

# Importance of Playing Duets

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Some of the most fun I've had playing my instrument is getting together with another player and reading duets. One of the benefits of playing duets is that it helps many aspects of our playing; our performance can really improve while we're having a good time playing with a friend. I'm certain band directors and/or private lesson teachers love to hear students playing duets—they know how important it can be to develop skills and techniques needed by the best players. As a full-time teacher and performer, I enjoy the opportunity to play good music with another player.

Some of the benefits of playing duets include ensemble skills (attacks and releases, playing together), intonation, blend/balance, sight reading, and of course, teamwork. Let's briefly discuss each one of these points and see how they apply to the student.



## Ensemble Skills

Whenever we play with others we must pay special attention to starting and stopping together; this is something we don't have to worry about when we play by ourselves.

Always be aware of starting the duet perfectly together. Also watch when both of you move from note to note; make sure that it is really together—without one going faster than the other. Make certain you both come in together after a breath—in other words, sharpen your ensemble skill! These simple aspects of good ensemble playing will be a big help when you play in your other groups.

## Intonation

Playing in tune with other instruments is a crucial part of anyone's musical training. Work on playing octaves in tune, unisons in tune, as well as maintaining good pitch on different intervals such as 3<sup>rd</sup>s, 4<sup>th</sup>s, and 5<sup>th</sup>s. Using a tuner can be a good help in this process,

but you will soon develop better hearing on your own without one. Know which notes on your instrument tend to be out of tune and then be very conscious to play them in tune. The end result will be much more pleasing to you both.

## Blend and Balance

Our goal here is to not stick out from the context of the duet. Listen carefully so that both parts sound equal in loudness (that's the balance) and that the tone quality is consistent (that's the blend).

## Sight-Reading

The ability to quickly grasp notes, rhythms, dynamics, and other markings is very important. Playing duets that you've not practiced before is an excellent way to improve your reading ability. When you first learned to read stories and books at home and school, with practice you were able to read faster and tackle more difficult material. It is the same when reading music, the more you do, the faster and better you become. Sight-reading will help you get better at recognizing rhythms; you will also start to hear various styles much better. Remember to always keep the key signature in mind!

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### Teamwork

This is an essential skill to learn that will help you throughout your life. Learning to give and take for the common goal of a successful outcome is the basis of teamwork. Having the capacity to work well with others is rewarding and will make playing duets that much more enjoyable.

### A Short List of Duet Books

*The Arban Method* (published by Carl Fischer). Start with the many duets found in the Arban Method. These duets range from easy to difficult and include many different keys, rhythms, styles—even double and triple tonguing!

*Saint-Jacome's Grand Method* (published by Carl Fischer). Another good mix of styles, keys, techniques, and rhythms for both parts. These duets are usually longer than those found in the Arban Method. Very good pieces for spending time working on the above-mentioned skills.

*Miniature Classics for Two Trumpets (or Cornets)* (published by Carl Fischer). Transcribed by Sigmund Hering, this book is compilation of 32 works by J.S. Bach, Handel, Purcell, and other great composers. These duets are easy and very accessible for younger players.

*More Miniature Classics for Two Trumpets (or Cornets)* (published by Carl Fischer). 32 more duets of the same type found in the first book. Another good resource for the young players.

*Selected Duets, Vol 1 and Vol. 2* (published by Rubank). These are duets from a variety of composers, culled from different collections of duets. Volume 1 is rated Easy to Medium in difficulty; Volume 2 is rated Advanced.

*Trumpet for 2* (published by Carl Fischer). This is collection of Early Classics arranged by Sigmund Hering for young players. These are a bit more challenging than the two previous Hering books. The pieces in this book are longer and contain keys and rhythms that are more advanced. However, they are more fun to play when worked up.

*Amsden's Celebrated Practice Duets* (published by C. L. Barnhouse). This collection of 70 duets begins at a very easy level, short and with easy key signatures and rhythms. It progresses through to challenging, two-page duets in a wide array of rhythms and keys. This book is a standard in the libraries of most advanced players. Many trumpeters have spent hours playing through these duets.

See how much fun you can have (and how your playing will improve) by playing duets with one of your friends. It's a great way to spend time!

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