

Making Your First Sounds

If you don't make a sound on an instrument right away, don't be disappointed. We always tell people at instrument trials that making a sound is a knack you have to learn. We compare it to riding a two-wheel bike: if you don't pedal away on the first try, that doesn't mean you can't ride a bike! It may take you a little longer to get your balance, but if you want to do it, you'll be able to. Some students need a little more help at this stage, and one-on-one coaching from a band director or private teacher can help a student who needs to get over the initial hurdle.



Making a Choice

Making a sound the first time is great fun, but it doesn't tell us anything about long-term success on that particular instrument. Yes, there are certain jaw and tooth alignments that may make one instrument seem more natural for a player, but young children will grow, get braces, and change in many ways. An affinity now may lead a player to a particular instrument, and if that student doesn't express a preference for one over another, that affinity may give them a smoother path.

However, we always advise you to go with desire (when expressed), because a student will work harder to make the sound they desire, and usually hard work will even the score—and keep the player involved long term.



A Parent's Guide to the Instrument Petting Zoo



The Instrument Petting Zoo isn't about finding an "appropriate" instrument for a person. We don't believe there is a rigid "fit" of any one instrument to a player. You understand, for example, that being tall does not mean someone must play basketball and ignore all other sports. Height may give that person an advantage, but they could still love baseball or soccer more. If you apply that logic and think of music as athletics and each instrument as a sport, you'll realize that a person's *interests* and *motivation* have more to do with success on an instrument—and in music.



We believe that the purest reason to choose an instrument is liking the *sound* of it. Any other reason is good enough to begin with: "My friend is playing it," "I saw it on TV," and even "It's shiny!" work too, but they only work for so long. At some point, the music itself has to take over, and if the sound is already a draw, you're steps ahead.

About the Instrument Petting Zoo

At the Instrument Petting Zoo, students—including adults who are interested—can hear the instruments, hold the instruments, and experiment with making a sound on them. Just holding a musical instrument answers questions for some students. How big is it? How heavy is it? Where do your hands go when you play it? We stress, though, that *making* a sound isn't as important as *wanting* to make that instrument's sound. Over the years, we've seen plenty of kids make surprisingly good sounds on the first try, only to reject that instrument because, "it makes my lips tingle," or "it makes me dizzy," both natural (and inconsequential) side effects of first trials.



Once you've had an Instrument Petting Zoo experience, don't stop there. We offer a special Resource CD that lets you hear the sound of the major instruments playing alone. It's helpful if you need to hear the true sound of the instrument played by a professional. Once they're familiar, go to the library (or your own music collection) and look for recordings that feature your favorite instruments. Many instruments can be heard in a variety of styles and contexts.

If you need listening suggestions, visit the Petting Zoo area of our website (www.skylinemusic.com) or see our Resource CD

The Orchestra Strings

Violin, viola, cello and bass are usually offered, although only the largest students may be big enough to handle a bass, even a half-size one, while still in grade school. The others are available in fractional sizes, so player size is usually not an issue as long as the proper size is in the hands of the student.



The **Violin** is the best known orchestra instrument. It plays most of the melody, and orchestras have a lot of violin players. It gets to play high, fast music very often, but it is not used in band and very seldom in jazz ensemble.

The **Viola** is like the violin but plays lower notes, often adding important background parts.



The **Cello** plays a little bit of everything in orchestra. Because it can play both very low and very high, it gets to play melody, fast "flashy" parts, background, and loud, low parts. You won't find it in band, and it almost never appears in school jazz groups.





Percussion includes all kinds of drums (like snare drum), mallet instruments (xylophone), and auxiliary percussion (tambourine, etc.). Most of the instruments are struck with drumsticks, mallets, or beaters.

Please talk to your band director if your child is interested in percussion to see what instrument(s) beginning students will need.

Blending the Instruments into a Band

You already know that band has a number of different instruments, and the music they play is arranged so that the distinctive sound of each instrument type is heard at its best to create a musical impression, whether dramatic, soothing, playful, or a world of other effects.

For this reason, your director needs a variety of instruments. When a composition is played, too much of any one



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instrument makes it harder to create the effect the music composer or arranger had in mind. A saxophone, for example, can drown out three clarinets without too much effort, so ten clarinets and ten saxes in the same band can make things difficult to balance.

