



big band  
director's toolkit

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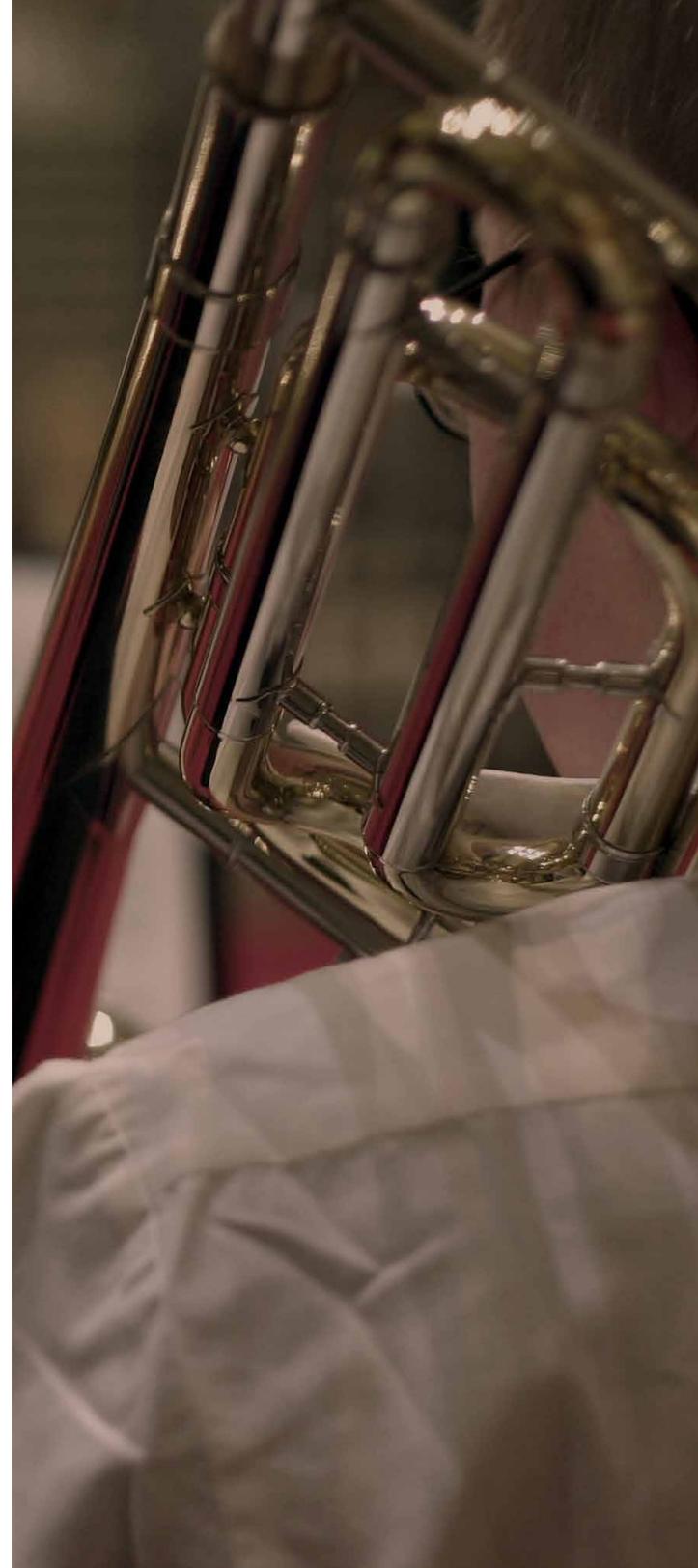
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*Are you directing a big band this year? We can help.*

*We've compiled tips from educators across the country. They share their experience on jazz conducting, learning swing, and what jazz festival judges want to hear. They also offer instrument-specific advice for every section.*

*Whether this is your first year or you're a seasoned veteran, this toolkit was created to help you tune up your ensemble, and to help your students excel.*



# teaching swing to young musicians

Many young jazz ensembles focus on funk and rock arrangements to hide the fact that they don't know how to swing. Rather than limiting our concert programs to "25 or 6 to 4" and "Fantasy," we should be teaching swing to young musicians from the beginning of their jazz careers.

Of course, jazz directors of all experience levels know how hard it is to teach a swing feel. Even the name — "swing feel" — implies that this is something you feel, not something you reason out or intellectually understand. As a teacher with both private students and full ensembles, I've heard (and tried) all sorts of different explanations of swing. Many teachers start by trying to explain that two eighth notes equal a triplet where the first two notes are tied. Simple, right?

When you're working with middle schoolers who barely understand triplets, asking them to internalize a rhythm with tied triplets is already a tall order. To make things worse, jazz often has different articulations than what students are used to. Students need something simpler. The next thing teachers try is usually "Well, just play long then short." This can turn the greatest Count Basie tune into the Mickey Mouse March. Emphasizing a long-short pattern causes all sorts of ricky-ticky side-effects.

## The Secret to Teaching Swing

The most effective method I have found for teaching students (especially young students) to swing is to use "back-accent tonguing" (but don't tell the students it's called that). Rather than have students hung up on the precise rhythmic values of swing (which vary based on tempo and style anyway), get the articulation correct and the rhythms will follow. Have students start on an upbeat with a firm accent, and slur into a tenuto downbeat. Add notes until students start to get the familiar swing "doo-BAH-doo-BAH" sound.



One key to making sure this exercise goes well is to focus on keeping the downbeats long.

## The Slur

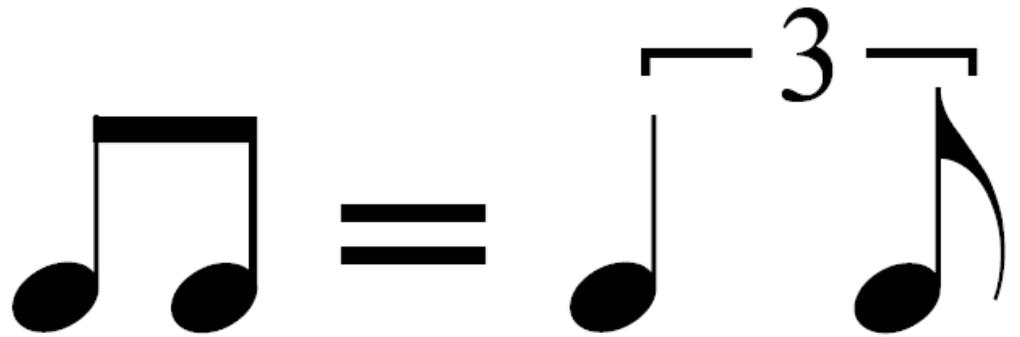
Next, add the slur. The goal is to make the accented upbeat drive forward into the long downbeat. Note this is easier to play than to read; be certain to model the sound so no one is intimidated by the notation (they can look like ties, not slurs). Don't let students get overeager with the accent — the slur into the downbeat is just as important as the emphasis on the upbeat.



Once students are starting to swing, apply the articulation pattern to something that students are very familiar with: scales. Now starting on the downbeat, use the scale up to the 9th to practice the accents and slurs:



# Swing!



Going to the 9th not only ends the scale on a downbeat for rhythmic comfort, but gets students used to extensions common in jazz and de-emphasizes the importance of the root (which students will rarely play in voiced chords). Practicing back-accent articulations on scales also kills two birds with one stone: your warm up already got students practicing scales and swing. Even better, you now have a vehicle for teaching advanced theory concepts like modes — use the same pattern on dorian or mixolydian scales.

## The Benefit

The biggest benefit to teaching students swing feel using the back-accent method is that it wires their brains and ears to automatically articulate soli passages in an idiomatic way, improving their sight-reading skills. Take a look at this example:



Experienced jazzers will naturally articulate the line like this:



You can see that back-accent articulations are similar to what experienced musicians will intuitively use on a swing line. Young students may still need

some courtesy articulations written in, but the back-accent approach puts them in a position where they will start to automatically articulate in swing style.

