

# Instrument and Class Selection Guide

# Band Instrument Selection Guide

## Flute

The flute is the smallest of the beginner instruments. It is a very popular selection each year, but only a small portion of those wishing to play flute will be selected.

**Physical Characteristics:** Flute players should have a slight “frown” to the upper lip with NO tear drop shape in the middle. Flute tones are produced by being able to focus an extremely small airstream to an exact location on the tone hole. The tear-drop-shaped lip will make it difficult to direct the air precisely. Flute players should also have agile fingers for moving this multi-keyed instrument through a fast musical passage. Students with extreme overbites (receded jaw) should avoid choosing flute as this makes it difficult to produce quality sounds.

**Other Considerations:** Students with double-jointed fingers should avoid selecting flute as this can cause lack of agility in the fingers.



Flute

## Oboe

The oboe is similar in its appearance to a clarinet, but it is played using a “double reed” instead of a single reed and mouthpiece. Selection of oboe players is **EXTREMELY** limited. VERY few will actually be selected for oboe.

**Physical Characteristics:** Students with profound overbites or underbites would have EXTREME difficulties producing good sounds on the oboe since the embouchure (mouth position) requires equal pressure on both sides of the reed at the same placement.

**Other Considerations:** Because the oboe is such a difficult instrument to master, only students with high academic performance records will be considered. Students who choose (and are selected) to play oboe are REQUIRED to take weekly private lessons with the applied lesson teacher at Downing (or another director-approved private instructor). Private lessons cost \$18.00 per week. Students are required to maintain a supply of 3-4 high-quality reeds at ALL times. Reeds can cost \$14-16 each. Students with a history of disciplinary trouble will NOT be considered for oboe.



Oboe

## Clarinet

Unlike the oboe, the clarinet uses a “single reed” and a mouthpiece to produce the sound. Willingness to purchase or rent a director-recommended clarinet is a **MUST!** Unfortunately, there are some clarinets on the market whose poor design and craftsmanship will make it next to impossible for your student to succeed. We can help you avoid that pitfall.

**Physical Characteristics:** One necessity of clarinet tone production is the ability to make the chin flat. Orthodontia is okay, but if a student has an extremely rounded bottom row of teeth, the mouthpiece will be hard to place in the proper position for tone production.

**Other Considerations:** Instruction in clarinet can be meticulous. Students who are able to focus on and perform a detailed series of instructions could do well on clarinet. Students who have difficulty remembering a series of instructions should avoid playing clarinet. Clarinet players are also responsible for maintaining a working stock of 4-6 quality reeds. A box of 10 reeds costs \$26.00 and can last (with proper care) up to 4 months.



Clarinet

# Band Instrument Selection Guide

## Bassoon

The bassoon is the largest instrument in the woodwind family. It is similar to the oboe in the fact that it uses a double reed to produce the sound. **VERY** few students will be selected to play Bassoon.

**Physical Characteristics:** A slight overbite is okay for students wishing to play bassoon, however, a student with an underbite should avoid bassoon. Agile thumbs are a necessity for playing bassoon proficiently as well as a medium or greater hand span.

**Other Considerations:** Like the oboe, the bassoon is such a difficult instrument to master, only students with high academic performance records will be considered. Students who choose (and are selected) to play bassoon are **REQUIRED** to take weekly private lessons with the applied lesson teacher at Downing (or another director-approved private instructor). Private lessons cost \$18.00 per week. Students are required to maintain a supply of 3-4 high-quality reeds at ALL times. Reeds can cost \$10-15 each. Students with a history of disciplinary trouble will **NOT** be considered for bassoon.



Bassoon

## Alto Saxophone

The alto saxophone gives the impression of being both a brass **AND** woodwind instrument, however it is indeed considered a woodwind instrument. The alto saxophone (which uses a single reed like the clarinet) is a very popular instrument like flute and only a few students will be chosen to play it.

**Physical Characteristics:** Since the balance of the saxophone is maintained by the use of a neck strap, it is extremely important that students be able to sit up completely straight when asked to do so.

**Other Considerations:** Saxophone players are responsible for maintaining a working stock of 4-6 quality reeds. A box of 10 reeds costs \$26.00 and can last (with proper care) up to 4 months. Alto Saxophone students will have the opportunity after their first year of instruction to audition for Tenor Sax or Baritone Sax (based on their proven musical and behavioral abilities while in alto saxophone class).



Saxophone

## Cornet/Trumpet

The cornet/trumpet is the smallest member of the *brass* family. The sound on cornet/trumpet is produced by buzzing into a small mouthpiece. Students who choose and are selected to play cornet/trumpet will begin on a cornet (smaller in size) and “graduate” into a trumpet upon the completion of a battery of playing exams at the end of their sixth grade year.

