



*Producing Outstanding  
Musicians Through Preparation  
For Region/District Band Auditions*

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*Texas Bandmasters Association  
59<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention/Clinic*

*July 21-24, 2006*

*Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center  
San Antonio, Texas*

# Producing Outstanding Musicians Through Preparation for Region/District Band Auditions

Greg Countryman - Fort Settlement Middle School – Fort Bend ISD

**Clinic Description:** The clinic will consist of a discussion of the methods and techniques that can be used to teach and evaluate audition music in order to develop the overall musicianship of your students. Also included will be suggestions on how to prepare students to perform under the stress of an audition setting.

## Purpose of Region/District Auditions

- The auditions should be a tool used to help your students improve their individual performance and ensemble skills.
- Emphasize that setting a goal of making the region/district band is a great objective, but that the main goal should be to make improvement while preparing for the auditions.
- Point out the progress being made from week to week and don't always talk about "making the region/district band".
- The students must feel they have been successful and have accomplished something even if they don't achieve the recognition of making the region/district band.
- If approached correctly, you will find that your students will make tremendous improvement in their individual playing skills and level of confidence through the process of learning the Region/District Band audition music. This is also one of your best opportunities to develop outstanding soloists in your ensemble.

**Plan and Timeline** – Develop a plan and timeline for teaching the music and put it in writing so the students can better understand the entire process.

- Break the music down into assignments that can be learned in one week, make assignments cumulative (example attached).
- Grade the students weekly on some part of the assignment to hold them accountable for the assigned material
- In each sectional, teach the new material for the next weekly assignment.
- Try to teach and test all the audition material 3-4 weeks prior to the audition. This will give the students plenty of time to make improvement and become comfortable with the music.

**Teaching Suggestions** - Much of this information is the same regardless of whether you are teaching students individually, in sectionals or in full band.

- It is important that you address basic fundamentals and ensemble concepts during your sectional warm-ups, as well as while you are teaching the audition music.
- Do not begin teaching the music at the performance tempo.
- Through your instruction in sectionals, you should be modeling how the students need to practice at home.
  - Practice slowly at first and then gradually speed up the tempo
  - Use a metronome to keep up with your progress (Ex. Monday-60, Tuesday-70)
  - Teach the students how to "Drill" by practicing small segments and repeating them over and over. Make a game out of it.
  - Then, put smaller segments together. Always drilling slow to fast.
  - Practice the parts you have difficulty with more often
  - Make sure the students understand that even at the audition the music doesn't have to be played at the marked tempo. Never sacrifice tone quality or accuracy to reach a tempo marked on the music.

- Even when you are first learning the music, use students to model. This will help motivate the students to go home and learn the music since they might be the soloist the next week.
- Start with notes and rhythms in sectionals.
  - Especially with young students, I would suggest only addressing notes and rhythms first. Your better players will probably be adding dynamics, style, etc. before you discuss these aspects in the sectional.
  - Explain unfamiliar rhythms – Make sure you have a counting system and have the students write in the counting if necessary.
  - Count and clap rhythms
  - Count rhythms and finger the instruments
  - Say on syllables (de, da, etc.) and finger the instruments
  - DO NOT teach by rote.
  - Rhythm is usually one of the main weaknesses of young students, so use this opportunity to help them gain a better understanding of various rhythms. The rest of your year will be much easier if you take the time to work on rhythm now.
- After the students are comfortable with the notes and rhythms, then start introducing other aspects such as style, shaping of phrases, dynamics, accents, etc. in sectionals.
  - In music with separated style, teach it slurred or legato tongued first so they hear what it sounds like to have a full body of sound on each note. Introduce style after the notes and rhythms are mastered.
  - For young students, you must teach them how to play notes using different styles through the use of articulation/note length drills.
    - We only teach slurred, legato, long lifted (marcato) and staccato. Don't try to teach all these various note lengths at the same time.
    - I would suggest starting with legato, then staccato and finally marcato.
    - Articulation drills can be done around the room in sectionals, so you can hear each student individually and help them match from person to person.
- All students will not be able to master the appropriate style.
  - For less experienced players, be willing to accept that they may not be able to play a true staccato and still maintain a good tone quality.
  - Let them play notes a little longer if it sounds better.
- Discuss dynamics and phrase shaping and have the students mark these in the music.
- After the notes and rhythms are learned and you have discussed the other musical aspects in sectionals, you will then need to start hearing the students individually to help them refine all the skills previously taught. The level to which each student will be able to master these various aspects will differ greatly and you will need to work with them individually to help them reach their full potential.
- Your less experienced players (especially second year players) may not be able to add all of these aspects to their performance. For these students, being able to play the correct notes and rhythms with a GOOD sound may be good enough for now.
- Peer Tutoring – This is a terrific way to get your less experienced players some extra help. I try to pair up every 7<sup>th</sup> grade student with an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student. I suggest they meet once each week for 20-30 minutes.
- If students are at varying levels (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> band) you may have to schedule separate sectionals. This will also make it easier for you to teach your basic fundamentals and ensemble concepts since all the students will be similar in playing ability.
- If there are some students struggling, you must determine if this difficulty is due to a lack of practice and preparation or if the student just needs more time to develop the necessary skills. Talk to the student and maybe the parents to determine the reason. If they are putting forth the time and effort, then just keep encouraging them. **NEVER GIVE UP ON A STUDENT!**