Of course, the most important ingredient is listening. Students who regularly listen to jazz will begin to internalize its language and will become fluent in swing more naturally and easily.



Ryan Sargent is an active music educator, performer, and MakeMusic's social media manager.

You can read his articles and bio on the [SmartMusic blog](#).

# five ways jazz conducting is different

Conducting a jazz ensemble is a contradiction in terms for some. Many of the bands that we study, respect, and admire feature no conductor at all. The only “conducting” might be the lead alto player cutting off the final chord. Most professional big bands are not conducted in the traditional sense, although modern bandleaders such as Maria Schneider and John Clayton are very animated conductors.

The conductor of any ensemble is responsible for all aspects of preparation and performance, and in this way the role of the jazz ensemble conductor is not different than that of a concert band or orchestra conductor. The gestures and activity from the front of the ensemble, however, are different in a number of ways. I would like to share a few of these differences.

## 1. Count-Offs – Let ‘em Hear You

Start the band with a count off. Say it loud and say it proud. A count-off is usually two bars long, although at very fast tempos four bars is used. Slower tempos often require only a single bar of count off. Let your ear and your sense of rhythm be your guide. Any pickup notes should be included in the count-off bars. This means that if there are pickups on beats 3-4 before the first full bar, the count-off will only be one and a half bars long.

Establish a tempo with handclaps or finger snaps. Style and tempo will determine if you snap quarter notes or half notes. Aside from a ballad tempo, most anything in a swing style will be snapped as half notes, and usually on beats 2 and 4, as this helps to indicate the swing feel. Non-swing styles may be snapped or clapped on quarter or half notes, and usually on beats 1 and 3. Once the tempo is established, verbalize the count-off by saying 1 (x) 2 (x) – 1 2 3 4. The “(x)” indicates a silent beat.

## 2. Less Is More – Don’t Conduct All the Time

Once the band is started, encourage everyone to listen to the rhythm section for tempo, and to one another for balance and blend. The ensemble should maintain consistent tempo by listening to the rhythm section, not by watching you present a flawless conducting pattern. Sometimes it can be hard to know what to do once the band is counted off. Many successful jazz ensemble conductors simply step to the side. If your ensemble is mature enough to allow that, go for it. Most young bands appreciate someone standing in front, though, for security if nothing else.

Feel free to give cues or make dynamic adjustments but your gestures will be much more limited in front of the jazz ensemble. A big band is really a large chamber ensemble and should be treated as such. Too much conducting is not only distracting, it does not encourage students to develop the necessary listening skills needed to be successful musicians.

## 3. Keep It Together – No Conductor Likes a Train Wreck

A jazz performance can ebb and flow, and sometimes a conductor is necessary to hold things together or to get things back on track. Stay out of the way as much as you can, but sometimes things happen that require a conductor to prevent a train wreck. Listen carefully and make certain the tempo remains steady. If adjustments are needed, make eye contact with the bassist and drummer. Those are the instruments best equipped to change the tempo of the band.

Open solo sections can also get tricky. Encouraging many improvisers is a very cool thing to do, but sometimes things can go awry. Make certain that you have the order of soloists penciled in your score, and that you keep



careful track of who is playing and cue who is playing next. The players should have all of this information also, of course, but nerves often take over during a performance and may cause forgetfulness or a lack of concentration. Even though we have been encouraging listening and personal responsibility among the players, someone has to be in charge. That someone is you.

#### **4. Stay Put! Don't Leave the Stage Between Tunes**

Large ensemble conductors are notorious for walking off stage after every piece, only to re-enter again and again. The first entrance is dramatic and exciting. By the time this happens for the sixth time I begin to wonder if it is just an excuse to milk more applause out of the audience.

Modern audiences already have short attention spans. Unless there is a huge change of personnel or set up happening, there is no reason to leave the stage until the performance is completed. Count-off – play – cut off, and then

get ready for the next one. Keep it moving. Your audience and the band will thank you for it.

#### **5. Don't Be a Stranger – Talk to the Audience**

So what to do between tunes? Engage the audience! Audiences crave connection with the performers, and you are in a unique position to do just that. Talk to them about any element of the performance (Who were the soloists? What did they learn to be able to do what they did?); the music (why did you choose that particular piece? what about the composer or arranger?); or other things happening in the music department (advertise upcoming concerts, recruit younger students). These are just a few of the things you can talk about. Keep it brief and to the point. While you don't need to read from cue cards, it does help to sketch out in advance what you plan to say between each piece. Recall the previously mentioned nerves from #3. They can affect us, too!

Even better than you talking to the audience – have students talk to the audience. Assign a student or a group of students to do a little research on the music being played and have them share their findings with the audience. The audience gets to engage with the performers, the students learn communication skills, and everyone learns a bit more about the music.

Everybody wins!

At the end of the day, the conductor of any ensemble exists to help the group sound better. It is best accomplished with a combination of careful listening, clear gestures, and good direction. As a smaller ensemble, a jazz ensemble can assume more collective responsibility for the music than what may be practical in a larger concert band. Adjust for this difference, and ALL of your ensembles will benefit.



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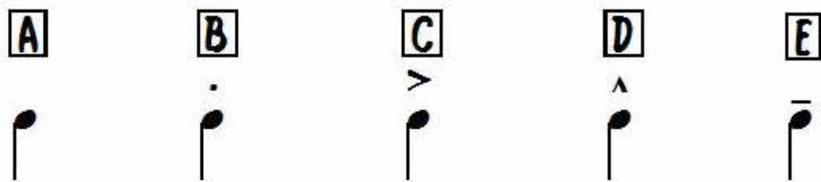
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# teaching jazz articulation to young brass players

Solidifying and matching jazz articulation throughout the young jazz ensemble will take your band to the next level of clarity, tightness, and style. One of the biggest differences between a mature versus a young ensemble, aside from soloists, is their grasp of style. I'll first address the common articulations that a director will encounter in jazz repertoire. I will also discuss how to teach your brass players to perform these articulations followed by articulations/ideas that can help your young ensemble swing.

## Jazz Articulations

There are several articulations that composers can utilize, however the most basic ones that you will see in young jazz repertoire are the following:



That being said, there are quite a few ambiguities when it comes to what these articulations actually mean! Aside from the difference that these articulations may be played differently in the concert band setting versus the jazz band setting, interpretations by jazz musicians/composers have also differed slightly through the years. The biggest difference between classical and jazz articulation is what happens at the *end of the note!* Most jazz articulations will start *AND* end with the tongue.

Let's start with articulation "A." Even though there is no articulation present, unless otherwise indicated by the style or composer, quarter notes in swing are assumed as "short" notes. This also applies to two tied 8th notes. For example:



This leads us to articulation "B." Staccato markings should be played short with a "dot" or "dit" articulation. This articulation should be crisp and clean. When the jazz staccato is placed on an 8<sup>th</sup> note, the composer generally wants a very clipped note with "bite."

Articulation "C" should be thought of as a breath accent in the middle of the note. This articulation is generally used to emphasize swing style or to emphasize syncopation. Think "hey" in the middle of the note with "forward-moving" air.

Articulation "D" is a fat articulation in which the player should use the syllable "Daht." This articulation should have a strong front to the note and last about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the value of the note. It will be present mostly in shout sections and parts of the chart when the composer wants a big full sound with lots of impact. Again, notice the "t" at the end of the note that indicates that the note should be stopped with the tongue.

Lastly, and most seldom used, is articulation E. This definition of this articulation is the same as the classical counterpart. This note is to be played full value.

## Teaching Articulations

Disclaimer: I would suggest discussing the implementation of jazz articulations with each of your directors on staff. When teaching young students articulation differently in two different ensembles, it is important that everyone be on the same page. Students *MUST* understand that these articulation methods are only acceptable in the jazz ensemble setting!



