

# Your First Band Instrument - The Do's and Don'ts of Choosing an Instrument

By Christina Thompson

So, you've decided to join the school band. Congratulations! In band, you have the opportunity to meet new friends and develop unique skills by learning to play a musical instrument from the ground up.



When you first join band, you may be tempted to dabble on many instruments; unfortunately, trying to learn every instrument will leave you knowing little about any instrument! As with your best friend, you pick one instrument, spend time with it, and get to know it well. But how do you decide which instrument is best for you? This article will show you the do's and don'ts of choosing your first band instrument, and give you tools to help you pick an instrument you'll enjoy.

Listening to recordings is a great way to discover which instrument you may like best. Ask your band director to recommend good recordings of different instruments, or search for music online. When you listen to a recording of great musicians, you have the chance to hear your favorite instruments at their finest. As you listen, try to pick out specific instruments and listen to what they're playing. Is there an instrument whose sound you enjoy? In addition to recordings, seeing the instrument in action can help you make your decision. Your band director may take the time to play each instrument for the class; if so, watch and listen carefully. What do you like and/or dislike about each instrument? As you listen to recordings and watch your band director, you may find yourself being drawn to certain instruments.

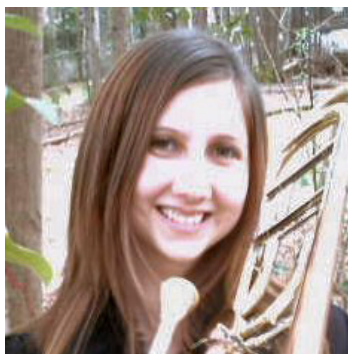
The best way to see how much you like an instrument is to try it out. Everyone is built differently, so certain instruments may fit one person better than another. As you try instruments, ask yourself questions to see if the instrument is a good fit for you. Is it easy to play a note? Are your fingers able to cover the holes and reach every key? For brass instruments, are you able to "buzz" your lips to create a sound? Which kind of buzz are you better at, a high, tight one for the trumpet or horn, or a lower, looser one for trombone, euphonium, and tuba? Imagine yourself playing the instrument every day. Is it something you'd be comfortable sticking with for a while? Many band directors offer the chance to try instruments in class, or you can visit a music store. Either way, trying several instruments can be a powerful way to decide which one is right for you.

When you're deciding which instrument to play, don't worry about instrument stereotypes. In the old days, some instruments were considered "boy" instruments

while others were considered "girl" instruments. For example, it was rare to see a boy playing flute or a girl playing trombone. Nowadays, though, these stereotypes are breaking down, and kids are starting to play whichever instrument they want to play. In fact, one of the best flutists in the world is a man, Sir James Galway, while one of the best trombonists in the world is a woman named Abbie Conant. If you are attracted to a certain instrument and think you'd enjoy playing it, don't let old-fashioned ideas change your mind.

While there are many good reasons to choose an instrument, there are several bad reasons. Generally, it's not a good idea to choose an instrument just because your friend is playing it. Since everyone is built differently, everyone won't find success on the same instrument. If you sound great on trumpet, but can't get a sound out of the flute, don't pick flute so you can sit beside your friend in band class! Odds are, you'll have a tough time and won't enjoy yourself in band. Another bad idea is choosing an instrument because you think it's the easiest to play. While some instruments may seem easy at first, you'll soon discover that every instrument has its own unique challenges. While the trumpet is easy to put together, it takes a while to achieve a pretty sound. On the other hand, clarinets are hard to put together at first, but tend to sound good before many other instruments. Percussion may seem easy, but percussionists have to learn several different instruments--and carry them all to the concert! If you choose your instrument because it fits you well and you think you'll enjoy playing it, you'll have a better chance of being successful in band.

When you're choosing a band instrument, doing research and trying several instruments before you decide can get your band career off to a good start. No matter which instrument you choose, be willing to stick with it. Even though it may be tempting to switch instruments when yours seems hard, remember that every instrument is equally difficult. When the going gets tough, keep practicing and ask your band director for help. You can even find a private teacher to help you learn more about your instrument. Even though band isn't always easy, taking the time to choose the right instrument can make it more fun, and put you on the road to becoming an excellent musician!



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