## **Evaluation/Testing**

- Weekly Assignments - The students play a portion of the weekly assignment in sectionals each week and they are given a grade on this performance.
- Individual Hearings -The students are given a grade each time we hear them individually.
  - We usually start the individual hearings four weeks before the audition.
  - The first two weeks are just a participation grade – show up and you get a “100”.
  - The last two weeks, the grade is assigned based on the student’s preparation.
  - When we start hearing students individually, we generally stop having our weekly section rehearsals.
- Scales - In addition to audition pieces, the students must learn 7 major scales and the chromatic scale. We generally do not spend much, if any, time working on scales in class or sectionals because I feel the students are capable of learning this on their own.
  - The students have to turn in scale tapes during the first 6-8 weeks of school. This year we will probably have them complete these recordings using the Finale Performance Assessment.
  - Scale Pass Offs (Scale Jail) – Each student must “Pass Off” each major scale and the chromatic scale for a director. This must be from memory and in person – not recorded. We have a Pass Off Chart on the wall in the band hall for everyone to see. This is a grade with each scale that is “passed off” being worth 10 points and the chromatic scale is worth 30 points.
- Playing in Class - The students play in class and they are given a grade for their performance. More information in the section below.
- Mock Auditions – Students are required to attend two mock auditions for which they receive a participation grade. More information in the section below.
- Make sure you take a student’s progress into consideration when assigning six/nine week grades. You may need to drop some of the earlier low grades if a student has made significant progress throughout the grading period.
- Use grades as a motivating tool, but make sure you consider the student’s effort and ability. If they are performing as well as could be expected for this stage in their development, that needs to be considered when assigning a final grade.

**Preparing the Students for the Audition** – For the students to perform well at the auditions, it is important that they become accustomed to playing in front of other people so they learn to cope with the nervousness caused by performance situations.

- Playing in Class - Have students play in class starting 4-5 weeks prior to the audition. I usually start by having one section play a scale for a grade each day. As we get closer to the audition, I will have 5-6 students play what they would perform in one round of the audition (a scale and part of one of the audition pieces).
- Master Classes – About one month before the auditions, we hire a specialist for each instrument to come and teach a two-hour master class. The students know that they will be expected to perform individually in these classes. After the master class, we reward the students with pizza and a party.
- Mock Auditions – Each student is required to attend a mock audition each week starting two weeks prior to the audition. In these auditions, we use the same procedure (2-3 rounds) that will be used on the day of the audition so the students become accustomed to the procedure. In our region, the students must perform for all the students in the room, so at our mock auditions they must sit and listen to the other students and be present for the entire audition.

**Expectations** – Regardless of what activity your students are preparing for, your expectations are probably the most important factor in their progress and preparation. Always set your expectations high, but realistic, and make sure the students understand that it is okay if they don’t reach all of the goals as long as they put forth their best effort!

## Region Band Auditions

In order to prepare for region band auditions, we will not have sectionals for the next 4 weeks. In place of these sectionals, you will need to do the following:

### Week of October 10<sup>th</sup> and October 17<sup>th</sup>

1. Sign up and attend an individual Region Help Session (15 minutes each week). Times are available in the morning and afternoon. This will be a participation grade only (show up and you get a "100").
2. Set up a Student Tutoring session.