As I mentioned before, most of these articulations differ from classical playing in that the notes end with the tongue. Sure, this is something that you harp on all year long in beginner classes as something that should NEVER happen... and now it's ok! Why do we stop notes with the tongue? To obtain a tight jazz ensemble sound, the use of the tongue is required so that phrases end exactly together in a unified, crisp manner. Therefore, brass players will touch the tongue back to the teeth at the end of phrases and notes such as the jazz staccato and jazz "housetop" accent; hence the phonetics of "dit," "dot," and "daht." Getting students to correctly end their phrases with the tongue will not be difficult, but it will take some reminders in each ensemble of the correct way to articulate. The director will need to keep an ear on their brass players to ensure that they are keeping their articulation appropriate for the ensemble setting.

One last note: using the breath accent articulation can be useful in getting your whole ensemble to swing harder. When I am writing for young jazz ensemble, I generally try to include such accents to aid with this, however, not all music includes these "courtesy style markings." In general, to help a line swing, you accent the first, highest, and last note. Adding slurs can also help smooth out the line and help it be less "square." This example is a typical bebop line that one might encounter:



Even though the chart you are working on may have great articulation markings, you may need to advise young jazzers of this simple rule if things feel a little square in the horn section. In general, slur marks are not used by composers, so this trick is something that you can teach your horn players and even have them write in.

Unifying and lining up articulations in your young jazz ensemble will definitely take them to the next level and will aid in creating those high impact moments and keep energy throughout the ensemble. Your students will certainly feel the difference, and you audience will hear the difference!



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# developing the middle school lead trumpet player

There are many aspects of playing lead trumpet in the jazz ensemble aside from playing in the upper register. Frequently, a student is pushed into the role of lead trumpet only due to the fact that he/she can play high notes. A good lead trumpet player is able to really lead the band in style, feel, time, precision, and volume, in addition to playing the high notes. Developing these skills in your young trumpet players will benefit your entire jazz band.

## Range and Endurance

It is important to understand how jazz ensemble music is graded and how to decide what piece is best for your young lead player. When perusing the literature for young jazz ensemble, it is important to note that there is an unofficial standard for grading. Grades 1-2 (Very Easy – Easy) pieces will generally have the top range of your trumpet player at a G5. This range is perfectly acceptable for middle school jazz ensemble. It is important to note that although a Grade 2 piece may have the same top range, the piece may utilize that note more than a Grade 1. You will generally not find A5 and higher until you venture into the Grade 2 ½ to 3 difficulty.

It will behoove the jazz ensemble director to not just note the range of the trumpet 1 part, but also the endurance needed for successful execution. Keep in mind, that although a middle school trumpet player may be able to play G or A, he may not be able to play a dozen G's or A's in one piece with accuracy. Work on endurance with your lead player by encouraging him/her to practice long tones in all registers. Strengthening the core muscles of the embouchure, even at the middle and low registers, will aid overall embouchure strength.

*IMPORTANT:* A trumpet student should not work on strengthening his/her upper register on a daily basis! Much like a gym workout, you do not want to tax the same muscles the same way on back-to-back days. Muscles need

time to rest and recuperate. In order to work on expanding range, the student needs to practice expanding lip slurs and expanding scales. It is crucial for the trumpet student to increase and expand their range slowly – not just go straight for playing high notes – to ensure that the exercise starts with correct fundamentals. Young players play with their best fundamentals in the “bread and butter” register: having them start there will help keep the focus on good fundamental playing as opposed to “squeezing” out the high notes.

Here are a few simple exercises that your students can do to work on range:

## Fluid Scale Exercise



## Advanced Lip Slur





them to slur 8th note passages. In many cases, the young jazz musician will sound “square” when playing 8th note lines. If you ask them to slur parts of the phrase, the result is instantly “hipper” and has more swing to the feel. Eventually, you can teach them to tongue much lighter in certain parts of phrases while emphasizing others to help the swing feel. In any given swing phrase, the player may accent the first note, highest note, and last note to help achieve “swing.”

## Volume

In full tutti sections, your lead player also determines the volume of the band. Young players will not have the dynamic range of more experienced players, but you can help them develop this with a simple exercise.

[Note: It will be much more difficult for your lead player to play soft in the upper register, and Grade 1 and 2 pieces will generally not ask them to do so.]

The following long tone exercise can help them develop their dynamic range:

♩ = 70-80

*p* *f* *p* *p* *f* *p*

*p* *f* *p* *p* *f* *p*

Continue...

Middle school jazz ensembles are constantly a “work in progress,” but developing your lead trumpet player can make all the difference for your ensemble, and your HS feeder jazz ensemble will benefit immensely from the work that you put in.

In closing, remind your lead trumpet player that when working on power and the upper register, it is important to rest as much as you play, not go past the point of straining, and to be patient. When I was frustrated with building range my jazz trumpet teacher always told me, “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire! Patience!” The upper range will come with time; don’t rush it.

And keep working on volume, precision, and style, too, because playing high isn’t all it takes.



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# quick fixes for young jazz trombonists

Having a strong trombone section can take your big band to the next level. It's tempting to focus on the shout chorus and the sax soli and leave the trombones to their own devices, but a few simple adjustments can bring your young jazz trombonists up a notch, and add power, balance, and consistency to your horn section.

Here are five quick fixes you can make to improve the trombone section in your jazz band.

## Alternate Positions

The most important thing about alternate positions is to use them. Often, alternate positions are the key to navigating tricky bebop or soli lines that would otherwise border on impossible. Of course, use good slide technique (very little wrist, minimal pressure, only the thumb and one or two fingers on the brace, etc.) but alternate positions go a long way.

Playing more advanced scales provides an excellent opportunity to work with alternate positions. The octatonic scale works well for this. In the example below, the first octatonic scale doesn't require large slide movements or awkward direction changes. Translating those movements out a position (to move the scale down a half step) maintains the simple slide motions by accessing alternate positions. The second scale would be more difficult if we played Ds and Fs in first position, rather than their alternates.



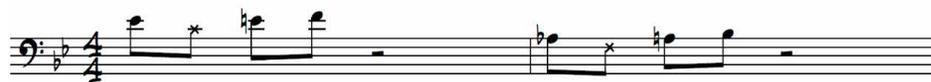
Be sure to encourage your students to swing the scale – that's how you get comfortable using it in a solo! Notice that by using alternate positions we also get to take advantage of many natural slurs. This scale can be worked up to pretty extreme tempos without much difficulty. This is because you only need to tongue every other note and the positions stay close together.

A word of warning about alternate positions: as with any instrument, alternate fingerings have different tuning tendencies. In many cases on trombone, alternate positions have opposite tuning tendencies from the typical position. For example, F3 is sharp in first position and must be lowered, but F3 in fourth position is so extremely flat that it's basically in third-and-a-half position.

## Ghost Notes

Ghosting notes is a crucial aspect of playing bebop correctly. It's also important in swing, but to a lesser extent. Sometimes ghosting is described as “swallowing” the note. However for trombonists, no swallowing is required – the term doesn't match what actually happens with the mouth. Instead, it's more of a note that doesn't quite speak. This gets easier when the ghosted note is on a different partial than the notes that need accents (and when the line is idiomatic).

Here's an example:



## Tone Production

The simple fix here is not to fix anything at all. Good brass tone is good brass tone, and it doesn't matter if you're playing Gordon Goodwin or Percy Grainger.



I think it's a common misconception that young brass players need to fix or change their embouchure, air support, or general tone color between concert band and jazz band. While more advanced players (who can access more potential tone colors without sacrificing technique) may strive for more edge in a big band, it's not necessary for young trombonists to do this in order to be stylistically appropriate.

