

Setting the Foundation for Good Discipline

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Pre-band Class

Having taught beginning band for many years, I recommend that you do some sort of Pre-band class (I do a recorder class). During the pre-band class, discipline is easy to teach. Students should be taught that their success in band class and even the instrument that they will be allowed to choose will be partially based on their behavior. If you use the pre-band class to select the best students out of a group, you may tell them they could be eliminated by bad behavior. If you are not going to eliminate any students, let them know that they may not get their first choice of instrument because of bad behavior.

The following is an explanation of how to use this concept in a pre-band class.

Two rules and Only Two Rules

There are only two rules in Band. State the two rules and ask students to recite them back to you. Do this daily until you are sure that every single student knows them and can recite them easily.

Rule #1: No noise in Band Class. If you wish you can say *Recorder Class*, but from the very beginning, you want to let the students know that you are going to be preparing them for the real class (Band) when they get the “real” instrument.

Explain that Band is different from any other class because you will sometimes be in classes with large numbers of students with expensive noise makers. If anyone is going to progress at all and learn to do well on an instrument, we all have to learn to be quiet. In order to be allowed to start on a real instrument (or to receive the instrument of your choice), you are going to have to prove that you can behave and be quiet. At the end of *Recorder Class*, a truthful assessment of how you have done is going to be sent home to your parents. It is imperative that I tell the truth because your parents are going to be spending time and money on you to purchase an instrument. I won't lie to your parents. If you really want to start on an instrument, you are going to have to prove to me that you want it enough to behave.

Practice Rule #1 by asking the students to talk quietly. Then when you say (loudly enough for them to hear) “RULE #1”, they are to be silent enough to hear the air conditioning or any ambient noise in the room. If there is still whispering or fidgeting, tell them that they didn't get quiet enough and to repeat the process, until they can be totally silent, enough to hear the ambient noise. Explain that when you say “RULE #1” any time in the future, they are not to finish the syllable that they are speaking, but rather stop any noise immediately. Practice this often.

Some students have come to your class and may have never met an adult who really expects them to behave. It is very important that you make it clear that they aren't going to be selected for a real instrument if they cannot act properly (or may not get their first choice). As students misbehave or are disobedient, use some sort of

arrangement where they are not allowed to participate as part of the group. Place them in your office, or simply off to the side of the room; do not allow them to take their recorder or book with them. Instill in them that it is a privilege to participate in band, and they will not be able to enjoy the privilege unless they meet your expectations. Don't yell and be harsh, just insist that they not participate with the class.

If someone is placed off to the side, leave them there for a short period of time the first time (2-3 minutes) and then ask them why they were placed there. In order to become a part of the group again, you must insist that they answer the question correctly and directly. They must admit their offense and not be allowed to say, "I don't know". If they won't answer, then tell them that you are going to give them more time to think about it. Then go back and teach the class as you would normally. After a short period of time, ask again what they did to get placed off to the side. If they give a direct answer that admits their offense, ask them, "do you want to be a part of the group or would you rather sit over there?" If they want to come back, let them back and tell them they are going to have to behave.

On the second or subsequent offense(s) leave the student apart longer. Make sure that you explain to him in front of the others what your expectations are and how you will be lengthening the time for each offense. Let him/her know as well that if they are continuously in trouble, they will not receive a good assessment for continuing on to a real instrument.

Do not attack the student, but do address the behavioral problems that you encounter. Help the student understand their incorrect behavior and how it is inappropriate for band. As you instruct the students with issues, all of the students will learn what you expect and how they are to behave.

It is important that you are consistent. Be careful to notice every infraction of behavior in a friendly and firm manner. Do not lose your temper, and do not "yell" at the students. If you handle this properly during *Recorder Class*, the students will meet your expectations throughout the year.

Rule #2: *Follow instructions perfectly.* In band class, I am going to be explaining what to do with your lips, teeth, tongue, fingers, hands, back, head, ears, brain, feet and lungs. If you follow instructions perfectly you will become a better musician. During *Recorder Class*, I am going to be looking for students who can behave and follow instructions perfectly. I don't care if you are a straight "A" student or not, I'm looking for people who will follow instructions. If you do, you will do well and I will let your parents know how well you did. It is very important that you show me that you want to continue on to a real instrument by "Following Instructions Perfectly".

