



rethinking your
warm up

smartmusic.

One leading educator thinks we should strike “warm up” from our vocabularies. Another thinks we should do away with tuning up our ensembles at the beginning of rehearsals.

Hear what these and other educators think about warm ups. Some of their actual warm up examples, offered for band, choir, orchestra, and jazz ensemble.

Their approaches are certain to inspire you to try new warm up ideas, engage your students, and ultimately make your rehearsals more productive.



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make the beginning of rehearsal engaging + productive

I have taught band for more than twenty-five years. During that time I've changed many, many aspects of my teaching practice as I've learned and discovered new ideas. However, no element has evolved more than my approach to "warm ups."

To begin, I have all but erased the words "warm up" from my teaching vocabulary, as they no longer accurately describe how I approach the first fifteen to thirty minutes of my rehearsal. I am not really interested in *warming up* the instrument. That will happen anyway. What I want is to get my students *focused* and *listening* while making sure that certain fundamental aspects of playing are practiced and improved.

The Calming Effects of Routine

There is always an element of predictability to at least part of my fundamentals time. There is something innately calming about routine. Parents of small children often have a set bedtime routine that occurs each night. Perhaps the child gets a drink of water, brushes his or her teeth, and then snuggles next to mom or dad for a story, song, and goodnight kisses before turning on the night light and being tucked in. The element of predictability helps the child feel calm and relaxed.

When we spend the first few minutes of our band class in a predictable manner, this has a similar effect on our young musicians. Students are able to put the hustle and bustle of the passing period behind them and settle into a sense of calm, which then sets the tone for the rehearsal ahead.

Breathing

Often the first thing that I ask students to do is a short breathing routine. We accompany the breathing with hand motions that mimic the direction of the

air stream. In the photo on the following page, students are demonstrating the starting position with their hands all the way out. When they breathe in, they'll move their hands in towards their bodies.

These motions allow me to visually monitor the students' timing of the breath. This exercise is more about focusing the students' minds and working on timing than it is on developing breath capacity, although that can be a secondary benefit.

Since my goal is to focus and calm the students, I tend to avoid asking students to fill their lungs to capacity in this exercise because of the tension that it creates in the body. When you try this in your own classroom, work to get students taking a full, relaxed and expansive breath on the inhale, while making sure that the exhale is focused and directional.

Breathing Routine for Focus and Timing

This chart, and the following bullet points, illustrate our breathing routine. You can see what the hand positions look like in my classroom in the photo on the next page.

Sip	Out	In	Out	Sip	Out	In	Out
1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

- Sip: Take a sip of air to release the note (your hand moves toward you)
- Out: Exhale the stale air (your hand moves away)
- In: Take a full, relaxed, two-count breath (your hand moves toward you)
- Out: Exhale a focused and directed stream of air for four beats (your hand moves away)



Fundamentals-Based Exercises

Following two or three minutes of breathing, I move into fundamentals-based exercises. Students begin with a concert F whole note, followed by a whole rest in a repeating pattern.



This exercise is beautifully simplistic. It can be performed by the youngest musicians (on mouthpieces/small instruments) to the most proficient, while allowing focus on all three parts of the note: beginning, middle, and end.

Throughout the exercise, center feedback on helping the students to perform with a resonant, vibrant tone that matches that of their neighbors. As a result, students will hear lots of information concerning breath support, air speed, posture, embouchure, and vowel shape.

The whole rest provides a perfect opportunity for me to give a few words of feedback which the students can then immediately apply, making the feedback

loop as short as possible. Once I am happy with the quality of the sound, my focus turns to the clarity of entrances and releases. Again, feedback is quick, continuous, and the students apply it immediately. We only stop the exercise if an extended explanation is needed, or if I want the students to respond to questions about what they hear.

Articulation Exercises

Once clarity of entrances and releases are established, I move to exercises that focus on articulation consistency and accuracy. Exercises which keep students on a single pitch, such as Concert F, are preferable because they allow isolation of skill. If we try to tackle too many things at once, our work will be less effective.



Exercises such as the one above can be modified to work on a variety of articulations and styles. Simply substitute in staccato, accent or any other style to change the focus.

Exercises for Changing Notes

Only after clarity of tone and articulation are established, and I am certain that students are focused, listening, and engaged in the fundamentals process, will I move into exercises where students change notes. These could include Remington exercises, scale patterns, chordal patterns, or chorales. Use these exercises to focus on changing notes with precision or improving intonation.

Note that it is extremely important to stop periodically throughout the fundamental set to pose higher-level questions to your students. As your students become more experienced listeners and musicians, your questions should become more in-depth.

Example Questions

Beginning Band:

- What did you hear? (This question gives student flexibility in how they answer and is safe because there really are no wrong answers!)
- What did you think of the tone quality of the clarinet section?

Developing Band:

- Which section of the band do you hear sticking out of the ensemble texture?
- Describe the articulation you are hearing from the trumpet section. What would you tell the trumpets to do to improve their articulation on this exercise?

Advanced Band:

- What adjustments need to be made to tuning (or balance) in this chord in order to achieve our best sound?

As you structure your own “warm up,” try developing a fundamentals-based routine that focuses on mastery of breathing, embouchure, vowel shape, articulations, and releases. Because these skills drive nearly every other aspect of playing, they must be practiced with a goal of excellence, rather than mere proficiency.

When fundamentals become automatic for your students, their minds will increase their capacity to carry out more complex musical tasks, while still performing the fundamentals with precision and clarity. As a result, everything your students play will improve!



