



G.C. Hawley Middle School Band

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How To Help Your Child Practice At Home (Even If You Do Not Have Much Musical Experience Yourself)

RESOURCES

- www.JustinDickson.com/Band
- www.youtube.com/HawleyBandRoom
- Free iOS and Android app **Metronome: Tempo Lite** by **Frozen Ape**
- Free iOS and Android app **Bandmate Chromatic Tuner**

ATTITUDE / PHILOSOPHY

- “It’s not hard, it’s just new.”
- Mistakes are okay. That’s how you learn new things. Expect to make mistakes every time you play.
- It’s not about trying hard enough, it’s about trying often enough.
- This is muscle memory, not just memorization. Muscle memory comes from lots of repetition and sleep.

THINGS YOU CAN REMIND YOUR CHILD ABOUT: **HOW TO PRACTICE**

- Start with the warm-ups or Fundamentals (website) that we used in class that day.
- Only try to learn one new thing at a time, or only try to fix one problem at a time, or you will be overwhelmed.
- Break it down into small pieces. Work on just a few notes at a time, before you attempt to play the whole song.

THINGS YOU CAN REMIND YOUR CHILD ABOUT: **STRATEGIES WHEN LEARNING A NEW SONG**

- Listen to how the song is supposed to sound, by listening to the videos I post on YouTube for our tests.
- Do not try to do the whole song at first. Do a few notes at a time. If you make a mistake, stop and fix it.
- Before you play, say the letter names of the notes out loud. Just do a few notes at a time if it is overwhelming.
- Before you play, tizzle (drums say “dut”) the rhythms. Tap your foot with the beat while you do it.
- Sssssllllllloooooowwwww dddooooooowwwwwnnnnnnnnn... The best way to learn a song is to play it very slowly at first, as slow as you need to. In other words, play it so slowly that it is easy for you. Speed up later.

TROUBLESHOOTING: **WRONG NOTES**

- Use the smartphone / tablet app I made called “Bandmate Chromatic Tuner” (free) so that you can see what note you are playing. Usually students simply are not sure if they are playing the correct note or not. This app shows them.
- On my website www.JustinDickson.com/Band, on the bottom of the Method page, there are Fingering Charts for each instrument so you can see which buttons you are supposed to press for each note.
- When you play a wrong note, stop and work on just that part. Go back and forth between that note and the one that came right before it. Do it 4 times in a row correctly before moving on.

TROUBLESHOOTING: **WRONG RHYTHMS OR THE BEAT IS NOT STEADY**

- Parents, most of our playing tests are songs that you know (“Jingle Bells” etc.), so if something sounds wrong to you, it probably is. Trust your ears. You can also tell if they are not keeping a steady beat (speeding up or slowing down).
- Rhythms: Tell them to put down the instrument and “tizzle” the rhythm while tapping their foot with the beat.
- Steady beat: They should tap their foot with the beat while they play. Use a Metronome, like the “Tempo: Lite” free app, to keep a steady beat. Use one earbud so you can hear yourself out of the other ear.

TROUBLESHOOTING: **BAD SOUND QUALITY, SLOPPINESS**

- Too much wiggling or body movement or mouth / lip movement. Only your fingers (trombone: arm) should move.
- Bad posture. Head tilted down or too far up. Slouching. Leaning on elbows. Elbows tucked in. Puffing cheeks.
- Inside of mouth is the wrong shape. It may be too closed up, or back of tongue is not raised to right position.
- Stopping the air between notes, so it sounds “punchy”. Air should be long and steady, blow between the notes.
- Not looking at the music, trying to play from memory. Always read the music while you play. Always.
- Air speed is too slow or too fast. The lower the note, the slower your air should be. The higher the note, the faster your air should be.

● Trumpet, Trombone, Baritone: Rolling in the bottom lip... lips should be even. Pressing the mouthpiece too hard against your lips... press as little as possible. Smiling or pulling lips back against the teeth... lips should blow forward into the mouthpiece cup. Instrument angle may be incorrect... try tilting the instrument slightly up or down (without tilting your head) to find the spot where you sound the best. Don't squeeze your lips... all of the lip inside the mouthpiece should be vibrating / buzzing when you play.

● Flute: Airy sound due to bottom lip not covering enough of the tone hole. Flute resting on shoulder or turned to the side. Flute (tone hole) rolled forward or backward... it should be flat with the ground. Aperture (hole made between your lips) is too big or wrong shape... it should be a small oval. Lips should be even... one should not stick out.

● Clarinet: Reed is broken or chipped... buy a new one and take care of it. Reed is too dry... stick it in your mouth for 1 whole minute before playing. Bottom lip should be rolled slightly over the edge of your bottom teeth. Bottom lip and teeth should be set about halfway down the reed... if it is set too high, you will get an airy or weak sound, or no sound at all... if it is set too low, you will squeak. You should press the reed with your bottom lip and teeth or you will squeak, but don't press too hard. Clarinet bell should be in front of your knees... do not have it tucked in to your body.

● Saxophone and Bass Clarinet: Reed is broken or chipped... buy a new one and take care of it. Reed is too dry... stick it in your mouth for 1 whole minute before playing. Bottom lip should be rolled slightly over the edge of your bottom teeth. Bottom lip and teeth should be set about halfway down the reed. Top and bottom teeth should be even, one should not stick forward. Neck strap (or bass clarinet peg) should be tight enough so that the mouthpiece is pressing against the top teeth when your head is straight. You should press on the reed as little as possible with bottom lip and teeth, like don't press at all. Experiment with instrument angle... tilt it slightly forward or slightly back to find where you sound the best.

● Percussion: grip on the stick must be correct. See the photos on your Method book. Top of the drum or keyboard should be about where your belt is. Muscles should be loose and relaxed. Stick height should be low, level with the ground.

WE TRIED ALL OF THAT AND IT'S STILL NOT WORKING! AAAAHHHHH!!!!

- Google and YouTube are your best friends. Search for “beginner flute lessons” or something like that, and see what the professionals say. If it is different than something I said, but it works for you, great! Do it!
- I also have some helpful links on the Links page of my website.
- I want to help you. But I don't always know that you need help, unless you ask me. Please ask me for help.
- It's okay to hang it up and go to sleep. You might wake up tomorrow able to do it, as your body “saves” the muscle memory. Don't get too stressed out and miserable, this is supposed to be fun!



“Keep trying, you'll get better!”