

Everyday Rehearsing

Dr. James Isaac (Ike) Nail

In the most important sense, a band is the accumulation of countless interchanges with students. Thousands of individual acts comprise a program just as thousands of brush strokes comprise a painting. In a great painting, all contribute to the vision of the artist. None are contrary or unnecessary. The same principles should apply to designing activities in a band rehearsal. The artist (that's you!) must keep in mind the desired final product. The main job is to include activities that contribute to it and to eliminate those that are contrary to the design. If music is the goal, approach them through real music in a musical manner. Consider what is needed musically and the actions to attain it often become obvious. For any desired skill or behavior, invent/buy/borrow a game/exercise/activity designed so that accomplishing the activity results in acquiring the behavior desired. Even if most of your students study privately with a great teacher, you are still the one who sees them most, instructs them most and has the most influential relationship with them.

First, do no harm. Do not encourage or permit habits of

posture, embouchure, hand position, fingering or rhythmic execution that are harmful. Because of the repetitive nature of the physical acts of playing an instrument, habits form quickly; the younger the student, the quicker an action becomes a habit. Once a habit takes root, it is neither good nor bad to a student; *it is simply what feels normal.* Some destructive habits are so common as to be clichés: excessive pressure in trumpet embouchures, loose clarinet embouchures, stiff and open flute embouchures, hand positions that defy the laws of mechanics, one-size-fits-all fingerings. Listen to and look at students individually often—daily if possible. Personally conduct weekly sectionals/master classes addressing issues specific to that instrument *outside full ensemble rehearsal time.* Administer frequent short playing tests. Hold solo days. All students should either own a tuner and metronome or have those apps on their cell phones. Teach one student at a time; talking to a group is mostly just giving out information.

Faulty embouchure is both the most damaging and the most common destructive habit. Embouchure Mantras should be said aloud and verified often.

THE BIG THREE:

Trumpet:

- Bottom lip flat against the teeth
- Chin flat, corners firm
- Mouthpiece anchors on bottom lip (minimize pressure on the top lip)

Flute:

- The flute goes beneath the lip
- The bottom lip is soft
- The air parts the lips

Clarinet

- Bottom lip flat against the teeth
- Chin flat, corners firm
- Voice like lipping up constantly or fake whistling a high note (Umlaut O)

Then, teach fundamental concepts constantly: beautiful tone, accurate intonation, control of musical pulse and accuracy of rhythmic execution, wide and expressive dynamic range, meaningful and expressive phrasing concepts, balance concepts and priorities, defined and developed articulations, and the ability to play absolutely evenly. Always make music when you can, even when drilling scales and arpeggios or sight reading. Players should always be attempting to express emotion or establish a mood, scene or particular style. Encourage students to take responsibility for making music, even sending sections out

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of full rehearsals for brief student-directed sectionals focused on a specific goal or issue.

Work on **beautiful tone and accurate intonation** every day, beginning even before playing. Teach students how the breathing mechanism and breath support system really work (there is a lot of misinformation out there)—expand/extend capacity. Watch Arnold Jacob's You Tube breathing videos. Use Breathing Gym and similar exercises before playing. Practice hissing or sizzling to reinforce the concept of constant fast air. Begin playing with a specific goal—best tone, clear pitch. *Always begin ensemble warm up unison*—middle range, medium volume, moderately sustained. The famous Remington Warm Up and the Breath Impulse Warm Up are both good places to start. Alternate singing (“oh”) and playing unison pitches to find the best possible tone and establish a pitch center, accurate to a tuner and absolutely still and clear. Demonstrate or have an advanced student demonstrate desired tone quality. Assign listening to desirable tone quality. Play one per part at times. Practice bending pitches and changing tone quality from brightest to darkest. Require each student to construct a chart showing his/her intonation tendency on all notes. Follow unison warm up with a simple chorale (*16 Chorales* by J.S. Bach, arr. Mayhew Lake, pub. G. Schirmer) that allows students to hear both horizontally and vertically. Play-sing-play phrases to master fundamentals and to create an expressive performance of high quality music. Always aim for a meaningful and musical performance, even if only a single phrase is worked and performed.

Establish **relentless and accurate control of pulse and rhythm** by rehearsing in announced segments (phrases) without incidental stops. Make the segments as small as needed (even only two notes) and work slowly enough for absolute accuracy; but,

do not hesitate or stop while executing them. Learn a physical counting system (eighth note pulse) and use it daily (consider the Breath Impulse System). Practice not stopping no matter how thin or inaccurate things get. Count/sing aloud. Sight-read every day (Read for fun: don't stop, don't get lost, read what you can and fake the rest). A class method book that has etudes for reading is a great time saver, but it is important to also read actual music. Learn to pat the foot; learn to stop. Move in time like a good chamber group. Play through phrases subdividing all notes into articulated eighth notes. Rehearse challenging rhythms playing/counting one or two measures at a time, alternating with one or two measures of straight eighth notes. Rehearse some using amplified metronome subdividing eighth notes (careful, this almost always effects pitch negatively for a while).

Establish **control of a wide range of dynamics** by assigning number values 1 – 8 to dynamic levels *ppp* (1) – *FFF* (8), then practice 16 count long tones 8 beats crescendo with each beat louder and 8 beats diminuendo with each beat softer. Use the same procedure substituting articulated quarter notes. Use breath attacks so that students develop a feel for exactly where the tone will start. Apply to phrases in real music immediately. Practice reverse dynamics by phrase ($p=F$).