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Learn more on the [On and Off the Podium](#) website and the [SmartMusic blog](#).

my elementary choir warm up philosophy

If you're like me, you have experienced some confusion about the purpose of choral warm ups. Many people seem to do warm ups because that's what they've always done – before you sing, you warm up. Even after I understood why I did my own personal warm ups in voice lessons, I still was falling back on some vague “warm ups are to choir rehearsals as stretches are to soccer practice” explanation, which, as a non-athlete, didn't really clarify things. However, through excellent instruction and mentors, and a plethora of experience, I finally feel like I have a handle on the purpose of warm ups.

Why We Warm Up

Here are my reasons for warm ups, in no particular order:

Routine and Transition

Warm ups alert students that we are starting and they become part of the routine of rehearsal, something that students (and also the teacher) may find beneficial.

Teaching and Reinforcing Vocal Health

Warm ups are the ideal place to teach basics like proper breathing, tall vowels, and how to access high notes. Since there is no performance goal, you can focus on one skill per warm up. This focused preparation early in rehearsal prepares students to juggle more than one skill when they are working on concert repertoire.

Preparing Song-Specific Skills

This is a subcategory of the point mentioned above. Do you have lots of staccato notes in one of your pieces? Long, connected phrases? Sudden or gradual dynamic changes? Choose a warm up that focuses on those aspects, or build your own. When you encounter that particular challenge later in rehearsal, you will find that with a quick reminder about the warm up, the skill has already been mastered.

Building Musicianship

Warm-up time is when I build ear training or partner song and round skills, depending on the level and goals of the group I'm working with. If you're working on ear training, incorporate intervals or patterns that occur in your repertoire. If you're working on singing in parts, up the challenge level weekly by adding more parts, changing standing positions, or reducing the number of people on a part.

Warm Ups for 5 Skill Areas

When planning warm ups for my 3rd-grade choir, I cover the following skills in the following order:

1. Breathing
2. Tone
3. Range
4. Diction
5. Ear training/part singing

Below I share an example and an explanation of a favorite warm up in each category.

Breathing

I incorporate focused breathing practice into every rehearsal, using an [expandable ball](#). I use this ball because it expands 360 degrees, providing a great model for what the rib cage does when we take a full singers' breath.

During the first rehearsal, I tell kids that to sing well, we have to learn how to breathe. I then elaborate that breathing for everyday life and breathing for singing are different. This includes a short, age-appropriate explanation of the diaphragm and the rib cage, as well as a demonstration of a good singer's breath. I also demonstrate, in a slightly exaggerated way, a bad singer's breath,



and have students identify what moves and doesn't move during each type of breath. Students then practice their singers' breaths.

During subsequent lessons, students breathe with the ball, inhaling as it expands and exhaling as it contracts. After a few lessons, I have students come to the front of the class and lead the breathing ball exercise, and I also have student monitors who identify a breathing star for each rehearsal.

Tone

The short explanation of this exercise is: students sing "May we follow you" on a descending five-note scale.

Voice

May we fo - llow you

However, this warm up takes lots of preparation and kinesthetic work in order to achieve its focus on pure vowel sounds and round tone. I cover one vowel sound each week, and each sound gets a picture, a hand movement (kinesthetic), and a descending five-note scale on that vowel.

Week 1: Eh [ɛ]

- Picture: Elephant
- Kinesthetic: Flip hands so fingers face down and backs of fingers brush slowly up against cheeks.

Week 2: Ee [i]

- Picture: Football goalposts
- Kinesthetic: Index fingers at the corners of the mouth (mimicking football goalposts). Make sure to encourage a tall sound here – kids can experiment with a very lateral ee and then a tall one.

Week 3: ah [a]

- Picture: A face with a light bulb: "A-ha!"
- Kinesthetic: A palm perpendicular to face, hand moving either down or up and out in front of the mouth. Palm moving down is best if your kids have a hard time dropping their jaw, and palm moving up and out is best if you want to bring the sound more forward.

Week 4: ooh [u]

- Picture: A milkshake
- Kinesthetic: Fingers moving away from mouth like they're pulling a thread out of it. For this vowel, I like to ask students what their favorite kind of milkshake is, then we pretend we're drinking a milkshake through a straw, so they purse their lips. Then we use that mouth position to make a pure [u] sound and add the hand motion.

Week 5: Oh [o]

- Picture: A face with a shocked open mouth
- Kinesthetic: The index finger drawing a circle in front of the mouth. This comes after ooh because first we remember our milkshake flavors, then we drink them, and then we say, "Oh no, my milkshake's gone!"

Then in either week five or six, introduce the full "May We Follow You" with kinesthetics. Doing the kinesthetics in order while singing will be confusing for a few weeks – it helps if the teacher or a student who learned them quickly can model.

Range

This warm up helps students stretch their range, and it is so absurd that kids can't help but enjoy themselves. Once they get up to E or F, I often have them shoot a layup on the top note, which helps them land on top of the note rather than approaching it from below.

Voice

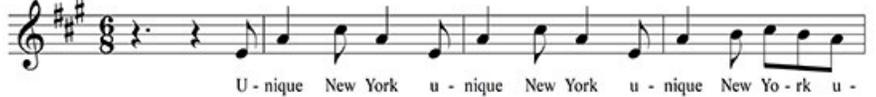


I am a cow Moo-oo - oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo

Diction

Tongue twisters get lips, jaws, and tongues moving to encourage excellent enunciation, and I've found the students of all ages love the challenge and silliness that tongue twisters bring out. Both pitched and unpitched tongue twisters will help students with diction practice.

Voice



U - nique New York u - nique New York u - nique New Yo - rk u -

Ear Training / Part Singing

My favorite in this category is the song *Fish and Chips*. Many people are familiar with this song in slightly varying iterations. It is a great introduction to singing in parts, as it has three standard sections that can all be sung simultaneously, plus a fourth verse that I learned while student teaching, which kids love for its "ick" factor. Introduce one section per week, and experiment with singing them in unison in order and splitting into different groups to sing them as partner songs.

