanced with ensuring that our team is balanced and successful.

Once we have finished all of our instrument fittings, we will confirm instruments with students and families. Some larger instruments are often available through the school (marked by an asterisk * on the following list), though others (generally the more common and smaller instruments) will need to be rented.

There are many considerations in choosing an instrument. We hope that this document helps to introduce the different instruments of the band and to help with the selection process!

For each instrument, there is a listing of “pros” and “cons.” There is also an indication of whether each instrument can participate in traditional Jazz Bands and Orchestras at the more advanced levels.

There are many factors that must be addressed that can aid in the placement of the student and their instrument:

- The student's physical characteristics: Teeth, lips, braces, overbites, teeth structures, mouth shapes, hand size, finger length, and overall physical stature.

- Prior knowledge and musical training: Can they identify certain sounds, pitches, and musical phrases that are suited to certain instruments? We will have some additional checks in the Fall.
- The need for balanced instrumentation: Band is a team concept and just like a football team with a few players at each position, the band needs a certain number of players on each instrument. Please be flexible if your student is asked to play an instrument that fits them. Odds are that they are seen as incredibly valuable!
- The interest of the student: This is always important(!) and always balanced with the other three criteria. We have also found that students tend to gravitate and favor instruments of which they are already familiar due to higher visibility of some in popular culture and music. However, students who opt to play the more “ambiguous” instruments often love them more than ones they had otherwise chosen initially and feel a unique amount of pride in playing something less well-known! Ultimately, students highly motivated to learn a particular instrument are more likely to succeed.

WOODWINDS

FLUTE

The smallest and highest-sounding instrument in the band

PROS	CONS
Small, easy to carry when in case. Relatively inexpensive to rent. Many private instructors available in the area.	This is the most difficult instrument to start on in beginning band. Some students cannot play this instrument well due to facial characteristics (lip size, etc.). Difficult to hold, especially with small hands. Many students play flute, so much more competition to get into advanced groups, honor bands, youth orchestras, etc. in the future.
Traditional Jazz Instrument: No	
Orchestral Instrument: Yes	
Good for switching to: (exists relatively on its own)	

OBOE *

A double reed instrument, about the same size as a flute or clarinet when assembled.

PROS	CONS
Small, easy to carry when in case. Not as many students play this instrument, so more opportunities to play in groups.	Somewhat difficult to play at times. Private lessons are very strongly recommended. Instruments and supplies can be expensive. Limited number of oboists allowed in each group.
Traditional Jazz Instrument: No	
Orchestral Instrument: Yes	

BASSOON *

A double reed instrument, the bass of the double reed family.

PROS	CONS
This is a very important instrument to the success of bands and orchestras at all levels. Not many students play Bassoon, leading to many opportunities for performances in different types of advanced level groups. Good bassoon players are always in high demand at every level of music!	Somewhat difficult to play at times. Private lessons are very strongly recommended. Expensive instrument to rent/purchase (which is why we offer ones to rent through Redwood!).
Traditional Jazz Instrument:	
No	
Orchestral Instrument:	
Yes	

CLARINET

A single reed instrument, similar in size to flute and oboe when assembled.

PROS	CONS
Small, easy to carry when in case. Relatively inexpensive to rent. Easily transferable to other instruments (bass clarinet, oboe, bassoon, saxophone). Many private instructors available in area.	Somewhat difficult to play at times. Students must have large enough hands to cover tone holes with all fingers. Many students play clarinet, so much more competition to get into advanced groups, honor bands, youth orchestras, etc. in the future (though often not as much as flutes).
Traditional Jazz Instrument	
No	
Orchestral Instrument:	
Yes	
Good for switching to:	
Bass Clarinet	
Oboe	
Bassoon	
Saxophone (Alto, Tenor, Bari)	

ALTO SAX

A single reed instrument made of brass. It is larger than most other woodwinds..

PROS	CONS
Relatively easy to learn (although easy to learn "badly"). Easily transferable to other instruments (other saxophones, bassoon, bass clarinet). Many private instructors available in the area.	Large, heavy instrument. Difficult to manage for small students. Limited performance opportunities in advanced groups (not used in orchestras). Expensive instrument to rent (more than double the cost of some other instruments). Many students play alto saxophone, so much more competition to get into advanced groups, honor bands, etc. in the future.
Traditional Jazz Instrument: Yes	
Orchestral Instrument: Not traditionally	

TENOR SAX & BARI SAX *

A single reed instrument made of brass. It is larger than most other woodwinds. Larger and lower-sounding than alto saxophone.

