How to Select a Band Instrument
The Pros & Cons of Each Band Instrument

Many students have a difficult time selecting an instrument to study, mostly because they are not familiar with all of the different instruments of the band. This document includes a list of the “pros” and “cons” for each instrument, which should help with the selection process. Also included is information on which instruments can participate in Jazz Band or Orchestra (offered as part of the after school program).

WOODWINDS

Flute
This is the smallest and highest-sounding instrument in the band.

PROS – Small, easy to carry when in case. Relatively inexpensive to rent. Many private instructors available in the Camarillo area.

CONS – This is the most difficult instrument to start on in beginning band. Some students cannot play this instrument well due to facial characteristics (such as lip size). Difficult to hold, especially with small hands. Since many students play flute, there is much more competition to get into advanced groups, honor bands, youth orchestras, etc. in the future.

JAZZ INSTRUMENT – No
ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENT – Yes

Oboe
This is a double reed instrument, about the same size as a flute or clarinet when assembled.

PROS – Small, easy to carry when in case. Not as many students play this instrument, so more opportunities to play in groups.

CONS – Somewhat difficult to play at times, so private lessons are strongly encouraged. Instruments & supplies can be expensive. Only a few private instructors available in the Camarillo area.

JAZZ INSTRUMENT – No
ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENT – Yes

Clarinet
This is a single reed instrument, similar in size to flute & oboe when assembled.

PROS – Small, easy to carry when in case. Relatively inexpensive to rent. Skills learned are easily transferable to other instruments (bass clarinet, oboe, bassoon, saxophone). Many private instructors available in the Camarillo area. Some instruments are available through the school district.

CONS – Students must have large enough hands to cover tone holes with all fingers, or it can be difficult to produce an acceptable sound. Many students play clarinet, so there more competition to get into advanced groups, honor bands, youth orchestras, etc. in the future.

JAZZ INSTRUMENT – No
ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENT – Yes
**Alto Saxophone**
This is a single reed instrument (similar to clarinet), made of brass. It is larger than most standard band instruments.

PROS – Relatively easy to learn (although easy to learn “badly”). Skills learned are easily transferable to other instruments (other saxophones, oboe, bassoon, bass clarinet). Many private instructors available in the Camarillo area.

CONS – Large, heavy instrument. Difficult to manage for small students. Limited performance opportunities in advanced groups (not used in orchestras). Expensive instrument to rent (more than double the cost of some other instruments). Many students play alto saxophone, so there is much more competition to get into advanced groups, honor bands, etc. in the future.

JAZZ INSTRUMENT – Yes
ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENT – No

**Tenor Saxophone**
This is a single reed instrument (similar to clarinet), made of brass. It is larger than most other elementary band instruments. Tenor saxophone is larger and lower sounding than alto saxophone.

PROS – Relatively easy to learn (although easy to learn “badly”). Skills learned are easily transferable to other instruments (other saxophones, oboe, bassoon, bass clarinet). Many private instructors available in the Camarillo area.

CONS – Large, heavy instrument. Difficult to manage for small students. Limited performance opportunities in some advanced groups (not used in orchestras). Expensive instrument to rent (more than double the cost of some other instruments), however some instruments are available through the school district.

JAZZ INSTRUMENT – Yes
ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENT – No

**BRASS**

**Trumpet**
This is the smallest of the standard brass instruments. It is the highest-sounding and “brightest” sounding of the brass instruments. **Students who currently wear braces or who will wear braces in the near future SHOULD NOT play trumpet as it can be painful!**

PROS – Relatively inexpensive to rent. Some instruments are available through the school district. Few supplies needed for purchase. Skills learned are easily transferable to other brass instruments (French Horn, trombone, baritone, tuba). **Trumpet is one of the most important instruments in the band.** Is BOTH a jazz and orchestral instrument. Several private instructors available in the Camarillo area.

CONS – Difficult for some students to hold/play. Air resistance while playing is high, so it can be challenging for students to produce a good sound.

JAZZ INSTRUMENT – Yes
ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENT – Yes
**French Horn**
This is a mid-range brass instrument. It is highly recommended that students studying French horn have had some previous musical experience (piano, etc.).

**PROS** – This is a very important instrument to the success of bands and orchestras at all levels. Some instruments are available through the school district. Not many students play French Horn, leading to many opportunities for performances in different types of advanced level groups. Good French Horn players are always in high demand at every level of music!

**CONS** – Difficult instrument to play and control. Private lessons are very strongly recommended, but there are not very many private teachers in the area. Expensive instrument to rent/purchase.

**JAZZ INSTRUMENT** – No  
**ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENT** – Yes

**Trombone**
Trombone is one of several instruments classified as “low brass”. **Low brass instruments are THE MOST IMPORTANT instruments in a band!**

**PROS** – The smallest of the low brass instruments. Skills are easily transferable to other low brass instruments such as baritone and tuba. Relatively inexpensive to rent and maintain. Is BOTH a jazz and orchestral instrument. Very important to the success of a band, making players in high demand at every level. One of the easiest instruments to produce a sound on for almost all students. Instruments are available through the school district. Several private teachers available in the Camarillo area.

**CONS** – Because there are no keys or valves on a trombone, it is difficult to play fast moving notes.

**JAZZ INSTRUMENT** – Yes  
**ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENT** – Yes

**Baritone**
Baritone is one of several instruments classified as “low brass”. It is similar to trombone, except with valves. **Low brass instruments are THE MOST IMPORTANT instruments in a band!**

**PROS** – One of the easiest instruments to produce a sound on for most students. Skills are easily transferable to other low brass instruments later on (trombone & tuba). Very important to the success of a band, making players in high demand at every level. Several private teachers available in the Camarillo area. Instruments are available through the school district.

**CONS** – Expensive to rent/purchase (Instruments are available through the school district). Not used in jazz bands or orchestras. Somewhat large and bulky.

**JAZZ INSTRUMENT** – No  
**ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENT** – No
**Percussion**

Percussion is a collection of instruments that involves the use of sticks or beaters. This is the only instrument selection that is not a “wind” instrument (involving blowing air through the instrument). Students studying percussion MUST learn both drums & keyboard mallet instruments. Students will spend the first 3 months (minimum) learning keyboard mallet instruments (Bells/Xylophone). Beginning students are required to have at least 6 months of previous music experience on another instrument. *Piano experience is strongly recommended for percussionists!* (Drum Set is NOT used in the Beginning Band) **Percussion requires constant focus and concentration at very high levels all the time – much more so than ANY other band instrument. Students who have a difficult time focusing should NOT try to play percussion!**

PROS – Does not involve “blowing air” through the instrument. Very important to the success of a band/orchestra. Somewhat inexpensive to rent/purchase equipment at the beginning level (costs increase later). Several private teachers available in the Camarillo area.

CONS – Difficult to learn all of the different instruments (especially if no prior piano experience). Requires a lot of “musical independence”, since there is generally only one person playing each percussion instrument at a time (especially at more advanced levels). A lot of students play percussion, leading to more competition to get into advanced groups, youth orchestras, honor bands, etc.

JAZZ INSTRUMENT – No (Unless student studies “Drum Set” privately in addition to concert percussion.) ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENT – Yes