



Surviving Your First Few Years of Teaching

CLINICIANS:

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We, as five educators who have in fact SURVIVED our first few years as music educators, will present some positive preparation advice, nuts and bolts, and experiences that will help you survive and THRIVE in your own career. We have all taught in different socioeconomic backgrounds and different age groups, so we will provide a broad range of ideas to apply in all of your situations. This, of course, will be from a positive and negative standpoint. We have all made mistakes, and some of our best advice comes from what we learned not just in our university studies, but out in our own classrooms.

Preparing for the Job Hunt

A. University

Do your best in all of your classes.

Pursue your instrument(s) to the best of your ability.

Trust in your teachers and advisors.

Be respectful and go above and beyond the expectations of your teachers. Consider getting experience by teaching private lessons in local public schools.

B. Job Applications

Apply everywhere.

Research. There are many questions you might have, down to the smallest details, about a school that you need to know. Check out www.uilforms.com for a history of the school's UIL Contest results, and visit <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us> to view the school's academic history and socioeconomic breakdown.

Interviews - Be prepared for specific questions about teaching, classroom environment, and personality. Present yourself as moldable, open to new ideas, and level-headed.

Do your best. Find a situation that suits you. The perfect job doesn't exist, but you can find a situation that will be rewarding and great.

C. Mentors/Clinicians

Find a mentor teacher - from college, student teaching, or someone in your own school/district. Your mentor needs to be someone that you will feel comfortable sharing your struggles and weaknesses with. Think about whether you share the same philosophy about music and teaching. Have they had success in the past with their own groups?

Some mentors can help you get a job or decide which job situations are worth pursuing.

Think about when they should come to visit. Schedule your mentors to see you teach and hear your group many times during your school year to establish consistency. You are also working to develop students who trust your mentors/clinicians.

Make time outside of class to discuss feedback - not just about the class, but about you and your teaching.

Always work on improving your teaching. Ask questions and change what others tell you is not working. TAKE NOTES!!!

Now that you have a job...

Balancing Life and Work

A. “The Never-Ending To-Do List”

The list never quite goes away, so do your best getting through it day-to-day.

If you’re an assistant, think about what your head director expects. Does he or she give you deadlines? Look ahead – can you offer help with an upcoming event? Also, is it worth it to push past your limit of exhaustion to get the list done, or can it wait until tomorrow?

What is the priority?

If you need rest, you need rest; however, there are some days where some to-do items must be done. Long hours come with the territory of our profession, but strive to achieve balance and keep things in perspective, or else you will definitely burn out at some point.

B. Keeping the “Me” Time

Don’t abandon any hobbies that you have.

Explore something new. Adopt a puppy, start a new TV show (or catch up on your DVR), go out to eat and socialize, exercise, etc.

Bring home some work (if you CAN work at home efficiently - some people cannot, and that is OK).

C. Become Friends with your Co-workers

Reaching out to your co-workers will help to strengthen your team teaching and establish trust with one another. This can also include other directors in your school district and/or cluster. Try to create some time to socialize that doesn’t always include “work talk”. The stronger you can build this support system, the happier life can be.

Reach out to teachers in other departments as well. Build a relationship with your fellow fine arts teachers, as well as academic teachers.

D. Keep in Touch with College Friends

There is no one better to talk through life situations that may arise than your college friends. They may be experiencing some of the same feelings and situations as you. They will probably be able to relate and keep things in perspective. We all need friends we can “vent” to at times.

Your friends keep you grounded and remind you about what is really important.

Building a Good Relationship With Your Administration & Parents

A. Administration

Stay in touch. If possible, arrange meetings periodically with your principal (try to include all the fine arts staff) to discuss any events, activities, issues that need to be addressed with everyone.

DYOD – Do Your Own Discipline (until you can’t anymore). Handle as much as you possibly can ‘in-house’ with student issues. Also – if you think there may be an issue brewing with a parent, give a heads-up to the appropriate administrator so they aren’t caught off guard.

Advocate for your program SMARTLY. Find ways to positively promote your program to your administrators: invite them to performances, have them be a part of the next concert (have a maraca part for them to play, a speaking part to read if a piece calls for it, have them conduct a piece), include them on positive group emails.

Evaluations / Classroom Walkthroughs – No Dog & Pony Needed! Just be yourself and continue with your rehearsal when getting observed. Administrators can sense when a teacher is putting on a show for them. Just like all other rehearsals, continue to ask students for feedback, work to hear individuals on their instrument, give appropriate feedback about their playing, etc. Tip: If you can schedule your formal observation to coincide with UIL C&SR, include a sight-reading piece in your lesson plan.