Every director has different ways of dealing with this, so consult with the director about your choices. If you want to be in band, but aren't set on any one instrument, consider asking the band director what instruments are needed to balance the group. You'll be a hero.

For example, if violin is the interest, you should certainly get a violin concerto recording. But you should also listen to a symphony, a string quartet, a fiddler, and anything else that illustrates the many ways violin can be played. Even better, try to go to a live music performance. There is nothing like hearing that sound made right in front of you, and most musicians can tell you exactly when and how live music made an early impression on them.

A collage of images showing children playing various instruments like flutes, clarinets, saxophones, and trumpets. In the foreground, there is a CD case titled "Instrument Resource Disc" with a treble clef and the text "Skyline Instrument Petting Zoo". The CD case is blue with a white treble clef and the text "Instrument Resource Disc" in yellow and white. The background images show children playing instruments in a school setting.

The Instrument Resource Disc presents the sounds of the Petting Zoo instruments alone, so you can hear what each sounds like. Once you've heard them, you'll find it's easier to recognize them when they play in groups. We make the Resource Disc available for a nominal fee. Just stop in at the store if you'd like one.

The Basic Band Instruments

If you're going into band, you usually have a choice of flute, clarinet, trumpet (or cornet), saxophone, trombone, and percussion. Some other instruments (like tuba) are a little too large for the size of most beginning students. Others (like oboe and bassoon) are both more expensive and more complicated to play, and may be too challenging for students starting in a band class (as opposed to private lessons). Still others (like soprano saxophone) are primarily used in special areas of music like jazz, and don't have a home in standard school band arrangements. The basic instruments all act as starting points, and most people who play the less common ones came to them from one of the basics.



The **Flute** is a woodwind instrument. (While today it's silver or silver-plated, the earliest flutes were made of wood.) Each note has a different fingering, and the sound is made by the player blowing over the hole in the headjoint (the part without the keys). The flute can play some of the highest notes in the band, and often gets to play the melody and some of the "flashy" parts in the music.

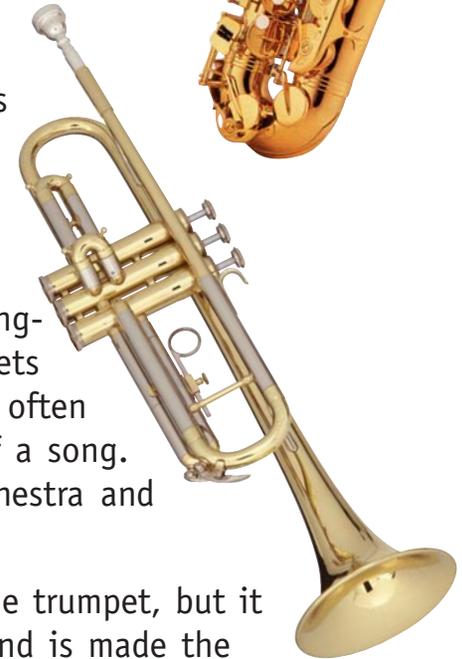
The **Clarinet** is similar to the flute. Both are woodwinds, and both use a number of keys to reach all of their different notes. But the clarinet can play lower notes, and its sound comes from a vibrating reed attached to the mouthpiece. Reeds wear out and are replaced regularly. Because it can play high and low notes, the clarinet can do many jobs in band and can be teamed up with a variety of instruments.



The **Saxophone** is between the woodwinds and the brass. It uses a reed like the clarinet, but is made of brass like trumpets and trombones. That makes it louder than the other woodwinds, but it still uses a different fingering for each note. Saxophones are used in band and especially in jazz groups, but they aren't found in orchestras very often. In band they play background parts a lot, but they are usually featured in jazz ensembles.



The **Trumpet** is a brass instrument and uses its three valves to open different tubing for its notes. Players have to "buzz" their lips to make a sound, and make their lips tighter or looser for high and low notes. That's why the same fingering can make several notes: the player is changing muscle tension, too. Trumpets play a lot of melody parts, and often get to play the loudest parts of a song. Trumpets are used in band, orchestra and jazz ensemble.



The **Trombone** is a lot like the trumpet, but it plays much lower notes. Its sound is made the same way, but instead of valves, it uses a slide to change the length of its tubing for different notes. Trombones get to play all the low, loud parts in band, orchestra, and jazz ensemble.