PROS	CONS
Relatively easy to learn (although easy to learn "badly"). Easily transferable to other instruments (other saxophones, bassoon, bass clarinet). Many private instructors available in the area.	Large, heavy instrument. Difficult to manage for small students. Limited performance opportunities in advanced groups (usually not used in orchestras). Expensive instrument to rent (which is why we offer ones through Redwood!).
Traditional Jazz Instrument: Yes	
Orchestral Instrument: Not traditionally	

BRASS

TRUMPET

The smallest of the brass instruments. It is also the highest-sounding and “brightest” sound of the brass.

PROS	CONS
Smallest of brass instruments. Relatively inexpensive to rent. Few supplies needed for purchase. Easily transferable to other brass instruments (French Horn, trombone, baritone, tuba). Trumpet is one of the most important instruments in the band. Is BOTH a jazz and orchestral instrument.	Difficult for some students to hold/play. Has a lot of resistance when blowing through. Most difficult of brass instruments to play well. Students who currently wear braces or who will wear braces in the future should consider a different instrument (or switching in the future) because playing on the trumpet with braces can be VERY painful!
Traditional Jazz Instrument: Yes	
Orchestral Instrument: Yes	
Good for switching to: French Horn	

HORN *

A mid-range brass instrument. It is highly recommended that students studying French Horn have had some previous musical experience (piano, etc.).

PROS	CONS
This is a very important instrument to the success of bands and orchestras at all levels. Not many students play French Horn, leading to many opportunities for performances in different types of advanced level groups. Good French Horn players are always in high demand at every level of music!	Difficult instrument to play and control. Private lessons are very strongly recommended. Expensive instrument to rent (which is why we offer ones through Redwood!).
Traditional Jazz Instrument: No	
Orchestral Instrument: Yes	

TROMBONE *

One of several instruments classified as "low brass."
*Low brass instruments are **THE MOST IMPORTANT instruments in a band!***

PROS	CONS
The smallest of the low brass instruments. Easily transferable to other low brass instruments later on (baritone & tuba). Relatively inexpensive to rent and maintain. Is BOTH a jazz and orchestral instrument. Very important to the success of a band, making players in high demand at every level. One of the easiest instruments to produce a sound on for almost all students. We offer these to use through Redwood!	Because there are no keys or valves on a trombone, it is difficult to play fast moving notes.
Traditional Jazz Instrument: No	
Orchestral Instrument: Yes	

BARITONE/EUPHONIUM *

One of the several instruments classified as "low brass." It is similar to trombone, except with valves.
*Low brass instruments are **THE MOST IMPORTANT instruments in a band!***

PROS	CONS
One of the easiest instruments to produce a sound on for almost all students. Easily transferable to other low brass instruments later on. Very important to the success of a band, making players in high demand at every level.	Expensive to rent/purchase (which is why we offer ones to rent through Redwood!). Not used in traditional jazz bands or orchestras. Somewhat large.
Traditional Jazz Instrument: No	
Orchestral Instrument: Not traditionally	
Good for switching to: Trombone Tuba	

TUBA *

One of several instruments classified as "low brass."
*Low brass instruments are **THE MOST IMPORTANT instruments in a band!***

PROS	CONS
Essential to the success of a band, making players in high demand at every level. One of the easiest instruments to produce a sound on for almost all students.	Large instrument. Can sometimes be difficult to manage for small students (although 3/4 sizes are available). Expensive instrument to rent (which is why we offer ones through Redwood!).
Traditional Jazz Instrument:	
No	
Orchestral Instrument:	
Yes	

PERCUSSION

A collection of instruments that involves the use of sticks or beaters. This is the only instrument section that is not a "wind" instrument (involving blowing air through the instrument). Students studying percussion MUST learn both drums and keyboard mallet instruments. Piano experience is strongly recommended for percussionists!
Percussion requires constant focus and concentration at very high levels all the time, much more so than ANY other band instrument. Students who have a difficult time focusing should NOT play percussion!

PROS	CONS
Does not involve "blowing". Very important to the success of a band/orchestra. Somewhat inexpensive to rent/purchase equipment at the beginning level (costs increase later).	Difficult to learn all of the different instruments (especially if no piano experience). Requires a lot of "musical independence," since there is generally only one person playing each percussion instrument at a time (especially at more advanced levels). A lot of students play percussion, leading to more competition to get into advanced groups, youth orchestras, honor bands, etc. Students playing percussion will eventually need to rent/purchase several different instruments, leading to higher costs.
Traditional Jazz Instrument:	
No, unless student studies "Drum Set" privately in addition to concert percussion	
Orchestral Instrument:	
Yes	