Explore **meaningful and expressive phrasing** by teaching students that music is always going to or coming from a point of emphasis. Mark the points of emphasis in each phrase, section and piece and assign each a numeric value. Push dissonances and relax resolutions. The highest pitch in a phrase is always in consideration for the greatest weight. In classical phrasing, the penultimate note of a phrase almost always gets extra weight and the last note almost never does. Sing phrases as a group; then play them.

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Put words to the notes to create the desired phrasing and emphasis. Try emphasizing various points of in a phrase.

Reinforce the understanding of *melodic and cadential balance* concepts. The melody is by definition the loudest element at any given moment.

The concept of pyramid balance must never supersede melodic balance; however, short fills, dissonances or passing tones in the bass and/or accompaniment *function* as melody. At points of rest in the music, melody ceases and pyramid (bottom up) balance takes over. With melodies scored in octaves, the lowest octave is usually loudest. Ask frequently, “Who has the tune?” Bop (play only the attack of each note) to locate fills and passing tones. Sing.

Develop a repertoire of *clearly defined and developed articulation styles*. Demonstrate, establish and refine the three basic styles: legato, staccato, marcato. Slurring is the ultimate legato style. Articulation in legato style requires using a “du” syllable and the least possible tongue movement. Staccato articulation often requires a “tu” syllable and the same minimal tongue movement as legato. Both styles need the briefest possible tongue contact with the reed or teeth. At the most rapid speeds the two styles sound virtually identical. Marcato articulation requires a “tu” syllable and slightly longer contact between the tongue and the reed or teeth so that there is a very

slight pressure buildup that is released providing an accent at the beginning of the note. Develop these concepts by working at the extremes – slurring, crisp staccato, heavy marcato. Say it, then play it. Practice legato absolutely slurred (chorales, folk tunes). Singing or buzzing focuses attention on this style without

the distraction of fingering. Practice staccato and marcato “on air only” without any other sound so that the “tu” sound can be heard and adjusted.

Work for *technical command and proficiency*, the ability to play evenly, by practicing so slowly that accuracy is never a problem, especially in the beginning stages of preparing a piece. Insist on correct hand position. Keep fingers close to the instrument; avoid wasted motion. Practice technical passages in dotted rhythms and reverse. Stretch the first note of a group of slurred equal notes. Practice using alternate articulations.

Everything is about the music. Pace the material so that something like an actual musical performance of some of the material occurs near the end of the rehearsal. Try not to waste time. Anything that can be done effectively outside rehearsal should be. Refrain from correcting mistakes that students should hear and correct on their own. (Make them responsible, not dependent; besides note-chasing is a drag.) Reevaluate constantly; eliminate ineffective procedures or techniques.

Remember, this is supposed to be fun!

(continued)



Fundamental Concepts in a Nut Shell

Breathing	In rhythm Natural Deep The air goes fast
Tone/Tuning	Sing-play-sing often Voicing (say “Oh”, not “Ah” or “Ee”) Clarinets are special – “Oooh in the front, “Ee” in the back Constant fast air for tone quality Dynamic control: Volume of Air = Volume of sound
Posture	Sit forward on the front third of the chair Spine erect except for lumbar curve Everything else relaxed (belly falls out, shoulders hang)
Rhythmic Integrity	Continuous pulse (playing without stopping) Rhythm understanding and reading (reducing fractions) All foreground rhythms fit into the background pulse
Technique	Hand position, facility, muscle memory and control Slowly and accurately is the key Fingerings - diatonic and chromatic, correct and used appropriately
Expression	Phrasing Phrase direction and peaks Default articulation Legato tonguing Ultimate legato (no tongue/no space/no sputter) Pointed tonguing Accents

James Isaac (Ike) Nail is the Music Director of the Western Oregon Symphony and the Western Oregon Winds at Western Oregon University in Monmouth, Oregon. He earned the Doctorate in Symphonic Conducting from the University of Texas, Austin. His distinguished career as an orchestra and band conductor, teacher and music director has included appointments with the Dallas (TX) Wind Symphony, California State University (Northridge), University of Southern Mississippi (Hattiesburg) and Sprague and West (Salem, OR), Richardson (TX) and Lee (Midland, TX) High Schools. He has been the recipient of two Grammy Awards including the 2000 National Grammy Signature School Award recognizing the most outstanding secondary music program in the country. His bands and orchestras have won more than a dozen state championships (including TMEA Honor Band and Honor Orchestra) in Texas and Oregon and performed at regional and national MENC Conventions, The Mid-West International Band and Orchestra Conference, the National Concert Band Festival, the National Kappa Kappa Psi Convention and by invitation at the Kennedy Center (Washington, DC). They have also produced significant reference recordings of wind ensemble repertoire and contemporary orchestra repertoire. He is a recipient of the National Band Association Award of Merit, a Past President of the Oregon Band Directors Association, a permanent member of the Oregon Band and Orchestra Adjudication Committee and a National Honorary Member and President of the Oregon Chapter of Phi Beta Mu. He was named Music Educator of the Year in 2009 by the Oregon Symphony Association in Salem. He is an active guest conductor and clinician having conducted All State and Honor Bands and Orchestras in more than a dozen states.

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