Indeed, famous jazz trombonists from many eras have deliberately accessed darker, more orchestral tone colors, including [Curtis Fuller](#) and [Bill Watrous](#). Jazz style, including the loud, edgy hits common to big band trombone writing, comes from [articulation](#) far more than it comes from a change in sound.

### **Vibrato**

Slide vibrato is a very intuitive motion that's difficult to perform correctly. Students will eagerly start whipping their slide back and forth, blissfully unaware that they sound like Tommy Dorsey having a mariachi nightmare. The most important thing to remember with slide vibrato is style. Both you and your students should listen to reference recordings to figure out what kind of vibrato

the piece calls for. Specifically, listen for the following:

- Speed. Is this rhythmic pulsing or more random?
- Width. How far away from the pitch center does the vibrato get?
- Players. Lead player only or whole section?

If your students aren't getting the slide vibrato you want, the [Army Jazz Ambassadors have a great technique video](#) that covers the basics.

### **Equipment**

Trombones are bigger than they were 100 years ago. American orchestra led much of this trend. (For a deeper dive, check out this [Facebook post](#) from legendary London Symphony Orchestra trombonist, Denis Wick.) Today, even the student model trombones that we see in beginning band are significantly larger than the horns commonly used by swing-era big bands, and most jazz tenor trombonists today use smaller equipment than their orchestral counterparts.

Should students intentionally use smaller equipment for jazz band? For the student whose parents recently invested in a large bore, orchestral trombone, it can be a tough question. As a private teacher and former jazz band director, I say no. Many jazzers (myself included) use smaller equipment because it enables firmer attacks and smoothness of playing in the extreme high register. These are nuances that may or may not affect the younger player; however, the real risk is that a student uses an inferior instrument just because it's smaller and therefore a "jazz horn." The benefits that come with using a higher-quality instrument outweigh the downsides to using larger equipment.

The same principles apply to mouthpieces. If a student has high-quality equipment that's smaller, feel free to have them use it. Young students rarely have multiple instruments, so in general, I have them play the better-made, larger equipment in big band. Again, there are great examples of jazz trombonists using large-bore equipment, like Robin Eubanks.

I hope these quick fixes help you get your young jazz trombonists off to a great start in big band!



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You can read his articles and bio on the [SmartMusic blog](#).

# how to develop your lead alto player

Playing lead alto saxophone in a jazz ensemble is fun, but carries certain responsibilities. The lead alto player sets the intonation, style, and dynamics for the saxophone section, while also matching the intonation, style, and dynamics of the brass section. This can be a big responsibility for a middle school or high school saxophonist. What follows are some thoughts and exercises to help your students to develop into confident lead alto players.

## Volume

The lead alto needs to produce enough volume to cut through the rest of the section. To start, make sure the saxophonist is playing on good equipment, including a jazz mouthpiece, jazz reeds, and a horn in good working condition. The next step is to make sure they are using their air correctly; otherwise it will be difficult to cut through the rest of the section. Before each rehearsal have the student put a towel, t-shirt, or something similar into their bell and then warm up for 10-15 minutes.

This will require the student to push the air harder, and give them a sense of how much more air they should be using all the time. Too often younger jazz students do not use enough air to blow through phrases and this causes the music to sound choppy and uneven. This technique could also be used during rehearsal to reinforce the concept of good air support. Learning to use air correctly will benefit both the student and the ensemble.

## Articulation

One common problem among younger jazz players is their use of articulation; they will articulate too often and with too much tongue. Once a student is using their air correctly, have them practice passages slurring everything, regardless of the written articulation. Then begin adding articulation using a "doo" or "loo" syllable. The tongue should brush the tip of the reed to keep the sound as

smooth and uninterrupted as possible. Jazz articulation is a debated subject. While there are some general rules about articulation, it tends to be a personal choice among jazz players. For a young player, the most important thing is to keep the articulation light and smooth and to slur more often than they articulate.

## Tuning

There are many factors that can contribute to a saxophonist's ability to play in tune. Again, good equipment will aid greatly in this area. Assuming the student has good equipment, these exercises will help solidify their intonation.

First, make sure the student has a good tuner. Although I prefer to have one with a sweeping arm, a digital tuner (or even many cell phone apps) can work just fine. The student should begin practice playing long tones at a mezzo-forte while looking at the tuner and adjusting the pitch to be in tune. Once the student finds where the note is best in tune, they should practice playing the note while looking away from the tuner and then checking the tuner to see how accurate they are. This is an exercise that every serious musician does regularly.

Once the student improves at playing in tune at mezzo-forte, have them play long tones at different dynamic levels. In general, louder dynamics cause a saxophonist to play flat and softer dynamics cause a them to play sharp. Knowing these tendencies means that a student can practice playing at more extreme dynamics with a tuner to make sure they are playing in tune.

Next have the student play long tones from forte to piano while looking at the tuner and keeping the note in tune. Then play the same exercise from piano to forte. All of these exercises should be practiced regularly for many weeks, months, and even years to assure that the student can play well in tune.



### Going to the Source

All of the previous information is helpful for developing young lead alto saxophone players. However, recordings represent the single most important tool for any young jazz musician. The lead alto playing of Don Redman (Fletcher Henderson), Johnny Hodges (Duke Ellington), and Marshall Royal (Count Basie) form the cornerstone of lead alto playing. Students should take time to listen and absorb their sound, style, rhythmic feel, interpretation, etc. This is best done by finding the lead alto part that matches a specific recording and studying how each player interpreted the music.

A good lead alto player can elevate the sound of the saxophone section and the entire jazz ensemble. Focused work on volume, articulation, tuning, and the study of classic recordings will help your students to become confident lead alto players and overall better musicians.



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Read his articles and bio on the [SmartMusic blog](#).

# contrasting the classical and jazz saxophone embouchure

Today's saxophonists are expected to perform many styles of music at a high level. Consequently it's vital they know how to correctly formulate an embouchure that will allow them to do so. Most often, younger students are unaware that there is a difference in a classical and jazz embouchure. It's not until they become undergraduate music majors that any real distinction is made.

Learning the difference earlier can give them greater success when moving between these styles and build a stronger foundation for sound production. Of course, there are other factors that help create the proper sound, such as mouthpieces and reeds, but the embouchure is the initial, most important step in the process.

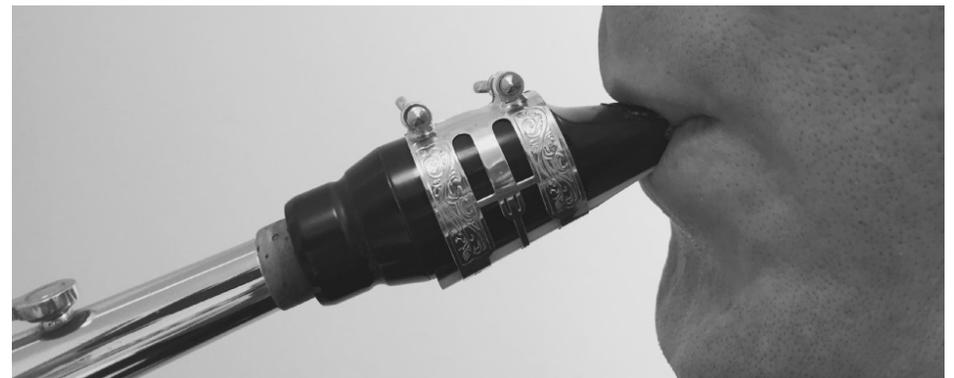
## Classical Embouchure

The classical saxophone embouchure was originally devised from attributes of the clarinet embouchure. These are very similar, with the exception of the angle at which the mouthpiece enters the mouth. Most sax teachers agree on the basics of forming the classical embouchure, but some details are up for debate.

