

# Developing the Individual Musician in Section Rehearsals

Charlotte Royall

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Thank you to TBA for allowing me to share some ideas with the greatest colleagues in the country. We are in an industry that is always trying to find ways to improve what we love—music and teaching.

I began my own flute career in a weak junior high situation and although I had excellent directors in high school, we never had like-instrument section rehearsals and I was pretty clueless when it was time to teach my own. It was “trial by fire.” When you are a new teacher, great mentoring and assistance usually occurs in the full rehearsals but you’re generally on your own in small sectionals.

## The Objectives I Hope To Share:

Find every supplement and idea that provides opportunities to enable your ensemble members to become great musicians, performing with beautiful tone and facility as soloists and ensemble members. Utilizing various pedagogical methods and performance opportunities with your students will improve the quality of the ensemble as well as develop a more confident, mature musician.

## Evaluate and Assess

It’s important to know where you are beginning. Benchmarking

is important to establish continuity in your students’ development. You have to hear each student perform to gain this knowledge. Keep accurate evaluations. Keep a written record of their ability and achievement. When we hear students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade play, we make notes of general tone, articulation, range, scale achievement, rhythmic accuracy, etc. to determine the individual levels and where to begin in sectionals. We also test our high school students at semester to determine what areas need improvement.

Before I begin I would like to emphasize that section rehearsals are required for all of our performing bands. Especially in the formative years, all concert performance music is taught in sectionals before attempted in full ensemble. This assures that all ensemble members have the correct approach to their parts. In full ensemble, with listening and matching skills being introduced and improved, they will learn to integrate, layer, etc. **Most importantly: Have a plan for each rehearsal, whether full ensemble or small like-instrument group.**

Refinement and intensity of varying levels’ listening skills will certainly not improve without like-

instrument rehearsals. Drills unique to the instrument must be taught and evaluated for continuation of improvement.

Provide modeling examples, recordings and don’t perform unless you are prepared to have them sound just like you! Provide supplemental materials—scales, flexibility exercises, tuning charts, tuner, metronome, and an overhead projector or document reader.

It’s important not to “beat a dead horse.” Don’t drill contest music unless necessary. (How fun is it for a tubist to drill whole notes for an hour?) Give the students the tools to perform their music on a high level with ease and confidence. The duration of rehearsal should be based on age and intensity of demands. It is important to use this time to check individuals every week. Have each player perform by themselves every week.

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*Hiring instrument-specific clinicians that you trust is an investment worth making.*

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Divide the time into basically FOUR areas of instruction and evaluation unique to each instrument—no more than 10-20 minutes on each section unless teaching a new concept. Remember: check performers every

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week on individual demonstration and understanding of concepts. Set the goals high but never push a performer to the point of tension or establishing bad habits. Check with a vengeance.

### 1. Tone Refinement

Establish a pure, beautiful tone and use as a reference for extending range. After you have established fundamental tone, continue to refine and extend through the entire range of the instrument. Especially with brass players, extending range before players are physically ready will create compensation that is difficult to rectify in high school or college. Establish a routine of tone-building exercises as a daily reference for the performers. Long tones serve so many purposes—establishing and evaluating tone, as well as consistency and pitch control in varying dynamics and ranges. Take time in sectionals to utilize tone-builders that are unique to the instruments in combination with exercises used in full ensemble rehearsals.

It is important to emphasize a pure, unforced, consistent tone. Exercises can include, but are not limited to: tone, energy and pitch matching exercises, scales, flow studies, intervals, etc. (Additionally, harmonics for flutes, register key exercises for clarinet, octaves for flute, saxophone and double reeds, flexibility exercises for brass.) Continue to stress voicing, tongue placement, embouchure, posture, hand position, breathing, use of air and their effect on tone production. Make short assignments and evaluate them weekly. We also use a Cichowicz flow study and Remington interval exercises for all ensemble members. Additionally, each member is also provided an individualized tuning chart and tendencies are discovered and rechecked.

### 2. Technique Drill

Establishing a starting point with each student will aid in the improvement of technique. Never force a

tempo that causes physical tension or breakdown of the embouchure or hand position. Technique refining involves a relaxed attitude, body and development of muscle memory. In sectionals, establish the quality of tone that you wish to maintain and accelerate tempos according to the ability of the group. Don't forget to challenge individuals to maximize what they can perform. Technique builders can include: scale and technique exercises, including 3rds and arpeggios, extended scales, chromatics in small segments, Clarke studies, lip slurs, flow studies, technique exercises unique to the instruments, short excerpts from etude books, alternate fingering charts and drills. (Be sure to vary articulations throughout the exercises.) Keep records on tempos and success of each section member and evaluate their progress each week.

