



# BUYING AN INSTRUMENT



## GENERAL TIPS:

Buying an instrument is a big step and can be confusing. However, the fact is that leasing an instrument for more than a year will end up costing MUCH more in the long run. If you have come this far, the time to purchase is here.

The student instrument you have started on will be sufficient throughout their school music experience. I will never suggest that you must buy a new instrument (vs. a used one) or that you must purchase an intermediate (or step-up) instrument. With that in mind, I will make the following qualifications:

- **Student line instrument / Beginner instrument:** Most music stores lease less expensive models of instruments. These instruments are made to be relatively inexpensive and relatively durable. They are not necessarily made to play with the best tone quality or to stand up to many years of intense playing. Simply put, they sometimes “wear out” or musicians “grow out” of them as they gain more experience. (Just upgrading the mouthpiece, however, will help tremendously.)
- **Step up instrument / Intermediate instrument:** These instruments are made with better quality materials and better quality control. In some cases (woodwinds), these instruments have more keys or have a bigger bore (brass--to help get a bigger sound), or are made of more expensive metals (including gold on some flutes). Some of these options are cosmetic, and some are truly beneficial. Generally, if your child is serious about band and really enjoys playing their instrument this can be an excellent option.

## If you are considering purchasing an instrument I recommend the following:

- **Shop around! Get as much information as you can, get the best value you can! Some options are:**
  - Rick’s Musical Instruments – Cumberland, RI
  - Doug’s Music and Learning Center - Seekonk, MA
  - Axelrod Music – Johnston, RI
  - Robert’s Musical Instruments – Warwick, RI
  - I DON’T recommend buying online
- **Do NOT buy from places like Wal-Mart, Sam’s Club, etc.**
- **Please, talk with me before you make a final decision!**
- **Used instruments:** are plentiful and CAN be an excellent value. However, as with buying a used car, the rule is “Buyer: Beware.”



**PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE---** talk to a band director or better yet have a band director play test any used instrument you are considering.

We are always willing to look at an instrument for general observations and will “play test” the instrument for you. We can often spot potential problems and help you to avoid a “bad horn”.

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**In buying a used instrument, consider the following:**

- Quality of instrument when it was new: was this a beginner horn or better?
- Age of instrument: old is not necessarily bad
- History of instrument: How long was it played and how long has it sat? An instrument that is ten years old but was only played for 2 years may be in better condition than an instrument that is five years old and has been played for five years.
- Repair history: Has the instrument had a “GPC”---Good playing condition check? Corks, wood, and pads deteriorate over time and with use. (Woodwinds)
- Appearance of instrument: Are there many dings, dents, or tarnish? This can be cosmetic OR the symptom of abuse and neglect.
- Most used instruments will need some kind of repair to put it in the best possible play condition.

**BEFORE YOU BUY:**



**ALWAYS play the instrument before you buy!!**

Students should “test” an instrument with their regular mouthpiece, reeds, etc., if at all possible because different mouthpieces make a HUGE difference! The student should go into another room and play scales, long tones and songs they know. The idea is to get a feel for how the instrument plays and how it feels to play. Receiving a new horn as a surprise gift could backfire!

- Can you make arrangements to take the instrument to a repair person for a repair estimate and appraisal? Rick in Cumberland will do this for you (free of charge).
- Can you make arrangements to bring the instrument to me for an estimate of repair and play test?

**If the seller is unwilling to meet these conditions, remember: “Buyer: Beware!!!”**

**Generally good brands: This list is not complete! If in doubt, please ask us!**

- **Flute:** Gemeindhart, Armstrong, Yamaha, Pearl, Artley, Jupiter (newer models only)
- **Oboe:** Bundy (Selmer), Yamaha, Fox-Renard, Linton,
- **Clarinet:** Buffet, Bundy (Selmer), Artley, Amstrong, Noblet, Yamaha, Normandy, Vito, Jupiter (newer models only)
- **Bassoon:** Fox-Renard, Linton
- **Saxophone:** Conn, Prestini, Yamaha, Bundy (Selmer), King, Keilwerth, Jupiter (newer models only)
- **Trumpet:** Conn, King, Yamaha, Getzen, Bach (older models only)
- **French Horn:** Conn, King, Yamaha, Getzen, Bach (older models only)
- **Trombone:** Conn, King, Besson Holton, Getzen, Yamaha, Bach Besson, Willson, Conn, Yamaha, Bach (older models only)
- **Euphonium:** Besson, Willson, Conn, Yamaha, Bach (older models only)
- **Tuba:** Besson, Willson, Conn, Yamaha, Bach (older models only)
- **Percussion students** need to be able to practice both mallet studies and snare studies. Some students are able to do this successfully on the beginner bell set (bells and snare practice pad.) More advanced students often feel the need to have a snare drum (instead of a practice pad) in addition to access to a keyboard instrument. Some students choose to practice mallet assignments at school. Some students are highly motivated by having their own concert bells (different from beginner bell kit), xylophone and/or drum set. This is a very individual decision based on the level of motivation and areas of interest.





## Simple Instrument “Upgrade” Options

### Flute:

- Silver or silver plated body--highly recommended
- Solid silver head joint
- Open tone holes (for more “serious student” who plans to continue in H.S.)
- Low B key & “gizmo key”
- Gold plated lip plate-some students react to silver

### Oboe:

- Wood---highly recommended, much better tone (NOT recommended for marching)
- “Hand-Made” reeds

### Clarinet:

- Wood---highly recommended, much better tone (NOT recommended for marching)
- Rovner Ligature – get this before buying a new mouthpiece or at the same time
- Hard rubber mouthpiece--- Van Doren 5rv lyre
- Silver plated keys

### Bassoon:

- Wood---highly recommended, much better tone (NOT recommended for marching)
- “Hand-Made” reeds

### Saxophone:

- Hard rubber mouthpiece--- Meyer 5 or Selmer C-star (very expensive) highly recommended
- High F# key

### Trumpet:

- Silver plated
- Bach 3C mouthpiece --- highly recommended

### French Horn

- Ask your Band Director to consult a Horn Specialist.

### Trombone:

- F trigger attachment (for more “serious students” who plan to continue in High School)
- Medium Bore
- 6 ½ AL mouthpiece ---highly recommended

### Euphonium

- Larger Bore
- 6 ½ AL mouthpiece ---highly recommended
- 4<sup>th</sup> valve

### Tuba

- Larger Bore
- 4<sup>th</sup> valve