**Physical Characteristics:** While orthodontia is somewhat troublesome to a cornet/trumpet player, it is not impossible to make good sounds with braces. A slight overbite is okay, but an underbite can severely hinder progress on cornet/trumpet. Cornet/trumpet players come in all shapes and sizes.

**Other Considerations:** Cornet/trumpet parts usually have the melody (recognizable) part, therefore students who choose and are selected for cornet/trumpet should exhibit a confident demeanor, strong personality, and demonstrate a high level of self-motivation.



Trumpet

# Band Instrument Selection Guide

## French Horn

The French Horn is also a member of the brass family. The sound of the French Horn is produced by buzzing into a small mouthpiece similar to a trumpet. Students with good musical ears (such as Honor Choir students) should consider French Horn.

**Physical Characteristics:** While orthodontia is somewhat troublesome to a French Horn player, it is not impossible to make good sounds with braces. A slight overbite is okay, but an underbite can severely hinder progress on French Horn. Because the bell of the French horn rests on the knee of the player while playing, it is imperative that a student's upper torso be long enough to accommodate the size of the French Horn to make good sounds and that players be able to demonstrate sitting straight up when asked to do so. The French Horn's valves are manipulated with the LEFT hand.

**Other Considerations:** Because of the difficult nature of French horn notes (mentioned above), students should exhibit GREAT ability to match sung or played pitches by humming or singing. Perhaps this is a good instrument choice for students who have participated in piano lessons or honor choir groups. Students with a history of academic or behavioral problems will NOT be selected for French horn. Downing provides French horns for students at a cost of \$100 rental for an entire school year. This \$100 fee covers all general maintenance for the instrument and will be collected at the beginning of the next school year.



French Horn

## Trombone

Like the French Horn, trombone players should have good “musical ears”. The trombone is played like the other brass instruments (buzzing into a cup-shaped mouthpiece), but uses a slide instead of valves. The slide is not marked or notched and players rely on their memory and listening skills to tell if they are in the EXACT proper location. Students with good musical ears (such as Honor Choir students) should consider Trombone.

**Physical Characteristics:** While some might think that trombone players must have long arms, the truth is there are numerous accommodations that make it possible for students of all shapes and sizes to play. A slight overbite is acceptable, while an extreme underbite would hinder success. Trombone players should have slightly fuller lips than average.

**Other Considerations:** Great trombone playing takes good concentration and study. Many quiet academicians have excelled at trombone.



Trombone

## Euphonium (Baritone)

The euphonium (you-PHONE-knee-yum) is sometimes known as the baritone. It is a member of the brass family and looks like a small version of a tuba. Its sound is similar to that of a trombone, but it uses valves (like trumpet) instead of a slide (like trombone).

**Physical Characteristics:** Euphonium players should have moderately full lips, but not too full. A SLIGHT overbite is okay, but an underbite would hinder a good sound. The euphonium requires a medium-sized hand span to reach the valves and students should have an above average lung capacity.

**Other Considerations:** Students with an above average amount of orthodontia will find the mouthpiece of the euphonium a bit more comfortable than trumpet or French Horn. Downing provides euphoniums for students at a cost of \$100 rental for an entire school year.



Euphonium

# Band Instrument Selection Guide

## Tuba

The tuba is the largest instrument in the band and many would believe would be hard to physically manage. The tubas we use for beginners are  $\frac{3}{4}$  size and easy to handle. In fact, some tuba players will begin by playing a euphonium and will switch over in December (if physically ready) to one of the  $\frac{3}{4}$ - sized tubas.

**Physical Characteristics:** Tuba players need to have full lips and a large lung capacity. While the size of the student doesn't matter TOO much, a long torso (upper body) helps a student reach the mouthpiece of the tuba while resting the bottom of the tuba on the edge of their chair or across the thighs.

**Other Considerations:** The tuba provides the musical foundation for the band and requires players that are self-motivated over-achievers. Students with a history of academic trouble should not consider tuba as we rely heavily on the ability of the tuba players to consistently maintain good grades and remain UIL eligible. Downing provides tubas for students at a cost of \$100 rental for an entire school year.



Tuba

## Percussion (drums)

Just because you are always tapping on things does not mean you are a natural percussionist (drummer). In fact, the percussion section is the most select, hand-picked section of the band. Only students with the highest grades, lowest discipline problems, and extremely high gross and fine motor skills will be considered for percussion.

