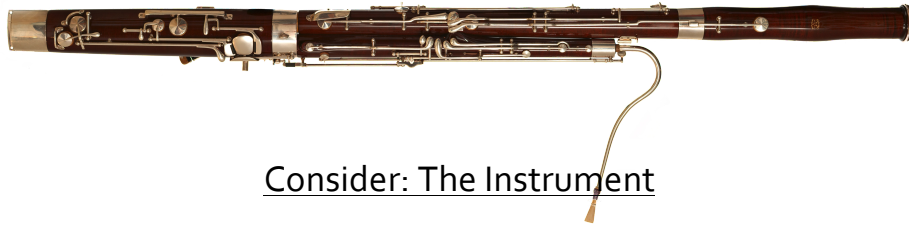


So, you want a beginning bassoonist?

Congratulations!

*You've decided to add to (perhaps to begin) the double reed force in your band.
What follow are some considerations in selecting your potential bassoonists.*



Consider: The Instrument

It can be daunting to start a student on an instrument on which you are inexperienced. If you are confident in teaching your beginners but unsure of the quality of instrument available to them, do not hesitate to contact a local bassoon teacher or performer to test the instrument for you. (This may also be a great contact for handmade reeds, as well!)

The most common instrument option is one owned by the school system, and many band directors do not allow double reed players in their ensembles due to lack of instrument availability. Before you abandon the thought of a bassoonist, be sure to check with your local music stores and nearby colleges and universities – many more than you might think will have a medium to high quality bassoon to lend or rent.

The School-Owned

- Pros: low cost, shareability
- Cons: questionable age and brand, potential for extreme disrepair

The College Lent

- Pros: low cost, likely decent brand availability
- Cons: revocable at any moment (i.e. when new college students need the instrument)

The Music Store Rented

- Pros: guaranteed repair, quality brand availability
- Cons: high cost

Consider: Transferring

Many directors and bassoon teachers believe this to be the only viable option for starting double reed players. Though transferring bassoonists from other instruments (usually woodwind) has many advantages, I personally disagree with the view that it is the only option. Below, I have listed a few advantages of transferring from any given instrument family in your band class, as well as disadvantages to transferring as a whole.

From Flute

- (Almost) one octave fingering similarity
- Large airstream

From Clarinet or Saxophone

- (Almost) one octave fingering similarity
- Reed importance and care

From Trumpet or Horn

- Principles of embouchure corner engagement
- Fast airstream

From Trombone, Euphonium, or Tuba

- Knowledge of bass clef
- Large airstream

From Percussion

- Knowledge of bass clef
- Hand independence and coordination

... so why not?

- Later start on fundamental principles
- Preconceived notions of difficulty

Consider: Starting Fresh

I believe that bassoonists can be started as true beginners in the first year. Below, find some advantages and disadvantages of this approach.

What Goes Well

- Sense of equality
- Concept of bassoon as comparably simple
- Parallel conceptual and technical development

What May Go Poorly

- Fingering complexity
- Crossing the break at different times than woodwind counterparts
- Feelings of isolation or discouragement

Consider: Student Traits

The bassoon is large, complex, and otherwise unwieldy as compared to its woodwind counterparts. This takes a particular type of student to manage successfully.

Ideal Physical Traits

- Large hands or long fingers (to reach the keys)
- Long legs (to touch the ground)
- Larger stature (to hold weight via seat strap)
- Moderate to larger-sized lips (to form embouchure)

Ideal Intellectual Traits

- Enjoys puzzles (to figure out keywork happily)

Ideal Social Traits

- Self-confident (to make strange noises alone)

Consider: Possible Private Teachers

If they are uncomfortable with teaching beginning bassoonists, many directors require their students to take private lessons. Should you decide to make this your classroom policy, consider the availability, cost, and quality of local bassoon teachers.

Consider: Your Language

Finally, you must always remember that you are teaching impressionable young minds. How their instruments are introduced often forms underlying views with regards to their musical and technical ability and potential for years to come (just ask any college music student or professional performer!).

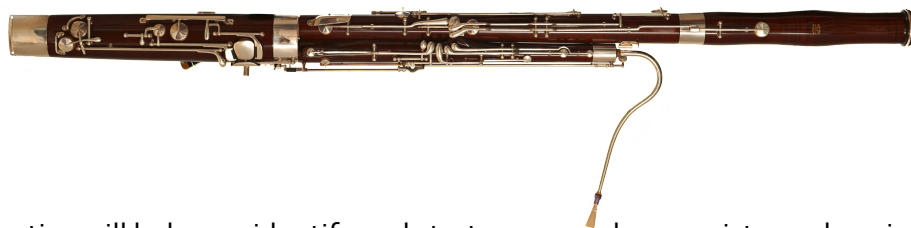
What follow are extremely abbreviated lists of phrases to use and to avoid when teaching your young bassoonists. Feel free to add to this list as your experiences teaching and playing the bassoon grow!

"No-No" Phrases

- Hard, difficult, etc.
- Tight embouchure
- Overbite, "drop your jaw"
- Finger pressure
- Straight back

Acceptable Substitutes

- Unique (challenges)
- Firm embouchure
- Relaxed jaw, "lips away from the reed"
- Finger weight
- Strong back



Hopefully these tips will help you identify and start your new bassoonists, and again, please do not hesitate to contact me with follow-up questions or observations.

Best wishes to you and your band!