Pure Fun

I always end my elementary choir rehearsal with a song that is purely fun – something that they will keep singing after rehearsal and tell their friends about. However, if there is a day that my warm ups feel particularly laborious, or the kids have lots of energy, or no energy, I may add one of these songs at the end of my warm up routine. These include any number of silly camp songs and are even more fun if they incorporate body movements ala the *Chicken Dance* or the *Hokey Pokey*.

As music educators, we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. For many of the ideas that I've shared with you, and for their general knowledge, wisdom, and kindness, I would like to particularly thank Dr. Leila Heil, Kate Klotz, and Connie Dewlen.



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beginning orchestra: warm up to success

I believe that every part of the lesson is just as important as the other. If one part of the lesson is weaker than the others, it can affect the overall quality of the learning that day. Conversely, when each part flows seamlessly and is just as informative and engaging as the last, students and teachers walk out feeling fulfilled in their learning. Each step is just as important as the others, and it all begins with the warm ups.

Why Warm Up?

Warm ups aren't just about playing a scale to get your fingers moving. They are a sacred time set aside to help the musician physically and mentally prepare for a successful class. Warm ups help students switch gears from

whatever class or interaction they just completed to directing their focus on music. They establish a sense of routine and familiarity that builds on the structured environment we all strive to create when we work with kids.

There are several different kinds of warm ups I keep in my back pocket to rotate through when starting off the lesson for the day, all intended to serve a specific purpose.

Physical Preparation

I learned to respect the warm up in a particularly memorable college studio class. Before giving us any tips, the professor asked us what we thought the

first step to warming up was – and then he called on me. I paused for a moment and said, “Scales and slow practice.” As great as that answer was, there was a crucial initial step that I missed: stretching.

We proceeded to go through a series of stretches to warm up all the muscles, big and small, that are necessary for playing our instruments. I would have loved to learn the importance of stretching as a beginning musician, so I encourage this habit in my students now.

Go through some basic stretches with them, and put them to music. Students can do finger taps on their knees or backs of their instruments, or tap each finger and the thumb together close to their ears so they can hear them make that “pop” sound. Stretch out each arm, and slowly roll the neck or shoulders.

Focus on posture. Go from sitting to standing without making a sound or making any unnecessary movements. Show your students how to sit up straight by having them slump over their knees and sit up with each part of their vertebrae stacking on top of the other. Do a little bow hold warm up, tapping each finger on the bow, bending and straightening the thumb, focusing on the areas they still need work on. And finally, add the instruments and do a “quick check,” letting go of their instruments and making sure everything is either staying on the shoulder (for violin and viola), between the knees (for cello), or on the inside of the leg (for bass).

As far as music choices, find out what songs and artists your kids listen to and pick something relevant to them. My classes have enjoyed singing along to *Perfect* by Ed Sheeran and *You Are the Best Thing* by Ray LaMontagne while they warm up. In fact, one student proclaimed that it was her favorite part of class because of the music.

Scales with Rhythms and Articulations

Once posture is looking solid and the muscles are warm, choose a scale or two to work on for a few minutes. This can be done with a metronome, to a drone, in rounds (my students’ personal favorite), and with whatever rhythm or articulation you want.

Scales are a great way to focus on intonation and introduce or review technical concepts. This is the time I work on slurs and the variety of bow strokes with my

students and talk more about achieving different dynamics.

I once wrote the different dynamics on the board, ranging from pianissimo to fortissimo, and pointed to the dynamic I wanted them to use throughout the scale. This is the perfect time to have students focus on the three fundamentals of good tone: bow speed, placement, and weight.

Find Your Go-To Exercises

I introduce the *Open String Cycle* to my students early on in the year and start off class with it every few weeks after that. It is a basic exercise I learned from my coworkers that has the whole orchestra playing each of their strings 8 times, then 4, then 3, 2, and 1 time without stopping. They start with the highest string of the orchestra (so violins and bass play E string 8 times), go all the way down to C and go back up. It is a great way for students to focus on bow usage and angle as they switch strings.

[Download a 5 page Open String Cycle example.](#)

As the year progresses, I increase the difficulty by showing the violists and cellists how to play their highest E’s (fourth finger on A for viola, fourth position, first finger for cello) and the basses and violins to play their C’s (shifting on the G string for bass, and third finger on G for violin). We always play the open string cycle to a backing track that helps keep the tempo steady. Because it is simple for students to memorize, I can get them started and let them carry on alone while I walk around and adjust their posture.

Be on the lookout for similar “keeper” warm ups that are simple enough that students can pick them up quickly (providing you with mobility), while having the potential to become more challenging.

Sight-Reading Exercises

Whether you read through a couple pages from a method book, or pull out a new song, it’s crucial to have students regularly work on their reading abilities. I created a sight-reading packet. Included are:

- Several one-line exercises that were written by co-workers
- Short, popular songs (*Hot Cross Buns* never gets old when it’s in different keys!) and
- Longer exercises that allow students to focus on playing longer in a certain key

One resource I found for these longer exercises is the [Uni-Tunes](#) book by Carol Nunez.

Refine Listening Skills with Ear Training

We like to play a game called “copycat.” I play four beats, and the students immediately copy me. I might give a hint and tell them what string to start on, or what the first note is, or I might not. I will keep repeating the “leader” measure until most of the students get it before moving on. Here’s what it might sound like:

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff is labeled 'Leader' and 'Copier Repeats' and contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5. The second staff is labeled '5 Leader' and 'Copier Repeats' and contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5. The notes are written on a treble clef staff.

Students love it. Whether I am making up a sequence of notes or bringing in a melody from a piece we are working on, they enjoy testing their knowledge and continuously playing. The key rule to reiterate before we start: the leader always plays first; the copiers listen. Another fun way to take this game to the next step is to let students be the leaders.