In forming the embouchure, the bottom lip is pulled tightly across the bottom teeth, which allows the lip to create a cushion. The cushion is where the reed sits and should remain hard, or firm, as it is stretched across the bottom teeth. The firmness of the bottom lip is further reinforced by the chin being drawn downward, and remaining flat. This also allows the lower lip to be rolled out just enough so the reed vibrates properly. If the lower lip sits too far inside the mouth, it will excessively dampen the reed, causing it to not vibrate properly. Lastly, the top teeth sit firmly on top of the mouthpiece, while the jaw provides support for the lower lip. Some teachers, such as Joe Allard, suggest that the upper teeth and upper lip work in tandem to accept the force given from the bottom teeth and lip.

Approaches to the corners of the classical embouchure vary. Larry Teal and other teachers advocate applying equal pressure all around the mouthpiece, similar to a drawstring, in addition to bringing the corners towards the center, as if preparing to whistle. Allard, on the other hand, believes this dulls the sides of the reed, thus preventing overtones from being present in the sound. He proposes to use the bottom lip to apply pressure to the center part of the reed, allowing the sides to vibrate freely. Students seem to respond with greater success to the drawstring approach because they can visualize it easily, but it is important to be aware of both techniques.

Some teachers argue that the jaw should have some flexibility and movement while forming a classical embouchure, while others suggest it remain more stationary. When I teach the classical saxophone embouchure, I firmly suggest keeping the jaw stationary. A middle C should be played with the same pressure as a low C, and so on. I often see students attempting to "drop the jaw" as they descend into the lower register, or worse yet, they jut the jaw forward on the mouthpiece, exposing even more reed inside the mouth. With this large amount of reed vibrating inside the mouth, the sound becomes much less focused and more spread.



classical embouchure example



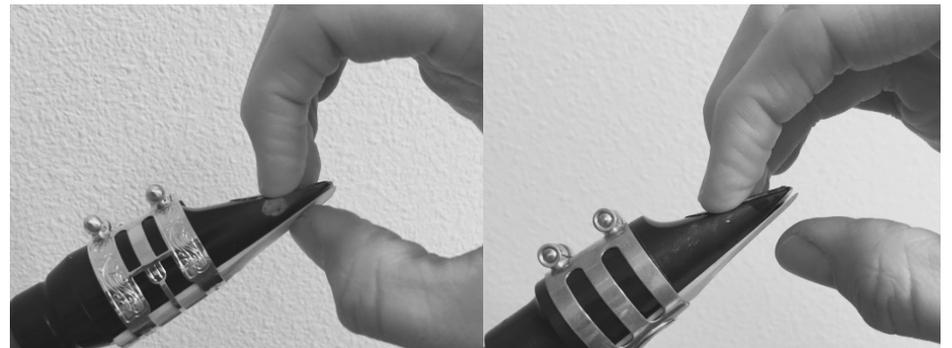
Lastly, if a student is having trouble grasping the appropriate amount of mouthpiece to take in, have them take the neck off of their instrument and hold it up so they are looking directly at the reed. Then, rotate the neck to the left so they can observe the space between the reed and the mouthpiece. The point at which the mouthpiece and reed meet is a good approximation for how much mouthpiece they should take into their mouth.



Note where the reed meets the mouthpiece

### Jazz Embouchure

The classical embouchure can act as a solid foundation for the saxophonist, but a distinctly different formation should be used when playing jazz. The first thing to change is the amount of pressure being exerted by the jaw. A jazz embouchure has significantly less jaw pressure than in a classical embouchure. I visualize a separation of the top and bottom teeth, allowing for the pressure to be supplied not by the jaw, but by the lower lip. With the jaw being “dropped,” or drawn downward toward the clavicle, the bottom lip is now responsible for the pressure on the reed, which will allow the reed to vibrate more freely.



Imagine fingers are teeth; classical separation on left, jazz on right

Because the jazz embouchure focuses on maximum reed vibration, the lower lip should be rolled outward, toward the saxophone, creating a soft, thick cushion that separates the teeth from the reed. This is done to expose more of the reed inside the mouth, resulting in a fuller, more vibrant sound.

However, the lowering of the jaw and the lip supplying a softer cushion means that the chin will inevitably bunch. This is characteristic of the jazz embouchure and directly opposes the flat chin mentioned above. The player can picture the muscles of the chin shifting upward and outward, while the teeth are separated and drawn downward. This will result in a bunched chin, rolled out lip, more reed exposed within the mouth, and the creation of a soft cushion supporting the reed.



Jazz embouchure example

The final point to be made is that the jaw is much more flexible when playing jazz. It frequently moves up and down when engaged. Because jazz requires less jaw pressure, it has the ability to move more freely. Typically, the jaw will apply less pressure on the reed when descending throughout the instrument and more pressure when playing higher. Additionally, it is also used as a means to make certain notes “stick out” of the texture. The accented notes will have more jaw pressure placed on them, whereas notes that are unaccented may utilize less pressure.

Here is a summary of the differences between the two embouchures:

	<b>Classical</b>	<b>Jazz</b>
Bottom Teeth	Touching the reed	Away from the reed
Jaw	Stationary	Flexible
Chin	Flat	Bunched



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# help for the rock guitarist in your jazz band

Here's the scenario; the middle school jazz band needs a guitarist. The best applicant is a rocker, who has some facility, can play in time, and is interested.

The first tune is a Basie-style swing tune. The chart says Ab7. The guitarist can produce a six string barre chord of the same name, but what's next?

What's next is uncomfortable for everyone in the room. I know because I was that guitarist.

## Freddie Green Can Help

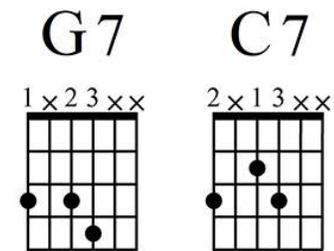
In time I was fortunate to befriend more experienced musicians with whom the name Freddie Green often came up. Green was the rhythm guitar legend of the Count Basie band. At first I didn't fully understand his greatness; I often found it hard even to hear him in the classic recordings. Can you always hear your heartbeat (even in a noisy room)? Nope. Does that make its rhythm any less crucial? I don't think so. Check out the chugging sound in [this clip](#).

What do I wish I had known before that first rehearsal? Well, lots of things. But let's start with some appropriate voicings that you can share with your students.

## Three Note Rythm Chords

Chord voicings are integral to the Green style, specifically voicings that only use a few strings. In addition to being easy to grab (and lending themselves to motion) their sparse nature also leaves more sonic space for other instruments. This space, combined with Green's complete lack of grandstanding volume, may offer a life lesson. Maybe it's more about making the whole band sound good than it is about proving the guitar player is awesome.

Sermon aside, the good news for young guitarists is that these voicings are not hard to play. Let's start with these two:



*NOTE: Numbers represent finger (pointer is #1) and the x means these strings are muted.*

Check this out: the C7 chord doesn't even have the root (a C) in it. That took me a bit of time to get used to. This fact that the root is optional is a valuable lesson, although guitarists may visualize the root (in this case 3rd fret, 5th string) when playing it. With just these two voicings your student could play an entire simple blues (sliding C7 up two frets to play D7).

G7 IC7 IG7 IG7

C7 IC7 IG7 IG7

D7 IC7 IG7 ID7

The trick here is to mute the other three strings so all strings can be strummed while only sounding three notes. In the G7 chord, the side of the first finger just



touches both the 5th string, and the 1st and second strings, preventing them from vibrating. Getting this to happen takes a little trial and error, but it's not physically tough like barre chords can be.

### The Right Hand

To start, students should play these voicings with quarter note down-strokes. Chug, chug, chug, chug. Next, have them add an accent on beats two and four. The simple blues above, played with just these two voicings, can really drive a whole tune in a musical way. It just takes some practice to make it happen.

