

# Music and Extracurriculars: A Balancing Act

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Each day consists of twenty four hours. Crunching the numbers quickly reveals one hundred sixty eight hours per week and fifty two weeks per year. Imagine how precious your time is! Your life is like a pizza that you can slice into sections. If you want to make half of your pizza cheese (sports), and half pepperoni (music), then go for it! The following thoughts may help you balance your busy life of music and schoolwork along with extracurricular activities. There is so much to do in a short time!

Sometimes we do extracurriculars because they connect us with people. Whether sports, music, academics, or service-related, activities put us in touch with people who are motivated, determined to make a difference, and passionate about what they do. Surrounded by these people, we begin to explore our possibilities and recognize dreams not yet discovered. In my senior year of high school I eagerly anticipated graduation. I thought that I would miss my extracurricular activities more than anything else that I was leaving behind. I soon discovered that I missed by high school trumpet teacher, my tennis coach, my

English teacher, and my pep band friends much more than I miss pep band, playing tennis and actually “doing” extracurricular activities.

Sports are a healthy addition for trumpet players, but it is difficult to balance sports with music. If you are nodding your head vigorously right now rest assured that you are not alone! I remember playing a marching band dress rehearsal in my tennis skirt one time because I did not have time to change after the tennis match!

So how are you going to keep track of all this stuff? Keep a detailed planner that provides ample space for tallying schoolwork, music, and extracurricular activities. Carefully consult your planner before making commitments. Write on your hand, use “post-it-notes,” or make lists. On especially busy days, try making a survival guide that lists times of events, priorities,

and all the “stuff” you need to bring. I like plain paper planners because I can scribble pictures and words in quickly as reminders for later. Just find what works for you and hold on to it. If you do lose your planner, send out a search party immediately!

When conflicts arise, be organized yet flexible. Directors like working with students who are responsible and who communicate scheduling conflicts well in advance. Perhaps you can creatively arrange to

participate in both activities. For example, play the first half of that soccer match so that you can make the downbeat of the band dress rehearsal. If you must choose remember that performances take precedence, followed closely by dress rehearsal. In any music ensemble, you have a responsibility to be present, playing your part. If you will be

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absent, make sure your part is somehow covered. If band at your school occupies a class period, you will be graded on your participation and performance. Know the expectations and follow your band handbook.

Of course it is okay to kindly say “no thanks” sometimes. Avoid compromising your health, schoolwork, responsibilities to family, or your own freedom to choose.

As a music student, you will want to schedule time every day to practice. My sister Emily says that “life without music is like dinner without dessert!” I’ll share another tasty example to help illustrate. Making a really good pizza requires a variety of ingredients. Pizza sauce is crucial, peppers make it interesting, and oregano adds flavor. These ingredients are like the skills that you practice on your trumpet. Having a variety of skills makes playing more fun. Toppings are also like extracurricular activities in that some toppings work well together, and some do not.

Even ten focused minutes with your instrument are better than zero. Your mouthpiece can travel with you, even on vacations. It is small, portable, and can help keep your chops in shape when you cannot have your trumpet along. Avoid dropping your mouthpiece and consider keeping an identical spare for traveling purposes. Mental practicing can also help in a pinch. Reading through rhythms, clapping, singing, doing fingerings, and marking tricky places for future “trumpet” time can improve efficiency in practice at all levels. Even teachers still practice!

Staying “in tune” with your school music programs can be incredibly rewarding and fulfilling. Your music

programs need you! They need your energy and leadership, your helping hands, and your beautiful trumpet sound. Help out by playing your best each time you pick up your horn. Play like it is the last time you ever get to play. Find your own expressive voice, but also be a cooperative team player who ultimately acknowledges the needs of other people. Keep educating yourself, be curious, and keep eyes and ears open. You just might discover the one experience that turns your life around, changes the way you think, or teaches you something that you could learn nowhere else.

Extracurricular activities enhance our understanding of other people and ourselves, thus playing a crucial role in our development as musicians. What a gift it is to be able to move people with our music. It is humbling that our hard work in band, lessons, and performance results in a chance to touch another person’s life. Compare your life to the pizza mentioned earlier. Toppings, like extracurricular activities, are great. Sometimes though, there are so many toppings that some of them fall off when we try to pick our pizza up. Choose never to let music be one of the things that “falls off.” Even if you feel discouraged, stick with it. If you strive to keep music in your life using the hints above, I promise that you will always have a friend, you will never stop learning, and you will experience a slice of life better than any pizza you have ever tasted.

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