Always Remember Music Theory!

Word of the Week is a great way to sharpen students’ mental power right at the beginning of class. It is something I learned from a fellow student teacher in Juneau and it always receives rave reviews from students at the end of the year.

At the beginning of the first class each week, I put up four different staves with four different words spelled out using notes. I just draw the notes with sharpie on large staves and draw blank spaces on the white board under each letter. It becomes a race for students to decipher their word and write it up there. It is a great way to help students start off class with a brain-working task and work together to decipher.

By the end of the year, I was writing the more complicated, longer words (baggage and cabbage are great ones!), and eventually turned it over to the students, as they wrote their own words of the week.

Word of the Week

The image shows four staves of musical notation in 3/4 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 120. The staves are labeled Violin, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. Each staff contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5. The notes are written on their respective staves.

Warm ups are a crucial time in every lesson. What I love is that there are thousands of ways to make warm ups both beneficial and engaging to students. Find what works with your teaching philosophy and goals, and your students will benefit from a successful pattern of focused practice and healthy habits.



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blues-based warm ups for the jazz ensemble

Blues represent a great way to warm up any jazz band. In addition to providing the foundation that jazz, rock, and rhythm and blues are built on, the blues progression is simple enough for beginners to explore. Whether you're finding yourself in front of a jazz band for the first time this year, or are an experienced jazz director, I hope you'll consider sharing some of the following blues warm up concepts with your students.

The Blues Progression

The blues progression is one of the most common forms found in jazz. It is 12 measures in length and in its simplest form, only deals with 3 to 5 chords, depending on which blues progression you are focusing on. For this post, I will be discussing the progression known as jazz blues. The progression can be found below:

C7 F7 C7 C7

F7 F7 C7 A7

Dmin7 G7 C7 G7

Exercises Using The Blues Scale

Typically, when a new semester begins, I try to think of interesting ways to warm up the jazz band while teaching them something that can be useful in their section playing or when improvising. The first warm up I would like to

show you involves the blues scale. Commonly, when the blues is first introduced to students, the corresponding scale that is also taught is the blues scale.

This scale has its strengths and weaknesses, but something it does really well is that it allows students to hear a sequence of notes sounding different than ones found in the major scale. Jazz harmonies often sound different than harmonies found in band or orchestra music, and the blues scale can help prepare them for such sounds. Below is the blues scale in C:

1 b3 4 b4 5 b7 1

As you can see, I have shown you how to alter the major scale in order to get the correct notes of the blues scale.

Adding Articulation

I suggest writing the blues scale on a white board, or chalkboard in the rehearsal hall so the students are able to see it and better comprehend it. Once they are familiar with the scale, add in these simple articulations to make it sound more like a phrase and less like a scale.

C Bb A G F Eb C

Jazz often incorporates a series of articulations known as backbeat or back-accent articulation. Basically, tongue the first downbeat, then the next upbeat, then only the proceeding upbeats. It helps to give the music forward



momentum while establishing a swing feel within the music. You can see how it's used on the first two beats of the blues scale and it will become even clearer in the exercises that follow.

The next step in this exercise is to go up the scale and back down. As you can see, I have added in articulations that make this sound more like a musical phrase instead of an ascending and descending scale.



I have also written in a precise cut off at the end of the phrase. The "-1" indicates that the sound cuts off right on the downbeat of 1 (-1 ½ would be the end of beat 1, -2 would be beat 2, etc.). Cutting the sound off at the correct time is extremely important in any style of music, but can either make a jazz band sound experienced or like one that needs a little more polishing. When doing this exercise, listen very carefully to make sure everyone is using the correct articulations and using extreme precision on the cutoff. This will help any of the

passages found in the music.

More Keys

As the semester progresses, start having the students play the blues scale in just a few keys, then move to all 12 keys as a warm up with the proper articulation, cutoffs and style. I generally move in the circle of 4ths starting on C but you can see what best fits your ensemble. If you warm up correctly, everything will gradually sync into your jazz band charts. This will take some time, but eventually they will be able to complete this exercise.

[Download a two-page PDF featuring the blues scale in all 12 keys.](#)

Warm Ups Involving Modes

While still utilizing the blues progression, you can warm up the jazz band using modes from the major scale. When learning to improvise you learn that chords have a corresponding scale you can use to create your melodies over any given harmony, or chord. This technique is known as the chord-scale relationship. For this exercise we'll be using the mixolydian and dorian modes. Mixolydian can be used over the dominant chords and dorian over the minor chord.

The exercise is below:

The image shows a musical score for a jazz exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff starts with a C7 chord and features a melodic line with eighth notes and accents on the backbeats. The second staff continues the exercise with F7, C7, and A7 chords. The third staff concludes with DMIN7, G7, and C7 chords. The exercise focuses on articulation and phrasing through ascending modes related to the chords.

The exercise uses the backbeat, or back-accent, articulation while moving through the ascending modes that relate to the chords. This can be a lengthy warm up if you choose to do this in all 12 keys. I would suggest 2-3 keys each day, or week, just to get the students acclimated to the exercise. It will still be very beneficial. The goal is to use the proper articulation throughout the ensemble while learning the scales, or modes, that relate to the chords. I have had a lot of success with it and hope you will too.

These are just a couple of the warm up exercises that I have found useful when working with different jazz bands on various levels. They help when it comes to the unification of the ensemble, articulation, and phrasing. Obviously, you can modify them in any way to make them fit your jazz band because each group is different. But most importantly, have fun with it and enjoy sharing jazz with your students.