Rule #1 and #2, should be introduced together and reinforced repeatedly in the first several weeks of school. When you notice someone not following instructions, talk to them honestly about what they are doing and how much you want them to do well, but that you will have to be honest with their parents and tell the truth. Engender an attitude that it is a privilege to be in band and they will have to be their best to be a part.

Rule #1 and #2 should be reviewed daily with the class to make sure they remember and understand what the rules are. With two simple rules, you will have the tools necessary for good classroom management.

Discipline in Band Class

Just as I stated in Recorder Class, there are only two rules in Band. Continue to emphasize the two rules and remind the students of their importance. It is necessary that you expect them to follow the two rules in a firm and friendly manner.

Rule #1: *No noise in Band Class.*

Rule #2: *Follow instructions perfectly*

Engender an attitude that it is a privilege to be in band and they will have to be their best to be a part. As students “test” the rules, simply ask the student in question to pack up and not play. When you do this, always have the student clap rhythms, finger and name and finger along with each song. They should do everything the class is doing except without the fun of playing the instrument.

If a student continues to be a problem after packing up, take the next step; have them stand over to the side in a “time out” location. Do not allow them to be in a location that can be distracting to the other students.

If a student continues to be a problem while standing to the side, let them know that the next step is to go see an administrator. If you make that statement and the student tests it, you must be prepared to follow through. The first time a student visits the administrator in charge of discipline, it is best to explain the situation to the administrator with the student listening. Ask for their help in disciplining the student, but do not recommend any type of specific consequence. It is often best on the first visit to simply document the troublesome student’s infraction and leave it at that. Later, the student and administrator will remember the first visit and will know that perhaps more action is needed.

If you have done a good job of letting go of students who are discipline problems in Recorder Class, and have set an atmosphere of “no noise” and “following instructions perfectly”, you shouldn’t have any problems that will need to go to the administration. Do your best to handle all discipline problems in class without going to administration.

Posture is Tied to Discipline

Posture must be taught in *Recorder Class* and reinforced in *Beginning Band*. Many of the good habits that we expect from good musicians are typified in good posture. It is listed on almost every judging sheet in both concert and marching adjudication, and is the first criterion that an adjudicator has on which to judge your band. Posture is important in proper breathing and therefore in tone production. Finally, good posture

helps a student to focus and stay on task. The degree of energy and interest from a student can be seen in their body language and therefore in their posture.

Teach good posture by pulling out a chair and sitting down. Display the posture that you are asking for while describing it to the student. Following is a recommended posture for a young student in elementary or middle school. The specified posture will be expected every time the group is performing in any manner.

Sit up on the front part of the chair, with your “back-end” on the front of the chair and your feet flat on the floor. Keep your back straight, but not stiff, keep your vertebrae straight, not collapsed. After you show them and explain, ask them to model it for you. Walk around the room and look at the students, giving them input both positive and corrective feedback to help them understand your expectations.

Your mantra will be, “sit up straight, both feet flat on the floor, back straight as a board”. Again remember that you don’t want their back to be stiff, but rather relaxed and straight and not hunched over. Make the speech often until they respond immediately when you make it. Practice with the students, getting into the correct posture position, by allowing them to go to relaxed position first and then to the correct performance or learning posture.

If you have different criteria than the above, teach it specifically, making it clear to the student so that there is no question in their mind what you expect. Remember that no matter what standard you set, there will always be someone who will “chip-away” at it, and not quite meet your expectation. The key to success is to set a higher expectation than you really want, so that when they lower the standard, they actually meet your expectation. Thus, some students who are “rule followers” will actually meet your higher standard, and pull-up the expectation of the whole group.

There are many rewards in teaching the correct posture. Better performance on the instrument is achieved, performance appearance is enhanced, and attention, focus and discipline are improved. If you are the feeder program to another school or band director, they will greatly appreciate you teaching the students proper discipline and posture.