### Learning Harmony

One music theory goal could be to get your guitarist to see every note of these voicings as it relates to the root of the chord. The G7 voicing (low to high) is root, b7, 3rd. The C7 is 5th, 3rd, b7. When they can identify these chord tones to you, and you've explained the difference between G7, GMaj7, G, G6, and so on, they can begin to discover their own voicings by understanding how each note relates. Plus this is all made a little more obtainable by the fact there are only three notes: it's less to juggle in their mind.

Note how this is a very different process than trying to memorize a chord chart; I'm reminded of the Chinese proverb: Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

### Take Things Further

Got a student who's already mastered the simple blues above? Here's something that's a little more fun:

The musical score is in 4/4 time and consists of four staves. Above each staff are chord diagrams for various chords. The first staff has G6, C7, G6, and G7. The second staff has C7, C#dim7, G, Gb, F, and E. The third staff has Am7, D7, G6, E7, Am7, and D7. The fourth staff has a double bar line at the end.

Here are a few things to observe:

- If a chord chart says G7, could one substitute G or G6 or Gmaj7? This is a type of conversation you might have with your students. G7 and Gmaj7 look very similar, but work very differently; G or G6 could work,
- Check out the C#dim7: this is just the C7 voicing slid up a minor third (creating bb7, b5, 1).
- At the top of bar 7, I threw in a G triad, which is a subset of G7. The third is in the bass: again, you don't need the root, and it doesn't HAVE to be in the bass!

### **Additional Ingredients**

Of course, additional ingredients include listening to music – including classic recordings – and playing, both with a metronome and with others. But you knew that.



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# creating the jazz guitar sound

Life can be difficult for a guitar player in high school jazz band. Band directors don't always provide clear direction. They often leave it up to the guitarist to make stylistic interpretations and tone decisions without any guidelines. When a budding guitarist is first introduced to jazz and big band music, how do they prioritize what to work on so they can become an effective part of the ensemble?

There are a million places to start, but one obvious (yet frequently overlooked) area is sound. Many times the guitarist is so concerned with reading notes and rhythms and learning new chord shapes that they neglect to set up their guitar and amp to create a decent sound that is stylistically appropriate. Here are some tips to help your students create a jazz guitar sound.

## Setup

It all starts with having the guitar set up properly to get a solid jazz tone. We'll assume the student is using a cheap solid body guitar (i.e. non-American made Fender Stratocaster) with less than stellar components because it is a very common setup for beginners. This already puts a young guitarist at a disadvantage, but a little tweaking goes a long way to get a serviceable sound!

Another important tone shaping tool is string gauge. Slightly thicker strings will go a long way towards fattening up the sound. Light or medium gauge strings (.010 or .011 size E string) are a good place to start, just make sure to have the truss rod on the guitar adjusted if making a significant change.

## Setting Knobs and Switches

To get the most out of any gear, it is best to start with the guitar's volume and tone knobs both at 5, or halfway up. Every young guitarist defaults to turning all the knobs on the guitar all the way up, and it can be a tough habit to break. Starting with the controls half way up provides the headroom to alter the instrument's volume and tone and also adds a little natural compression so that when strumming with more force you don't get that "icepick" treble-laden sound of 60s surf music.

Pickup selection is also important in creating the desired sound. For traditional jazz rhythm guitar, make sure the guitarist is selecting the neck pickup with the pickup selector switch. It has a much darker and deeper tone than its brighter counterpart, the bridge pickup. This will produce a warmer, more idiomatic sound, even if you are playing on a Fender Stratocaster or similar instrument.

Guitarists have to remember to keep the guitar volume knob at 5 before adjusting ANYTHING on the amplifier. This will take some time to get used to and can't be emphasized enough. Next, adjust the amp to reach the desired volume, keeping the amp's Bass, Middle, and Treble knobs at around 5. This may sound oversimplified but it really is the best place to start.

Once the electronics are in order, it is time to look at where the guitarist's hands are and how they are approaching the instrument.

## Hand Placement

The picking hand should be right over the neck pickup or even approaching the neck itself. This will mirror the deep, full sound of the neck pickup. Picking closer to the bridge results in a thinner, brighter sound. The picking motion should be nice and smooth and should strike all six strings, using the left hand to mute the strings not being played in the chord. This can be done with both the thumb and/or any other left-hand finger not being used to fret a string.

## Chord Voicings and Locking In

The next component of sound is how the guitarist voices chords on the instrument. It is very common to see "slash" marks in lieu of fully voiced chords on guitar parts, so how does the guitarist go about deciding what notes to play?

Freddie Green, the guitarist from the Count Basie Orchestra, commonly played only two or three notes to help fill out the harmony. This approach helped him stay out of the way of the rest of the band. At the same time, his main priority was locking in with the rest of the rhythm section to create a cohesive sound



together. This should be the goal of guitarists in traditional jazz band charts as well. [The previous article](#) offers some three note voicings to help.

In addition, listening to guitarists like Freddie Green will put students on the right path for tone, style, and more. The guitarist is most effective in traditional jazz band when playing with a full warm sound, small chord voicings, and focusing on locking in rhythmically with the rest of the rhythm section.

### Listening

To conclude, the guitarist has to LISTEN because they have so many interpretive decisions to make constantly in jazz band. It becomes easier and more automatic with experience, but it takes some time to acclimate to what the guitarist's role is in the big band when there isn't always an obvious answer. This all starts with sound and style, so making sure the guitarist has their electronics set up correctly is a big part in being successful. Make sure they are listening to the rest of the rhythm section and working together with the bass and drums to create a cohesive sound together.

Lastly, let them know it is ok to lay out when they aren't sure what to do! It's like the Hippocratic Oath; they should strive to do no harm.



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# improve bass technique in your jazz band

The bass player is one of the driving forces of any musical group, especially if that group is jazz combo or big band. If you're a director who's not a bassist, it's not always obvious what to look and listen for in your young bassists — or how to guide them. Here are a few simple bass technique tips that I've found to have a big impact.

## Setup

While it's always everyone's job to keep time, the bassist and drummer provide the rhythmic heartbeat for any jazz rhythm section. When you're swinging, that pulse comes from the ride cymbal and the bass, which is typically walking four to a bar. So, when you're setting up the band, make sure your bass player is located to the drummer's right (where a right-handed drummer would place the ride cymbal). This removes any physical barriers and makes it easier for them to agree on that quarter note pulse.

The bass player's other partner in crime is the lead trumpeter, who leads the rest of the ensemble in phrasing and swing feel. Be sure to position the trumpets closely to the rhythm section to keep things tight between sections.

## Articulation

Once your bass and drums are in agreement, focus on the bass line itself. My first bass teacher once told me to imagine that every big band chart had a giant slur from the first bar to the last bar. Simply put, your bass player needs to give every quarter note its full value and connect each note in the line, even when they're digging in. If your bassist is playing a double bass, be aware that this approach to pizzicato playing may be a little different than what they've previously encountered in an orchestra.



## Bass Technique

In order to achieve this articulation, bassists must coordinate their hands in specific ways. For the left hand, use the tips of the finger to provide the firmest connect between the string and fingerboard or fret wire, and therefore the cleanest pitch. But be sensitive to smaller hands, which may need to make adjustments in lower positions to prevent excessive wrist bending.

At the same time, the angle and position of the right hand contribute greatly to articulation and tone production. On the double bass, fingers should be roughly parallel to the strings and near the end of the fingerboard. By contrast, on bass guitar the fingers should be more perpendicular to the string. Have your bass player experiment with resting the right thumb on the side of the fret board. While this position may be higher than they are used to in pop or Latin styles, it softens the articulation to more closely emulate the double bass. Combine this with rolling off the tone, by turning down the tone knob on the bass, to reduce some treble and round out the sound even more.