### Week of October 24<sup>th</sup>

1. Sign up and attend an individual Region Help Session (15 minutes each week). Times are available in the morning and afternoon. This will be a major grade based on your preparation.
2. Sign up and attend one mock audition during this week. The mock auditions will be on Tuesday afternoon from 4:00-6:15 p.m. and on Wednesday morning from 7:00-8:30 a.m. There are two mock auditions this week (one in the morning and one in the afternoon) so you can choose one that does not interfere with your other activities. This will be a participation grade only (show up and you get a "100").
3. Set up a Student Tutoring Session

### Week of October 31<sup>st</sup>

1. Sign up and attend an individual Region Help Session. Times are available in the morning and afternoon. This will be a major grade based on your preparation.
2. Sign up and attend one mock audition during this week. The mock auditions will be on Tuesday afternoon from 4:00-6:15 p.m. and on Wednesday morning from 7:00-8:30 a.m. There are two mock auditions this week (one in the morning and one in the afternoon) so you can choose one that does not interfere with your other activities. This will be a participation grade only (show up and you get a "100").
3. Set up a Student Tutoring Session

## Region Music Assignments August 2005

### WOODWINDS

Week of:	5-Sep	12-Sep	19-Sep	26-Sep	3-Oct
Flute	Rondo M. 1-10 (1st note) # 13 M. 1-8 # 23 M. 1-6	Rondo M.1-16 (beat 1) # 13 M 1-12 # 23 M. 1-10	Rondo M. 1-24 (1st note) # 13 M. 1- 12 # 23 M. 1-10	Rondo M. 1-30 # 13 M. 1-16 # 23 M. 1-16	Rondo - ALL # 13 - ALL # 23 - ALL
Oboe	# 5 M. 1-4 # 10 M. 1-8 # 13 M. 1-4	# 5 M. 1-8 # 10 M. 1-12 # 13 M. 1-9 (first note)	# 5 M. 1-12 # 10 M. 1-16 (first note) # 13 M. 1 - 12	# 5 M. 1-16 # 10 M. 1-22 # 13 M. 1-17 (first note)	# 5 - ALL # 10 - ALL # 13 - ALL
Bassoon	# 4 M. 1-4 # 1 M. 1-8 (first note) # 6 M. 1-4	# 4 M. 1-8 # 1 M. 1-12 # 6 M. 1-8	# 4 M. 1-12 # 1 M. 1-16 # 6 M. 1-12	# 4 M. 1-16 # 1 M. 1-20 # 6 M. 1-16	# 4 - ALL # 1 - ALL # 6 - ALL
Clarinet	# 17 M. 1-9 (1st note) # 3 M. 1-8 (1st note) # 6 M. 1-4	# 17 M. 1-13 (1st note) # 3 M. 1-14 (1st note) # 6 M. 1-8	# 17 M. 1-19 (1st note) # 3 M. 1-18 (1st note) # 6 M. 1-12	# 17 M. 1-23 (1st note) # 3 M. 1-26 # 6 M. 1-16	# 17 - ALL # 3 - ALL # 6 - ALL
Bass Clarinet	Maggiore M.1-5 (1st note) # 3 M. 1-8 (1st note) # 6 M. 1-4	Maggiore M. 1-8 # 3 M. 1-14 (1st note) # 6 M. 1-8	Maggiore M. 1-12 # 3 M. 1-18 (1st note) # 6 M. 1-12	Maggiore M. 1-17 (1st note) # 3 M. 1-26 # 6 M. 1-16	Maggiore - ALL # 3 - ALL # 6 - ALL
Saxophone	# 18 M. 1-8 (first note) # 6 M. 1-16 # 5 M. 1-6 (beat 2)	# 18 M. 1-13 (first note) # 6 M. 1-24 # 5 M. 1-10	# 18 M. 1-13 (first note) # 6 M. 1-36 # 5 M. 1-16 (beat 3)	# 18 M. 1-15 (first note) # 6 M. 1-46 # 5 M. 1-22 (beat 2)	# 18 - ALL # 6 - ALL # 5 - ALL