

GETTING STARTED IN BAND

by Rebecca Van Treeck



A Parent's Guide for New Band Students

First Steps: Recruitment and Instrument Selection

Congratulations! Your student is taking their first step toward a successful musical career. While it might seem overwhelming at first, your student's band teacher likely has a well-coordinated recruitment process in place to help guide band parents and their students.

While this process will likely vary from one band director to another, most will introduce students to band at the end of the previous school year. The school will usually send out a mailer for parents at the end of the event, featuring details about the band program and a sign-up form for interested students.

Quite often, teachers will bring in older students to put on an introductory performance to gauge initial interest and will follow up with instrument demonstrations and fitting nights to help provide parents and students with an opportunity to see which instrument they are best suited for. White House of Music staff members are often on hand at these events to help explain the [instrument rental process](#), [lesson opportunities](#), and our [Maintenance & Repair program](#).

Learn more at WhiteHouseofMusic.com or visit one of our six locations.

On average, about half of the students who sign up for band will begin to take summer lessons to familiarize themselves with their instruments prior to the upcoming school year, while the other half will receive their instruments once school begins in September. Some band directors may help with selecting an instrument based on availability in their instrument roster (quite often a number of positions will be filled by students who began to take lessons over the summer), while others allow the students to select their instrument based entirely off of their own individual preference, regardless of the roster requirements.

Parents whose students are interested in percussion should probably sign up early, as it's always a popular instrument category. Band directors will usually look for students with a piano background as a percussion qualifier.

Instrument Accessories

Once your student has selected an [instrument](#), they will likely require a number of accompanying accessories to play it. It's usually best to refer to your teacher's guidelines on accessory purchases, as White House of Music provides a variety of different care kits based on the needs of different school districts. These instrument accessories will vary depending on the type of instrument, but we can break most of them down into three separate categories:

Woodwinds

- 3-4 Reeds
- Reed Holder
- Polish Cloth and Swab
- Mouthpiece Brush
- Cork Grease

Brass

- Valve Oil (For Trumpet, French Horn, Baritone, and Tuba)
- Slide Oil (For Trombone)
- Grease
- Mouthpiece Brush

Percussion

- Set of Mallets for Bells
- Drumsticks

One other piece of equipment essential for long term musical success is a proper music stand. Growing

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up, I practiced on the bed with improper posture, sliding my mouthpiece to one side in order to accommodate the odd position.

To this day, I still need to be conscious about this early mistake, as I continue to have a tendency to place my mouthpiece just a bit off center due to bad habits learned during childhood!

Instrument Care and Maintenance

When you acquire your instrument, you will want to keep it in good playing condition. Progress will be slowed or stopped (and student frustration will set in) if an instrument is not working properly. Most band rental programs offer and/or provide maintenance agreements. I would highly recommend taking advantage of this option. It may be your student is very responsible and careful with their instrument, but another student in the band class may not be. Accidents do happen, especially at a young age.

After each practice session, your student should swab out their instrument. I usually recommend doing this at home when free time is a bit more readily available. Woodwinds will need interior cleaning after each use. Brass players should remember to empty the water key after use (condensation from exhaled breathing will accumulate inside the instrument). Brass players should also have their instruments flushed and cleaned annually. Your student's teacher can guide them through this process, but it is also a complimentary service offered through the White House of Music [Maintenance & Repair program](#).

Some instruments will require more regular maintenance than others. Saxophones (both Alto and Tenor) will incorporate an octave key that you'll want to keep an eye on. Handling instruments properly will typically help avoid key issues.

Make sure your trumpet valves remain oiled. If these instruments are run dry, some issues may occur. A dented tube or valve can cause problems with movement of the pistons and the smoothness of a trombone slide as well. While all mouthpieces should be cleaned occasionally, reeds should be kept clean and dry and rotated regularly to help make them last longer.

Instrument care is typically covered in your student's first lesson, but it's important to remind them to keep it in good condition throughout the course of the year!

How Much Practice Time Is Required?

We typically recommend deferring to your student's teacher on the amount of practice they will require. One rule of thumb we recommend, particularly for less experienced students, is that the frequency of practice is more important than the duration.

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Success in musical performances isn't achieved like most classes, where your student can cram for a test by studying for hours on end. Instead, it's built through the repetition of good habits developed over many small increments of time, through practice sessions taking place in the same place, time, and position. Playing for an audience of parents and friends can oftentimes prove to be beneficial. It's also important that your student spends some time playing for fun!

White House of Music: Your Local Band Resource

White House of Music welcomes you to the widespread network of band players and band alumni across Southeast Wisconsin. If you have any questions about [instruments](#), [types of bands](#), [lesson opportunities](#), or our [instrument rental program](#), please don't hesitate to ask. We're here to help provide all the resources necessary to help ensure your student's success along their musical journey. Congratulations on helping your student take their first steps toward Making Music for Life!



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