**Physical Characteristics:** Students should exhibit a great deal of coordination in gross and fine motor skills.

**Other Considerations:** The study of percussion includes bells, triangle, tambourine, maracas, claves, among many other instruments.

**IMPORTANT:** Students interested in testing for percussion will be required to attend **MANDATORY** testing session on Tuesday, March 19<sup>th</sup> from 4:00– 7:00 PM in Downing Band Hall. Please call Mr. Brown at (972) 350-1456 to schedule your appointment. After your Percussion Evaluation you will be tested on another instrument(s) choice in case you are not selected for percussion. Each appointment should last approximately 30 minutes. Students who do not attend this session will NOT be considered for percussion.



Percussion

# Orchestra Instrument Selection Guide

## Violin

The violin is the smallest and most widely recognized of the string family. It is also known as a fiddle. The instrument is held under the chin with the left hand, and the right hand is used to draw the bow across the strings to make the sound. The bow is a wooden stick with horse hair stretched across. The four strings are different pitches and other notes are made by stopping the strings against the fingerboard with the fingers of your left hand. The violin is the most popular of the string family, and almost half of every string orchestra is made up of violins. It is also the highest pitched of all stringed instruments.

**Physical Characteristics:** Violins come in a variety of sizes. Students of any size can pick up the violin with ease.

**Other Considerations:** The violin often has the melody (recognizable part) in string pieces, and can often have more difficult music than the other stringed instruments. Because it is the smallest, it is also the cheapest to rent.



Violin

## Viola

The viola is slightly bigger than the violin in size. The sound of the viola is also a little bit lower than the violin and the strings are a little thicker. The instrument is held under the chin with the left hand, and the right hand is used to draw the bow across the strings to make the sound. The bow is a wooden stick with horse hair stretched across. The four strings make different notes and other notes are made by stopping the strings against the fingerboard with the fingers of your left hand.

**Physical Characteristics:** Although the viola is larger than the violin, it can come in very small sizes, just like the violin. Any student can pick up the viola with ease as well.

**Other Considerations:** The viola often harmonizes with the violin. Viola parts often include difficult counting sections. The great advantage of choosing the viola is that no orchestra can find enough violists. They are often in great demand in professional orchestras.



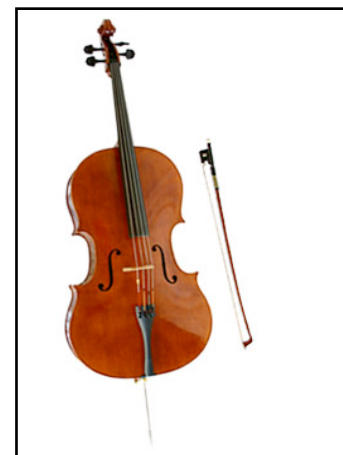
Viola

## Cello

The cello is the tenor voice of the string family. This instrument is supported on the floor with an endpin while the seated player steadies the instrument with their knees. Like the violin, you create the sound by rubbing the horse-hair of the bow across the strings. The four strings make different notes and other notes are made by stopping the strings against the fingerboard with the fingers of your left hand.

**Physical Characteristics:** Cellos come in a variety of sizes. Students of any size can pick up the cello with ease, but carrying the cello can often be difficult for smaller students.

**Other Considerations:** The Downing Orchestra owns cellos, so students will not need to carry the instruments back and forth every day. Students will be asked to keep a rental instrument at home, and use a school instrument while at school. The cost for using a school instrument is \$100 for the year.



Cello



# Orchestra Instrument Selection Guide

## Bass

The bass is by far the largest instrument of the string family. It is a very versatile instrument, found in many different ensembles. The bass is the lowest in pitch and is considered the foundation of the orchestra. The instrument is played either standing up or sitting on a stool.

**Physical Characteristics:** Basses come in a variety of sizes but can still be difficult for smaller students to play. Carrying the bass can also be difficult for smaller students.

**Other Considerations:** The Downing Orchestra owns basses, so students will not need to carry the instruments back and forth every day. Students will be asked to keep a rental instrument at home, and use a school instrument while at school. The cost for using a school instrument is \$100 for the year.



Bass

# Choral Class Selection Guide

Beginning choir is open to any 6<sup>th</sup> grade student who enjoys singing, or wants to learn how to sing. Previous choral experience is not necessary to be enrolled in choir. Various musical styles are chosen to achieve diversity and to give a well-rounded experience into all kinds of music. Several concerts are performed throughout the year. Opportunities for additional involvement include district choir, solo and ensemble, choir festivals and trips, and on-campus voice lessons.