## Keep it Low

Big bands fill a wide frequency range. It's always tempting for bassists to keep climbing higher and higher up the fingerboard. While this is not a problem in a small group setting or the woodshed, this may encroach on someone else's tonal territory in a large ensemble. This phenomenon was once illustrated to me during a live performance of the great jazz singer Kurt Elling. While introducing the band, Elling jokingly praised his bass player's technique. He appreciated that the bassist kept his left hand high, which kept the pitches low.

While each of these items may only make a subtle difference on its own, taken together they can make a significant difference for your young bassist and the sound of your band.



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# chord voicings for beginning jazz pianists

The harmonic instruments in a typical jazz band, piano and guitar, often have opposite strengths and weaknesses. Generally younger guitarists can read chord changes while not being able to read individual notes. Conversely, younger pianists can often read notes but lack the knowledge to spell chord changes. In this article I'll share some tips on jazz piano voicings you can use to write out voicings for your young pianists, or to instruct them in creating their own voicings.

## Rootless Voicings

When a pianist is playing with a bass player in a jazz band setting, usually "rootless voicings" are used. These piano voicings are exactly as the name implies; chord voicings that reflect the sound of the chord, but do not contain the root of the chord. The reason these voicings are used is because the bass player often plays the root of each chord change.

There are a couple of guidelines when creating rootless voicings. First, be sure to always include both the 3rd of the chord and the 7th of the chord. Second, try to include any upper extensions of the chord, particularly if they have any alterations (b9, #11, etc). Finally, when moving between chords, try to move each individual voice as little as possible. Below are some examples of rootless voicings from simple to more complicated.

In his book *Voicings For Jazz Keyboard*, Frank Mantooth introduces a concept called "rule of thumb." The concept is as follows: for two-handed voicings, keep the thumb of your right hand between C4 and C5. Any lower and the voicing can tend to sound muddy. Any higher and the voicing can tend to sound thin. I have found this concept to be effective for the young jazz pianist.

At first, these voicings might sound odd without the bass. Eventually, students will learn to hear these sounds as normal, especially with the bass added.

Notice the chord changes appearing in the piano voicings. Again, encourage your students to analyze these voicings and use them for different chord changes or other charts.

First example of rootless voicings for CMAJ7, DMIN7, G7, and CMAJ7. The piano part is shown in a grand staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The bass line is mostly silent, indicated by a dash. The right hand plays simple triads: C4-E-G for CMAJ7, F-A-C for DMIN7, and G-B-D for G7.

Second example of rootless voicings for CMAJ7, DMIN7, G7, and CMAJ7. The piano part is shown in a grand staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The bass line is mostly silent, indicated by a dash. The right hand plays simple triads: C4-E-G for CMAJ7, F-A-C for DMIN7, and G-B-D for G7.

Third example of rootless voicings for CMAJ7, DMIN7, G7, and CMAJ7. The piano part is shown in a grand staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The bass line is mostly silent, indicated by a dash. The right hand plays more complex voicings: C4-E-G for CMAJ7, F-A-C for DMIN7, and G-B-D for G7.

## Basic Rhythms

The rhythm used when comping can be as varied and individualized as musicians themselves. Here are a couple of common rhythms to use when comping.

Fourth example of rootless voicings for CMAJ7, DMIN7, G7, and CMAJ7. The piano part is shown in a grand staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The bass line is mostly silent, indicated by a dash. The right hand plays a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes: C4-E-G for CMAJ7, F-A-C for DMIN7, and G-B-D for G7.



In general, it's best to rest more than play, particularly when the entire band is playing. It is also good to vary the rhythm so as not to become monotonous.



The pianist should listen to the rhythms being played in the horns and make sure the comping rhythms are matching or complementing the horns.

### Playing in a Jazz Band

A big difference between the role of a pianist in a jazz combo setting and a big band setting is when a pianist needs to play and when they do not need to play. In a jazz combo setting, the harmony of the tune is largely conveyed by the pianist in conjunction with the bass. However, in a big band, there are more

instruments and the harmony is often present in the trumpets, trombones, and saxophones either through pads, or through harmonization of the melody. A good guide is the more instruments that are playing, the more sparse the pianist needs to play. For instance, when a soloist is playing, the piano should fill out the harmony more. During a shout chorus, the pianist should play very little and perhaps not at all.

Big bands are a great place for all musicians to be introduced to jazz. For young pianists, this is a great way to begin to learn piano voicings, comping rhythms, and the overall role of the jazz pianist. With a little help, your jazz pianist can be a big asset to your ensemble.



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# help drummers get to the heart of swing

Here's a clear, stripped-down approach you can use to quickly and effectively get your drum students "swinging" without overloading them with excessive technical baggage.

## What Is the Role of a Jazz Drummer?

For the first half century of its existence, jazz was a form of pop music designed to make people dance. The power of its groove lay in the unique mash up of European- American rhythms and instrumentation matched with African-American interpretation. By combining these two elements, jazz drummers created a particular pulse that had forward moment, but also felt relaxed. During the big band era of the 1930s and '40s, this pulse – now dubbed "swing" – wielded such power that it made jazz the most popular music in the world.

As modern elements like bebop entered the picture, jazz drummers began introducing more melodic ideas to accompany their timekeeping. This required ever-growing levels of coordination and limb independence.

As jazz moved farther and farther out of the mainstream, the primary path to learning moved from the bandstand to the classroom. As a result, the study of jazz drumming today is often framed primarily as the pursuit of technique (in the form of limb independence) as opposed to a groove. Students begin by learning the "jazz ride cymbal" pattern, and then develop a catalog of syncopated ideas to play against that pattern. While this approach is certainly valid in that jazz drummers need to apply independence within their work, it tends to obscure the primary goal, which remains the creation of the uniquely "American" pulse.

## Understanding "Pulse"

Simply put, jazz was and is *groove* music. When students put all their focus on technical elements, it can distract them from this fundamental principle. The fact that jazz rhythm sections have always employed terms like "shuffle" and "walking" should be a strong reminder that the intention of this music is to get listeners moving, even if today those movements usually manifest themselves as tapping feet or bobbing heads as opposed to actual dancing.

Without a proper understanding of pulse, even a highly developed jazz drummer can end up sounding mechanical. Essentially, his or her playing will not be in line with the musical goals of jazz. I always tell my students that the ability to play a beautiful stream of quarter notes on the ride cymbal offers a far greater chance of success in the highly competitive world of jazz than all the technique in the world.

## Creating a Jazz Sound: The Role of the Four Limbs

I often describe the sound of jazz drumming to my students as follows: your sonic goal should be to make the tip of the stick on the ride cymbal, the "foot chick" of the hi-hat and the "chatter" of the snare drum sound indistinguishable – these three elements should blend together like drops of water bouncing off a pavement.

Proper limb balance is at the core of what makes jazz *sound* like jazz. Having grown up playing rock'n'roll, most aspiring jazz drummers today are surprised at just how much effort it takes to adjust the balance of their limbs to achieve this effect. To that end, let's take a minute to clarify the role of the four limbs, listed in descending order of importance.



### 1. The Ride Cymbal

In contemporary jazz settings, the ride cymbal is usually the dominant voice; the one responsible for driving the time and creating the pulse. As a result, the ride should be the student's primary area of focus.

It's important to stress that the "jazz ride cymbal" pattern is not simply a pattern. At its heart, it must incorporate the same flow of quarter notes (a.k.a. pulse) being produced by the rest of the rhythm section.

Therefore, it makes sense to start by putting the full pattern aside, and have students simply play quarter notes on a pad or other flat surface. To create the proper motion, think about what happens when you bounce a basketball. After each bounce, you respond to the upward motion of the ball before throwing again. In essence, you move with it.

By learning to *react* to the motion of the stick instead of trying to control it, students will begin to understand how a minimal, well-placed amount of downward force can "drive" the time. The goal is to create a single motion that

includes both the "in" and "out" part of your stroke, allowing the pulse to have both forward momentum and remain relaxed at the same time.