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the importance of warm up time for instrumental teachers

We all know that doing warm ups is important as part of a daily routine for instrumental music teachers. Individual and group warm ups can serve multiple functions that include physical, mental, and technical preparation for rehearsal. The time allotted before, and at the beginning of the rehearsal, should be viewed as invested time, not time wasted. Students and teachers can save hours of practice and rehearsal time by creating carefully planned warm up activities.

Individual Warm Ups

Students should have personal warm up goals for the time immediately preceding each rehearsal. The moment they enter the music room they can be focusing their mind and getting ready to rehearse. They also need to get

blood flowing to all muscle groups to avoid injury and better prepare them for complex, rigorous, and rapid muscle movements, both large and small. For string players and percussionists this may include slow large muscle movements in both sitting and standing positions, followed by some stretching. Wind players may do some breathing and embouchure warm ups including lip slurs for brass.

You may want to have daily or weekly pre-rehearsal goals written out for students in their folders, on the SMART Board, or on your projection device. These might consist of notated exercises that focus on different pedagogical issues unique to each instrument. String players might have bowing patterns to work on while brass players might work on long tones. Woodwinds might

work on fingering issues, while percussionists practice rudiments or mallet related exercises.

Ensemble Warm Ups

The design of your large ensemble warm ups should be based on your curriculum. Most often these warm ups are skill-based. To start, look at your year-long curricular goals. What are the skills students need to learn? How can you teach them in a five- to fifteen-minute activity each day?

Once the technical and musical skills have been identified, they should be sequenced in a way that they can be taught over the course of an entire year. Most skills are developmental and require repetition and time. A skill such as vibrato may take a whole year to teach, develop, and refine. A little bit of work in regular warm up intervals enhances the acquisition of each skill.

Once all the long-term skills have been given their allotted time throughout the year, teachers can also focus on short-term goals such as repertoire-driven issues. Each piece you select to perform should reinforce your curricular goals for the year. The short-term goal may be to learn these three pieces, but the long-term goal is for students to gain the skills as stated in your curriculum and district standards.

Warm Up Specifics

A typical warm up period may focus on issues like tone, rhythm, intonation, range, phrasing, blend and balance, and bowing fluency. Specific techniques like spiccato, double-tonguing, going across the break, and rudiments may also be addressed. Using method and technique books at all levels can be a real help in structuring your warm up curriculum.

If I were working on tuning G major intervals in a string orchestra I would use exercise number 9 in the *Sound Innovations Creative Warm-ups* book:

INTERVALS IN G MAJOR—Listen for the interval that occurs at each fermata. Adjust to remove any “beats” in the sound. Intervals in this exercise include a Major 2nd, Major 3rd, Perfect 4th, Perfect 5th, Major 6th, Major 7th, and Perfect 8th/Octave. Evaluate and refine your performance. Write out each interval starting on G using music notation.

The musical notation shows two staves in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff is in treble clef and the second in bass clef. The exercise consists of four measures, each starting on G4. The intervals are labeled as follows: Measure 1: P5, P4; Measure 2: M6, M3; Measure 3: M7, M6; Measure 4: M2, P8.

Wind players might use exercise 24 in *Sound Innovations Ensemble Development for Intermediate Concert Band* to work in the key of Bb:

The musical notation shows a single staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats (Bb). The exercise is labeled "BALANCE AND INTONATION: PERFECT INTERVALS" and "24". It consists of four measures, each starting on Bb4. The intervals are labeled as follows: Measure 1: P5, P4; Measure 2: M6, M3; Measure 3: M7, M6; Measure 4: M2, P8.

All the upper-level books in the *Sound Innovations* series are designed to be used as part of a warm-up curriculum. It is important that each exercise you use or develop be short enough that it can be accomplished quickly. Written out scales, arpeggios, and chorales can be a powerful ally in skill development.

What Drives What

An important question I asked myself as a young teacher was, “does the repertoire drive the curriculum or does the curriculum drive the repertoire”? I believe it is the latter. If that is the case, then it is easy to coordinate your warm up books and exercises with the specific pieces you have chosen. It is important to use a skill-based rubric with each piece you select to determine which technical and musical skills are needed for the piece and how can you prepare students for success by incorporating those into the warm up time. A great strategy is to start working on the most important skills the concert period before you begin the piece.

Other skills will require on-time delivery as you start the music. Some standard warm-up strategies include using the piece you are working on to determine the scale, rhythms, bowing, sticking, and tonguing patterns used in the warm up period. Another might be to use chorales to establish key centers, chord tuning, balance, and listening skills. Students can be sensitized to conducting gestures by playing scales at differing tempos as indicated by their conductor.

This is also a great time to engage the ear by teaching aurally. You may teach an exercise, rhythm, mode, melody, harmony, or bass line by ear. The use of rote tunes allows you to visually focus on the students and, more importantly, they can focus visually and aurally on you. It also gives you a chance to model each technique, sound or rhythm for them.

Preparing Students for Success

In many ways, the success of any rehearsal depends on the time and care that are devoted to the warm-up process. Preparing students for success in

this way makes differentiation easy and helps the teacher stay focused on the skills and musical issues that need to be learned. It is all too easy to realize – at the end of the year – that you didn't cover everything you hoped you would. It is like the American history teacher who hasn't made it past the Civil War by the time school is out. The music we expose students to is very important, but we all teach in a vertical curriculum that demands we prepare students for the next level. Warm up time is a critical moment in that process.



Pedagogue, composer, and teacher trainer, Bob Phillips is an innovator in string education. Read his articles and bio on the [SmartMusic blog](#).



reevaluating warm up routines

As we begin a new academic year, I find myself reflecting on my class routines and seeking ways to reinvigorate my classes and streamline my teaching procedures. One area I have been reflecting on this summer is the class warm up routine, its purpose, and related strategies.

What is your class warm up routine? Is it effective? Is it clear? Is it meaningful to your students? Does it represent an efficient use of time and make your ensemble better in the long run?

