



A Parent's Guide To Buying An Instrument

If you have never purchased a band instrument before, the whole process can be quite confusing and intimidating, particularly if you have never even played an instrument before. Instrument features, terminology, cost, and brands that are familiar only to musicians, are just some of the factors that contribute to the anxiety that many new buyers feel and the whole thing can be quite overwhelming. If you are planning to purchase or rent an instrument for your student, you should find the following information helpful.

1. General Information On Musical Instruments:

Band instruments are marketed in three types depending on the age and ability level of the student:

- (1) Beginner Level (Beginner-Early HS)
- (2) Intermediate Level (Beginner-Early HS)
- (3) Professional Level (Advanced HS, College, Pro)

Most so-called "intermediate" grade instruments are actually "beginner" instruments with only a few modest cosmetic improvements. None of these improvements really add much to the actual playing sound of the instrument, but do add to the cost. Beginner/Intermediate instruments are recommended for students in beginning/middle school and early high school.

As the student advances in high school, they will generally want to invest in a professional-level instrument to meet the needs of their higher skill-level. These are the instruments that will allow students to play at a collegiate level and are a worthy investment as students prepare to submit college applications and prepare for scholarship auditions (even those who do not plan to major in music).

Musical instruments are delicate and complicated machines. It is important that they be in good working condition, otherwise they will be unusable to the student. It is also important that they be quality instruments from a reputable brand. Ensuring that an instrument purchased is of a quality, durable brand and in good working condition can save the owner huge amounts of frustration money in repairs over time.

It is important to note that often repair costs exceed the value of an instrument, particularly in student instruments. Think of a 30yr old car worth \$500 – if the transmission goes out, it's probably not worth repairing. Similarly, a \$100 instrument could require a \$400 re-pad in order to be playable. Afterwards, it will still be worth \$100. My hope is to help you avoid this situation so that you make the best investment and your student can be as successful as possible.

2. Recommended & Acceptable BEGINNING Brands/Models:

The following band instrument brands and models are the instruments that the Director personally recommends to our beginning band students, to ensure their greatest level of enjoyment and success in band. These will also be the most durable, cost-effective (in the long-run), and easily repaired, as well as the models that maintain the highest re-sale value. Only student brands and models appear here. The brands listed below have been tried and prove, and are recommended by the majority of the strongest band programs across the US. Also included is the REQUIRED mouthpiece set-up, the estimated cost of renting or making payments on the instrument, and the student's best options should they choose to switch to a "color" instrument after completing beginning band (Not all students will switch).

FLUTES:

- Strongly Recommended Models: ANY Yamaha Model. Specifically, Yamaha YFL 260/262 or Yamaha YFL 360/362
- Estimated Monthly Rental or Purchase Payment: \$22-\$40
- Accessories Needed: Plastic Cleaning Rod (\$1) and small piece of clean cotton cloth.
- Switch-Over Options in Advanced Band: Oboe, Bassoon, Saxophone, Tuba, Percussion
- Other Quality USED Beginner Brands (IF in good condition!): Yamaha, Gemeinhardt, Pearl, Armstrong, Buffet, Haynes Amadeus, Jupiter, Powell Sonaré, Pearl, Trevor James, Blessing, Selmer, Bundy II.

CLARINETS:

- Strongly Recommended Models: ANY Yamaha Model. Specifically, Yamaha 200 AD, Yamaha 250/255
- Mouthpiece: Vandoren 5RV "Lyre" Mouthpiece (Can Be Purchased On Amazon)
- Bonade Inverted Bb Clarinet Ligature (Can Be Purchased On Amazon)
- Reeds: Vandoren Blue Box ONLY (Start at strength 2.5, Can Be Purchased On Amazon)
- Accessories Needed: Cork grease, silk or microfiber swab. DO NOT USE A FELT SWAB OR SNAKE.
- Estimated Monthly Rental or Purchase Payment: \$25-\$40
- Switch Over Options in 7th Grade: Saxophone, Oboe, Bassoon, Percussion
- Other Quality USED Beginner Brands (IF in good condition): Yamaha, Buffet, Leblanc, Noblet, Bliss, Normandy, Vito, Selmer, Signet, Bundy II.

TRUMPETS:

- Strongly Recommended Models: ANY Bach or Yamaha Model
- Mouthpiece: Vincent Bach 7C, Yamaha 7C, or Yamaha 11B4.
- Accessories Needed: Valve Oil, Slide Grease. DO NOT USE A SNAKE.
- Estimated Monthly Rental or Purchase Payment: \$22-\$40, or less
- Switch Over Options in 7th Grade: Oboe, French Horn, Tuba, Euphonium, Percussion
- Other Quality USED Beginner Brands (IF in good condition): Yamaha, Bach, Conn, Getzen, Blessing, Besson, King, Blessing, Holton, Jupiter.