Once the student can feel this dual-purpose motion, have him/her play it along with a favorite jazz or blues recording. Doing so offers the chance to lock in with a real player who is creating a real-time feel. Two favorite tracks I use with my students are Miles Davis' "Freddie Freeloader" (from *Kind of Blue*) and Art Blakey's "Moanin'" (from the CD of the same name). Eventually, the student should be able to upgrade to a shuffle or the full jazz ride pattern without sacrificing this commitment to the pulse.

### 2. The Hi-Hat

When first studying jazz, most students learn right off the bat that the hi-hat is supposed to be played with the foot on beats 2 and 4. Beyond that, however, things get a little murky. Why those particular beats? What purpose does it serve? Without answering these questions, many student drummers end up pasting the hi-hat onto their jazz groove without any real goal. Sadly, that's how the groove ends up sounding: out of sync, and lacking any focus or direction.

Here's a bit of clarification. When played in conjunction with the ride cymbal, the job of the hi-hat is to state the *backbeat*, just as the snare drum does in rock'n'roll. It offers the ride cymbal pattern a landing point, something that completes one cycle and begins another. As such, the hi-hat should have a heavy "drop" to it, and a dominant position in the overall sound of a jazz groove.

To get the hi-hat to properly connect with the ride cymbal pattern, remember the following: if you want two limbs to come *down* together, then focus on getting them to meet at the *top* of the motion beforehand. By timing the setup of each hi-hat stroke to connect with the drive of the ride pattern, students will be able to produce a deeper "pocket," one that is in keeping with the tradition of jazz.

### 3. The Bass Drum

Today, most young drummers' first musical exposure is to rock or pop, styles that place a heavy emphasis on the bass and snare drums. Rockers tend to rely too much on these two elements when playing jazz, making their groove sound unnecessarily loud and heavy. To successfully make the transition, they need to consider the bass drum as a supportive force, not the focal point of attention.

When discussing the bass drum with your students, point out that those used in the pre-bebop eras of jazz were essentially large military instruments. The challenge for drummers of the time was to create a pulse that mirrored the "walking" feel of the upright bass without drowning out the other (quieter) instruments. They settled on a technique called "feathering," which I often explain as "hitting the band in the butt with a pillow." In essence, the goal of feathering is to give the bass drum a presence that is "felt" rather than "heard."

### 4. The Snare Drum

Most courses of study encourage jazz drummers to integrate complex snare drum patterns from the start, but my suggestion is to have students keep the snare part as simple as possible while learning to negotiate the balance of the other three limbs.

If you listen to many classic jazz and swing artists like Benny Goodman and Frank Sinatra, you'll notice that the drummer lightly outlines beats 2 & 4 on the snare using only a cross-stick or very light backbeat. By lifting the snare stick in conjunction with the motion of the ride pattern and letting it drop into these

beats, the right sound can be achieved. To keep the snare from dominating the sound, students need only lift the stick three or four inches off the head.

As a jazz band instructor, fostering the development of a clear, consistent pulse and properly balancing the limbs should be your main objectives when working with drummers. When understood better, these elements can be the key to delivering a much more effective and powerful product, both in performance and in competition.



Daniel Glass is an award-winning drummer, author, historian and educator.

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# five ways to impress judges at jazz festivals

Jazz festivals are terrific opportunities for bands to travel, perform, and bond. The best festivals provide a high-quality performance experience along with insightful teaching. Whether the festival is competitive or not, the band will be playing for judges or clinicians tasked with listening critically and offering comments and suggestions for improvement. Today I'd like to suggest some "best practices" for jazz festival participation, intended to help your band make a positive musical statement whether the festival is competitive or not.

## 1. Choose Unique Repertoire

An exceptional festival performance begins with exceptional planning and preparation. Festival judges and clinicians often spend very long days listening to many bands. After the fourth time hearing the latest Adele or Pharrell Williams arrangement (or the latest version of "Satin Doll"), fatigue sets in very easily! A fresh set list gets the attention of judges and clinicians immediately, and forces them to take notice.

What makes a program unique? For starters, leave the pop arrangements at home. It is fine to perform the latest pop hits at a hometown concert, but the limited time and increased focus at a festival demands a more sophisticated program. Exposing students to classic jazz tunes (yes, like "Satin Doll!") is important, but strive to locate arrangements that are different from those that others are likely to be performing. Play a "head chart" that the band learns by ear. Relatively simple arrangements can be played using no music and it makes for a very different performance experience. If the players are up to it, encourage student writers! There is no better way for a student to learn the craft than to have their work performed and critiqued, and there is no better way for a band to create a unique program than to create the music themselves.

## 2. Maintain a Professional Stage Presence

The band should take the stage, find their seats, and be ready to play in as orderly a way as possible. Rhythm section players should be coached to make equipment adjustments as efficiently as they can – and make sure bass players and guitar players have all necessary cables. Nothing kills a groove like waiting for 10 minutes while the drummer adjusts stands and the saxes argue about who sits where.

During the performance, have soloists play in front of the band rather than in place. Ideally they will be able to do this without music but having a music stand out front is OK, too. Playing in front of the band makes the soloists easier to hear, and looks better to the audience. It also gives them a little extra encouragement to practice. If moving from their place in the ensemble is impossible, at the very least make sure they are standing in place during solos. This rule applies to everyone except trumpets (who are already standing), pianists (one Jerry Lee Lewis was enough!), and of course drummers.

## 3. Tune to an Instrument – NOT to a Tuner

There is certainly a place and a time to use a tuner. The place is most often a practice room and the time is during individual practice time. While it may seem more efficient to flash a tuner in front of each student in the band and allow the arrows to tell them to push in or pull out, it does nothing to help them truly listen. Intonation is not a "set it and forget it" skill, and the tuner flash encourages this kind of thinking.

It goes back to planning and preparation. True listening skills take time to develop, and if a band is tuning in this way by the time a festival rolls around it tells me that there has been no work done in the preparation period to teach



students how to listen carefully and play in tune. It is of course OK to use a tuner for reference in rehearsal, but do not depend on it. Teaching students to adjust their tuning using their ears and not their eyes will take a little longer, but the long term results are well worth it.

#### **4. Provide Bound Scores with Permission from Publishers**

Judges want to be able to follow scores and most festivals require directors to provide copies for every judge or clinician. Most publishers are more than happy to allow copying for this purpose. All directors need to do is ask, and this can usually be accomplished with a quick email. Respecting copyright is something that we should all be modeling as teachers, and this is a very easy thing to do.

Having the scores bound (a simple staple in the corner will do) with the pages in the correct order is a real help. Judges often want to reference specific bar

numbers in comments, or want to check the score for performance accuracy if they hear something that sounds amiss. Providing scores that are clean, easy to follow, and LEGAL allows the judge or clinician to focus on listening and music rather than finding their place in the score.

#### **5. Don't Overstay Your Welcome**

Most festivals run on a fairly tight schedule. Keeping your program within the allotted time shows respect for the festival host, the judges and clinicians, and the other performing ensembles. Festivals are long days even when everything runs on time, and when even one band runs overtime it creates more work for everyone.

It goes back to planning and preparation. While your program does not need to be planned down to the second, you should have your soloists and solo lengths planned in advance. While I love a good jam session as much as

anyone, a festival performance is not the time for open-ended solos. Many of the great solos we study are short statements that are made within the context of a larger performance. Plan things out accordingly. In addition to programming, getting on and off stage efficiently (see #2 above) will also help a great deal in this regard.

Most of these ideas are simple common sense, and apply to jazz and concert festival performances alike. If you choose your repertoire carefully, and prepare the band with attention to musical details, your festival performance will be a success. Please feel free to contact me if I can be a resource to you in any way.



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