A solid warm up should be all of these things. It must truly benefit your ensemble.

Why should directors have a warm up routine?

A warm up routine should address a variety of ensemble issues in a predictable and enjoyable manner. The warm up should:

- Promote student focus
- Contribute to refined individual and ensemble tuning
- Develop listening skills
- Develop new and advanced technique
- Promote enhanced attention to the conductor, and/or
- Allow for the development of ensemble nuance

While a warm up may not be able to address each of these areas daily, it should focus on one or two of them on any given day. Let's explore each of these areas in greater focus.

Routine/Focus

Routine is imperative for our students. Students crave routine and always respond positively to a meaningful and predictable warm up routine.

"Routines help children feel secure and comfortable and help them understand the expectations of the environment. They help reduce the frequency of behavior problems and can result in higher rates of child engagement."

- Imagine Education Australia, Helping Children Understand Routines

In *Learning to Teach...not just for beginners*, author Linda Shalaway explains, "Routines are the backbone of daily classroom life. They facilitate teaching and learning. Routines don't just make your life easier, they save valuable classroom time. And what's most important, efficient routines make it easier for students to learn and achieve more."

We would all certainly advocate for anything likely to make your students feel more secure and designed to save classroom time!

Refined Tuning and Intonation

A strong warm up should focus on both individual and ensemble tuning. I want my students to think about their own instrument tuning and how they match up with and adjust to the ensemble tuning. For a string orchestra, an important part of my warm up routine is what I refer to as my "tuning procedure." This procedure promotes active corporate listening, personal accountability, and eye contact with the conductor.

We begin with a general "A" and everyone tunes their instruments to the best of their ability. I don't usually do this for younger groups, but there is no harm in everyone giving it a try! When tuning to the general "A" encourage everyone to tune at a dynamic of piano.

Individual Tuning

I believe that tuning is essentially a series of binary questions:

1. Is my instrument in tune with the tuning note? (Yes or no)
2. If no, is it sharp or flat? If the student isn't sure, they should try adjusting one way or the other.
3. Did my adjustment make it better or worse? (yes or no)
4. If worse, try adjusting the adjust the other way.

Group Tuning

1. Have everyone tune a unison A. When in tune, they should make eye contact with you.
2. On your cue, have the viola, celli, and bass to move to a D (and get that in tune as the violins continue sounding their A). When in tune, they again make eye contact.
3. When you are satisfied the low D's are in tune, have the violins move to D while the violas, celli, and bass continue to sound their D. When you have eye contact from all violins, have the violas, celli, and bass move to the G. When they are making eye contact (and are in tune), have the violins move to G while the violas, celli, and bass continue to sound their G.
4. Do the same for the viola and celli C string. Basses should stay on the G for this, along with the violins. When finished with the low C, have everyone stop playing for a second or two.
5. Then, go back to a unison A. Invariably, some students will need to adjust. By now, they are really listening.

While you can [learn the rest of this tuning procedure here](#), you get the idea: students are listening to each other, they are making eye contact with you, and the process continues to refine their intonation. In time the whole process can become relatively quick and completely non-verbal.

Listening

As you can see, the tuning procedure promotes listening across the room. The treble parts must listen to the lower voices and vice versa. I find that successful ensembles are aware of other voices at all times. So, the repetition of a consistent warm up procedure promotes this habit. This is one of the reasons so many warm up routines utilize a chorale as part of the warm up routine.

Over the course of time, students really learn what the other voices are doing. On any given day, a different voice may be emphasized as part of the warm up. It can be a great idea to have one of the voices play their part alone and then have the rest of the ensemble sing their part (learning it by rote). This will transform the way the ensemble hears each other for the rest of rehearsal.

Technique

The warm up routine is also a wonderful time to introduce and enforce new or more advanced techniques. In a string orchestra setting, I advocate using "cycle

form" exercises or etudes. Cycle form was developed by noted pedagog, George Bornoff, and is a magnificent tool for teaching technique in a heterogeneous classroom environment.

I teach these etudes by rote, and once they are in place, they are the perfect vehicle for technique development. The concept is as follows: teach the students a pattern on any string. This can be a scale or interval pattern.

For the purposes of this article, let's use the first 4 notes of the major scale as an example. (On the G string: A, B, C#, and D.) At the most basic level, each of the pitches will be played 4 times in a quarter note pattern up and down the tetrachord. [A more detailed description of this system can be found here](#) with links to handouts, fingerings, and many more resources in the description below the videos.

(sul G string)

Musical score for sul G string exercise. It consists of four staves: Treble, Bass, Bass, and Bass. The first staff (Treble) shows a sequence of seven measures with notes G, A, B, C#, D, C#, B, A, G. Fingerings are indicated above the notes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1. The second staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 1, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1. The third staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 1. The fourth staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 1.

This pattern can be reproduced on each of the open strings in the same way.
(sul C String)

Musical score for sul C string exercise. It consists of four staves: Treble, Bass, Bass, and Bass. The first staff (Treble) is empty. The second staff (Bass) shows a sequence of seven measures with notes C, D, E, F#, G, F#, E, C. Fingerings are indicated above the notes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1. The third staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 1, 3, 4, 3, 1, 1. The fourth staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 1.

(sul D string)

Musical score for sul D string exercise. It consists of four staves: Treble, Bass, Bass, and Bass. The first staff (Treble) shows a sequence of seven measures with notes D, E, F#, G, A, G, F#, E, D. Fingerings are indicated above the notes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1. The second staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1. The third staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 1, 3, 4, 3, 1, 1. The fourth staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 1.