Administrators are always blown away by the procedure.

Be willing help outside of the band hall. Administrators notice when you volunteer to run the clock at a basketball game (your students will LOVE seeing you there too), work a McTeacher night at McDonalds, or help out the campus in unexpected ways. While it is hard to make time for this, it can pay off in the long run.

Gauge your relationship with your administration before you pick a battle. (This is just a figure of speech. Keep in mind that if you actually battle – you will lose.)

B. Parents

Communication - calendars, grading, and participation expectations should always be clearly communicated. Find multiple ways to keep your parents in touch - paper handouts, Charms, band websites, Facebook groups, Instagram, Twitter (make sure you understand and respect your district's view on the use of social media).

Invite parents to chaperone on trips. It is a GOOD thing for them to see you in action! They usually come away with a whole new appreciation for what you do with the kids.

Always try to have your concerts in nice venues that accommodate everyone. If that's not always possible, get creative!

Pick the right battles with parents.

Even though it's hard... admit that something might be your fault when it is.

Transitioning To A New Position When Growth Or Change Is Needed

If you feel that you are ready for a change, be honest with your head director or others that depend on you. Be professional and polite in your desire to transition.

Ask others for advice!

Look for the place or change that you want. Will this new position fill your needs?

“The grass is always greener...” Don't assume that leaving will fix all of your problems or frustrations.

“Nuts and Bolts” of Teaching

A. Being a Good Assistant

Be a “kid magnet”

Write things down and take notes!

Anticipate things that you can handle on your own.

Be dependable, reliable, and trustworthy.

Take ownership in things of which you are in charge.
Be in other band rehearsals when you are free. Offer to help in any way possible.

B. Being a Good Head Director

Make your assistant's life easier; remember what worked for you as an assistant, and coach/mentor them as you would want to be helped.

Support your "cluster" campuses.

Be appreciative of your assistants - never take them for granted.

"Fall on your sword" only when appropriate – this applies to dealings with parents, your assistant, students, and administrators.

Plan ahead and be as organized as possible.

C. Find Groups Better Than Yours

Listen to recordings.

Take time to go watch other teachers (in the classroom, as well as performances).

Volunteer to organize a region band and observe the clinician's teaching style.

Remember - you enjoy music! Go out and hear concerts, practice your instrument, seek out new pieces, etc.

D. No excuses! (You can't turn around at UIL and give the judges a disclaimer!)

We are all trying our best with what we have.

Know the difference between venting and complaining.

Don't assume that good information is all that you need- it must be applied in a way that students understand. Students learn in so many different ways!

E. Programming

Ask your experienced teachers/mentors for advice in this area. Lots of people will have opinions, but make sure you pick the music that best fits YOUR group.

Consider the ability level of the entire group. What are your students' strengths and weaknesses? What music will feature their strengths? What will they be able to pull off in the time you have? How will you approach rehearsing it? Do you have a plan?

The more experienced you become, the easier this process will be.

Do your own score study, or seek out a mentor/clinician that can guide you.

Make a plan before the rehearsal! Create time limits and stick to them. Sometimes moving on is necessary, so gauge your group's ability to fix it that day or not.

F. Be Organized

Being organized helps when things get hectic.

Keep your desk and classroom clean (it's not your custodian's job). Your students will respond/ behave better in a clean environment.

Treat everything like a presentation of you, your work, your students, and your program.

Take pride!

Keep a running list of things you want to improve upon next year.

G. Establish Procedures

Do this on day one in your classes! The first couple days and weeks of school will establish what the expectations are for the rest of the year.

How do the students enter the room? Where do they store things? How do they set themselves up for class? How do they pack up at the end of class? etc.

Find classroom management techniques that fit in with your personality.

H. Be Patient

Year-to-year - change doesn't come easy to a program.

Day-to-day - be consistent with your expectations and be clear about what you want your students to rehearse and sound like; they will do their best to meet those expectations. It might take some time, but always listen carefully and "hear through" their current mistakes to gauge their potential. Remember... students want to please you.

Micromanage pedagogy and procedure, not spirit and energy!

I. Get Involved in the Profession

- Go to conventions (TMEA, TBA, TODA, TCDA)
- Get professional development (TBA, SHSU, SMU, and offer professional development sessions over the summer and throughout the school year)
- Get involved in your region. Don't be afraid to do the grunt work – hire judges, drive the percussion truck, be a clinic organizer.
- Look into getting your graduate degree – many universities are offering great part-time and/or full time degrees.

We would like to thank our teachers, mentors & "band heroes" from the University of Houston Moores School of Music, who gave us the foundation to be successful during our first years of teaching & beyond.

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