

# Students Teaching Students

*Thoughts and suggestions for both the teacher and student to create effective student-led wind section rehearsals.*

*Frank Troyka, Conn-Selmer Division of Education*

## **Use section rehearsals to...**

- Address concerns that might otherwise slow down the full ensemble rehearsal;
- Target specific excerpts that may be particularly challenging;
- Work on the peculiarities of the specific instrument that cannot be addressed effectively in the full rehearsal (every wind instrument has its "bad" notes and awkward fingerings);
- Identify listening responsibilities in the full band rehearsal.

## **Characteristics of Good Section Rehearsals**

- There is an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- There are goals and there is a clear focus at any given moment.
- Participation is high by all present. Everyone collaborates. Everyone plays individually! (With very large sections, it may not be practical to hear everyone individually.)
- There are specific procedures and expectations that everyone understands (those procedures and expectations are aligned with those of the director in the full rehearsal).
- All are prepared to engage in the pursuit of the objectives. There is little or no need to address off-task behavior.
- Energy is high and enthusiasm is present throughout.
- All are challenged to think for themselves.
- There is change. Things get done.
- We experience "moments."
- There is spontaneity.
- There is consistency.
- They are fun (but you may have to define "fun").
- Everyone looks forward to the next rehearsal.

## **What a Good Section Rehearsal is Not**

- Tense and "dutiful."
- Solely based on the outcome rather than the process. Improvised.
- Partisan (students feel some are favored over others).

## **Before the Section Rehearsal Begins**

- Work with your director to identify specific excerpts from the repertoire to prepare. Ask what his/her concerns are and what s/he would like you to accomplish.
- Wind instruments must be physically warmed up before accurate tuning can take place (cool instruments play flatter than warm ones).

### **Suggestions:**

- Encourage students to arrive in time to warm up individually prior to the start of the rehearsal. It's important that you not attempt to tune the section or individuals until the instrument itself is at its playing temperature.
- If the students are not warmed up before rehearsal, it's perfectly appropriate to do a group exercise where intonation is less critical (e.g., rapid articulation exercise, rhythm study, flexibility/slur exercises for brasses, scales for woodwinds). Avoid chorales or air flow studies until the instruments are warm.
- Once the instruments are warmed up, intonation can be addressed.

### **Suggested tuning notes:**

- Flute/piccolo: 5th line F, then C above the F, then A below the F. The F is a good reference pitch, the C tends sharp, and the A tends flat. Tuning these notes help young flute players listen for “melodic” tuning.
- Oboe/English horn: Concert A
- Bassoon: Concert A, F
- Clarinet/bass clarinet: Written D below the staff, open G, 3rd space C. If the G is sharp, lengthen the horn at the barrel/neck; if the C is sharp, lengthen the horn between the left and right hand joints.
- Saxophones: Low F# (written), slur to 5th line F#. If these two notes are in tune, add the written 4th line D. D is a very sharp note! Try adding the low B key to bring the pitch down.
- Trumpet: 3rd space C, 2nd line G
- Horn: 3rd space C (check both sides of the horn on this note)
- Trombone/euphonium: Bb (on top of the staff)
- Tuba: 2nd line Bb.
- Have a plan for each and every rehearsal.
- Establish procedures that are similar to your band director’s procedures for the full rehearsal. Procedures=Structure; Structure=Safety (structure doesn’t mean “sameness”).
- Keep it simple.
- Work with the band director to create achievable, short-term goals as well as broad, long-term goals.
- Involve everyone in a meaningful way; collaborate.
- Share the plan, orally or in writing, so everyone participates in achieving the goals of the rehearsal. (Written objectives tend to carry more weight).

### **The Rehearsal Itself**

Start with what you see on the page and prioritize your concerns. Priorities are often determined by the difficulty of the music itself. The hierarchy below is NOT a universal approach to prioritizing, however each item is, in a sense, a prerequisite for the next item on the list. If you’re not sure what to work on, this list can help you identify what to listen for.

*Tone quality—Correct notes—Correct rhythms—Correct articulation—Style—Dynamics—Phrasing*

### **Reminders:**

- Teach more to the top (the better players), rather the bottom (the weaker ones). You must challenge everyone, but if you bog down because of one or two individuals who underachieve, you invite discontent from the stronger players. You might need to work separately with individuals who struggle.
- Use a metronome, audible to the group, to help maintain pulse and rhythmic consistency.
- As the section leader, you must be able to demonstrate the qualities you expect in the other members of the section. Be prepared and be able to demonstrate on your instrument!
- Play along with the other members only occasionally. You must be focused on what THEY are doing and if you play along too much, your priorities will shift to what YOU are doing.
- Allow time to review and for continuity. A 60-minute section rehearsal might be structured as follows:
  - Fundamentals (articulation, intonation, technique)—10-15 minutes
  - Repertoire: 35-40 minutes
  - Review/continuity: 10-15 minutes
  - Make an audio recording of your rehearsal for your personal study and review.