(sul A string)

Musical score for sul A string exercise. It consists of four staves: Treble, Bass, Bass, and Bass. The first staff (Treble) shows a sequence of seven measures with notes A, B, C#, D, C#, B, A, G. Fingerings are indicated above the notes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1. The second staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 1, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1. The third staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 1. The fourth staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 1.

(sul E string)

Musical score for sul E string exercise. It consists of four staves: Treble, Bass, Bass, and Bass. The first staff (Treble) shows a sequence of seven measures with notes E, F#, G, A, G, F#, E, D. Fingerings are indicated above the notes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 3, 2, 1. The second staff (Bass) is empty. The third staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 1. The fourth staff (Bass) shows the same sequence of notes. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 1, 4, 2, 4, 2, 4, 1.

The key point is that each string feels the same to the left hand. It is the same pattern on each string. These patterns can be very simple or more complex. The idea is to establish the cycle form as the standard; then new techniques can be taught or re-enforced through the routine. For example, I teach bowing styles (spiccato, martele, etc) rhythmic bowing patterns (hooked bowing), shifting, upper positions, and other left or right-hand techniques using this strategy.

Nuance

When using a regular chorale as part of the warm up routine, you might encourage the ensemble to focus on nuance. The ensemble will become fluent when a chorale is repeated regularly over a period of time. With fluency, comes nuance. As the ensemble becomes more and more familiar with the basics of the chorale, you can ask for more nuance such as an emphasis on phrasing, rhythmic push/pull, and dynamic variation. Emphasizing this in warm ups will facilitate these same discussions in performance repertoire.

Watching

The warm up can also help elevate the attention your students give you as you conduct. As warm up repertoire is internalized and becomes fluent, you can begin to demonstrate higher expectations of following the stick and utilize more nuance in their conducting. So often, in the performance repertoire, student musicians are focused on reading their part. The warm up can be a welcome break from the written page and an opportunity to develop other skills including watching the conductor.

What to Use?

How does a director choose solid resources for a warm up routine? I believe a warm up book should be clear, comprehensive, and built on the strongest pedagogical foundations. For strings, I use *Habits of a Successful String Musician: A Comprehensive Curriculum for Use During Fundamentals Time*, by Christopher Selby, Scott Rush, and Rich Moon (GIA Publications). This book presents a differentiated, sequential, and comprehensive method for developing skills that lead to mastery of rhythmic, tonal, and ensemble skills. It provides wonderfully written technique builders that relate to virtually all of the points I have made in this article.

Obviously, there are many warm up resources available for teachers to select from, and I encourage you to find the one that works for you and your students. These resources can vary in depth, focus, pedagogical underpinning, and even "look." All of these factors matter and can have a great deal to do with the overall success of your warm up routine.

Communicate Your Goals

Finally, we must continuously articulate and reinforce the goals of a warm up routine to our students! They need to know why this time is so important. If we

forget to keep our students reminded of this, they will surely become complacent. And, in some ways, reminding them is a good reminder for us as well!

So, as you approach the coming academic year, I encourage you to consider your warm up routine. Perhaps it is time for some tweaking. Perhaps it is time for a complete overhaul. Or, maybe yours is just right, and you can approach it with a newfound confidence and resolve. No matter which camp you are in, I wish you much success in the coming school year with the finest of musical and ensemble results!



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a mindful, community-building choir warm up

For music educators and choir directors, the warm up can become a stale part of the rehearsal. When you take a fresh look at it, it can become a time for excitement, community building, and music reading. It can even offer a moment for mindfulness practices. Too many choir directors go through the motions during a warm up with mindless “mi-mi-mi-mi-mi’s” and tedious tongue twisters. It is time to give a little more love to this crucial part of the choral rehearsal and see how it really makes a difference not only in your choir’s sound, but also your choir’s cohesion as a group.

Three years ago, as a final project in my choir classes, I gave students the opportunity to create their own warm up for our class. This project was eye opening. I saw some students mimic exactly every exercise I did and when I

asked them to address why they chose a particular warm up, they could not even give me a solid answer.

This forced me to take a step back and reflect. Was I rushing through my warm ups to get to the music? Was I missing an opportunity to really teach students what goes into healthy, lifelong singing habits? How do I make my warm up an engaging part of the classroom experience while also communicating why each part of the warm up is important?

Three Essential Steps

Now I explain to my students that every warm up has three essential steps. These essential steps include a set of exercises focused on your physical

body, your breathing, and your voice. Every warm up must have a combination of exercises that delve into these.

It's also vital to sure these exercises are engaging, purposeful, and fun. I focus on the fun because it's the easiest way to trick kids into practicing healthy singing technique while also increasing their positive engagement in school. Middle school is a daunting age group to teach but it's even more challenging for the students. A fun and engaging warm up is a great way to make students experience the joy in music and also to provide a space where students feel excited and comfortable to be themselves around their peers.

Physical Warm Ups

I have acquired many physical warm ups from the land of phys ed and theatre arts. Whether you are just shaking it all out or doing a plank challenge, the physical warm ups should be tied to any part of the body used for singing. I always ask my students; "What parts of the body are used for singing?"

Hint: It's a trick question!

Singing is a whole body exercise. So any parts of the body can be focused on during the physical warm up. I've seen major benefits of infusing standing yoga poses into my choir warm up. Typically every Friday, my choirs do a basic flow through some standing poses that help elongate the spine and promote healthy singing posture.

Breathing Warm Ups

Breathing warm ups have become a centering moment for my choirs. We practice mindfulness here but also explore the capacity of our breath. Before we move in depth, I invite my students to close their eyes and practice three types of meditative breathing techniques.

First we start with the standard "In through your nose and out through your open mouth." Next we move into a closed lip breath (ujjayi breath), where you breathe in through your nose and back out your nose with sealed lips. Lastly we do a lion's breath, where you breathe in through your nose, stick out your tongue and make a loud exhale.