#### *Articulation Drill*

When working to improve articulation, remind players to keep tongue placement correct and consistent. Again, it is important to remember to start where it is most comfortable and effortless for the performer. Double and triple tonguing can be improved with scale and technique exercises. Flute flutter tonguing should be taught in section rehearsal only. Evaluation is necessary. Emphasize that releases are just important as starts. Be very clear about note values and releases. Check for incorrect releases, including tongue-stops.

#### *Vibrato*

Vibrato is a must for every instrument except clarinet and French horn. Diaphragmatic vibrato is usually preferred with the exception of saxophone. There is a variation of demand for vibrato in the ensemble. Flutes, double reeds and saxophones use it a majority of the time in full ensemble. Many conductors ask brass players to use it only soloistically. Drilling a measured vibrato in section rehearsal is useful in teaching performers to vary or control their vibrato

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with the tempo and interpretive demands of a music selection. You should stress that a soloistic vibrato may be different from an ensemble vibrato. It can't be stressed enough that all performers in an ensemble are soloists first and must learn vibrato.

### ***Brass mouthpiece-to buzz or not to buzz...***

If this technique is used, stress the importance of correct tone production and consistency. The individual musician can be evaluated on pitch consistency and air fluctuation in drills and music.

### **3. Music related**

Many elements of musicality can be clarified in section rehearsals. Emphasis, phrasing, rubato, etc. can be taught and reinforced in long tones, scales, chorales, etudes, etc. Through long tones, you can teach and evaluate intensity of volume, direction of line, phrasing, and variation of vibrato. Evaluate tapered releases for voicing, intensity, air column, embouchure and aperture. Pitch should remain consistent. It is vital that you use a tuner. Teach phrasing, and rubato opportunities on assigned short, lyrical etudes. Students must demonstrate an understanding of all basic styles and articulations and be able to integrate them into the music from the beginning.

Sightreading is a skill that can be mastered as long as it is practiced. Have students perform unison lines and duets with a metronome in varying tempos. Reinforce the musical aspects of sightreading. Always think of sightreading as an unplanned performance.

### **4. Individual Performance Opportunities**

Many successful band programs require solo performances. There should be some form of solo requirement on varying levels for every student in the program. Many students enjoy the opportunity to perform for others in a smaller venue. Hopefully, the director will provide them with all of the tools

necessary to make the experience worthwhile. Examples of individual performances include passing off memorized music, All-Region/All-State etudes (even shorter excerpts), ensemble audition music and solo and ensemble contest music. Evaluate their performance several times before they actually perform for a judge.

Small, like-instrument section rehearsals provide students with unique, individualized instruction that they will most likely not receive in full ensemble. This is also a time when the relationship between director and student can be developed in a very positive way, which will result in more equipped and confident performer. This in turn will result in increased individual and ensemble success.

*Charlotte Royall is serving her 8<sup>th</sup> year as Director of Bands at The Woodlands College Park High School. She previously taught at Knox JH in The Woodlands and in Spring for 14 years as Director of Bands at Bammel MS. She graduated from the University of Houston with a Bachelors Degree in Music Education and studied conducting with Mr. Eddie Green. Mrs. Royall's performing groups have earned consistent UIL Sweepstakes and Outstanding in Class festival awards. In 1990, the Bammel MS Symphonic Band was named the TMEA Class CC State Honor Band and performed at the state convention in 1991. The band was also a state Class CCC finalist in the State Honor Band competition in 1996 and 1998. The College Park HS Band has consistently earned Superior ratings at UIL Marching and Concert and Sightreading and won Best in Class Awards at marching and concert festivals. In 2010, the College Park Wind Ensemble was state finalist in the TMEA Class 5A Honor Band competition. The band was also named 2010 and 2012 Mark of Excellence National Wind Band Honors National Winner. Mrs. Royall serves as a clinician and adjudicator in the southern United States area. She has presented clinics for TMEA, TBA, The Midwest Clinic, BOA Summer Symposium, and co-conducted the Spring ISD JH Honor Band for The Midwest Clinic. Mrs. Royall held a seven-year term on the TBA Executive Board, serving as president in 1999. She is a member of the TMEA, TMAA and Phi Beta Mu. In 1999, she received the University of Houston Moore's School of Music Distinguished Alumni Award. In 2009 she received the TBA Meritorious Achievement Award.*