TROMBONES:

- Strongly Recommended Models: Any Bach or Yamaha Model
- Mouthpiece: Vincent Bach 6 1/2 AL, Yamaha 48S
- Accessories Needed: Slide Grease, Slide Cream. DO NOT USE A SNAKE.
- Estimated Monthly Rental or Purchase Payment: \$40, or less
- Switch Over Options in 7th Grade: Tuba, Euphonium, Percussion
- Other Quality USED Beginner Brands: Yamaha, Bach, Conn, Getzen, Blessing, Besson, King, Holton, Jupiter.

SAXOPHONE, FRENCH HORN, EUPHONIUM, TUBA:

- For detailed information on recommended brands/models for these instruments, please check out the "Recommended Equipment List" on www.whitepinebands.com under the "Documents" Tab.

PERCUSSION:

- For detailed information on recommended & required equipment, sticks, and mallets for percussionists, please check out the "Required Percussion Equipment List" on www.whitepinebands.com under the "Documents" Tab.

3. Buying Or Renting An Instrument

Most music stores have a variety of instrument rental plans and buyer options, that include rental and "rent-to-own" plans, where eventually the instrument becomes the property of the student. Some music stores will apply the entire amount paid on your child's first instrument to a more advanced intermediate or professional instrument, or a switch instrument when they are ready to step-up.

We strongly recommend our partner vendor, Music & Arts (www.musicarts.com), due to their low cost (beginning instruments starting at \$22) and the flexible options they provide to students, as well as their repair and accessory plans. However, many music stores (Taylor, Summerhays, Dunkley's, Kessler) sell quality equipment. Online venues such as eBay, Reverb, and Mercari can also be great ways to get a great deal – if you're purchasing from a reputable seller. To ensure that you get the MOST for your money and your child has the best experience possible, it is important that one of the directors inspect any used instrument, or any new instrument not found in the brands listed above.

Any instrument, new or used, whether it is purchased from a music store, online, or from an individual, should only be purchased with the clear understanding that it may be returned, if found unsatisfactory. Do not purchase an instrument without a return policy unless you are 100% sure you are buying a quality product that your child will be able to use in band. The Director is happy to help guide you if you are unsure. Likewise, if you are looking at an online purchase, please feel free to send the Director a link prior to purchase and he will be happy to check it out.

4. Important Information On "Off-Brand" And Poor-Quality Instruments:

In the last 10-15 years, many online and in-person retailers (including music stores, Amazon, eBay, and big-box department stores such as Costco & Walmart) have begun selling **extremely** low-quality instruments. These brands are almost predatory, geared towards purchasers that do not know any better. Most (almost all) of these are imported from Asia or Eastern Europe, and are completely non-functional after a few weeks of use. Additionally, these brands generally cannot be repaired if broken or out of adjustment – they are disposable. Replacement/repair parts for these instruments are non-existent and the quality of the materials used in their construction is very poor, sometimes dangerous. Some of these instruments can even present a safety concern for students because of their tendency to shatter, cause chemical reactions with students' skin/natural oils, and the possibility of low-quality needle springs popping off (which often contain lead or rust within weeks of use).

It has been consistently observed by successful band directors that students find these poor-quality instruments harder to play, nearly impossible to play in-tune, and severely lacking in durability. Sadly, often the end result of purchasing these instruments is the student quitting band out of frustration. The phrase "you get what you pay for" is extremely true concerning musical instruments.

An instrument being new is absolutely no guarantee that it will play well - In fact, many low-quality imports are already broken/non-functional when they are brand new, but students do not realize it because they are beginners. A used quality instrument will always be a better option than a brand new instrument of low quality.

Some Brands to COMPLETELY AVOID include: Avanti, Giardinelli, Mendini, Cecilio, Prelude, Allorah, Jean Baptiste, Stagg, Glory, Eaststar, First Act, Muslady, Bandnow, Palmer, Etude, Yasisid, SelNer, Pampet, Asmuse, Rowell, Lesage, and Gibson (Not the brand same as the guitar company!!!). These are all very poor quality instruments that CANNOT be used in our classroom.

If in doubt, go with YAMAHA – it will always work. Still not sure? Email the director at zebulon.bellon@wpcnadmin.com