Each of these breathing exercises require students to be silent, meditative,

and have a chance to center themselves before we move into rehearsing music. After this, we move into more traditional breathing exercises like patching, hissing, and other exercises that build our abdominal muscles.

Vocal Warm Ups

This is where the fun happens! The key is to use warm ups that not only address a vocal need for your group but also engage them to the point where they are having fun. The easiest way to get a small, timid middle school choir to sing louder is to trick them into it.

I like to start off any warm up I do with something that works through the nasal passages and helps wake up the face. I tell students to imagine their mom wakes them up for school early in the morning and their response to her is SOO ANNOYED that they CAN'T EVEN, so they respond to her with a nasal, annoyed "MAAA!"

Let them have fun, but remind them not to push shout or scream. Then take that nasal "MAA!" and put it on a descending triad (3-2-1). Encourage healthy fun exploring the sound a nasal tone makes.

Next, to change the sound a bit, have them imagine that their mom just made them their favorite dinner! Naturally they're so excited that they smile, open their mouths wide and say "MAAA!" with love and appreciation. Then put that on the same descending triad. The singers will be tricked into a beautiful, open sound.

Using the Alphabet

Another fun, tricky warm up is based on the alphabet. Have students sing the alphabet up and down on a 5 note pattern (1-2-3-4-5-4-3-2-1- etc) until the end. First challenge your choir to speed up their tempo but still be precise on all their letters. Next, pick a medium tempo but invite a student to pick two letters somewhere in the middle of the alphabet to omit. Then sing the exercise but when you get to those letters, you replace them with rests.

Concentration is key here! Your singers will not want to have a surprise solo during this warm up. You can increase the difficulty by removing more letters. It's so fun working through this warm up that students won't even be able to keep themselves from laughing. Allowing them to have fun with their singing

and make little mistakes with this challenge will open the door to realize that to sing together, you must be vulnerable together.

The Range-Extender Unicorn

For the final warm up, which I like to call the *Range-Extender Unicorn*, have students sing a simple "You", and slide it up an entire octave and then back down.

Where does the unicorn come in?

I like to tell my students to envision they are unicorns and to point to where their unicorn horn comes out. This is exactly where their sound should feel like it's coming out while they make this octave leap. Since physical movement is often helpful with healthy vocal production, I then invite the students to send their hands up into the sky, out through their unicorn horn.

I swear it's all about selling it. Your singers will giggle, think it's goofy and give it a try. After they give it a try, you'll see that they have a bright, heightened sound as they envision this range extension exercise going all the way out their forehead.

I tend to use all these exercises in a given week during my warm ups. Having fun and building community is one of my priorities as a choir director of young people. If our students do not love the space they are in and feel comfortable being a little vulnerable, then we won't ever get to the challenging stuff.

Grounding your warm up in a marriage of mindful practices and exciting vocal tricks is just one of the ways to build community in your choir. Do not neglect the warm up because it holds the key to success when building a strong choir culture. Instead of brushing through to get to the "music," take some time here to focus on the singers that make your choir all that it is.



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using chorales as orchestra warm ups

6

6. THE NIGHT HAS COME

(Die Nacht ist kommen)

Page 2 in part books.

We've all experienced those frustrating days when it takes half the rehearsal to really get going. Choosing a warm-up that requires additional brain cells can help students engage more quickly. I've found that technical exercises like scales and arpeggios don't entice students to actively participate. If you instead choose something like a Bach chorale, they will have to listen to how they interact with the group and watch you. Technical drills, especially if you do the same routine daily, will engage fingers and bodies, but minds will begin to wander. Chorales will require students to listen, watch, and analyze right away.

Listening

Chorales are fantastic for teaching intonation because the counterpoint and harmonies are so clear. I recommend simply asking the orchestra to listen to their neighbors and match. This helps students engage with the ensemble right away rather than mindlessly playing a bunch of easy notes. It also empowers them to make adjustments without you directly telling them what needs to be done.

If you have time, you can dive in with some more detailed exercises. I typically have all voice parts play together and then break it down. For example, with a full orchestra, you can have everyone playing the soprano line play together. This will help the flutes and first violins to tune across the ensemble (they likely didn't hear each other the first time). Afterward, they'll start listening more closely to each other.

You can also isolate different voices playing together, perhaps bass and tenor lines, and ask students to listen for the intervals between them. This is a great time to engage not only the bass and tenor lines but also to ask the alto and soprano students what they heard to help their lower friends out.

Listening can also help students focus on matching timbre. I may have one section, perhaps the violas this time, play a few measures and then ask the rest of the ensemble to describe the viola section's sound. (If you have a marker board available, you can write these adjectives down.) Then I ask the orchestra to try to match that section. You can try this drill with a few sections to get students thinking about descriptive words and considering what they can do to explore their sounds. Finally, ask students to write three adjectives for their own instrument's ideal sound in the margin and to play with that sound.

Watching

There are a couple places you can ask the orchestra to watch. Primarily, you can have them watch you! Let them know what you're working on before you start so they know where to focus. If we're preparing a pops concert with lots of tempo changes, I'll let students know that this time through we're going to have a different tempo after each fermata or that they should watch me and be prepared to ritard or accelerate. You can also have them watch you for dynamic changes, articulation styles, and phrasing.

Secondly, if you have a strong concertmaster, you can ask the orchestra to follow that student. This helps them combine listening and watching, developing skills required to play in chamber groups. Chamber music opportunities help develop independence and confidence, so even if it's rough the first few times, I would suggest letting one student in the front row lead the ensemble once a week. This also helps students learn context; sometimes they'll need to watch you, sometimes they'll need to watch their colleagues, and sometimes they'll need to do both.

Analyzing

I always ask questions after we play a chorale:

- What did you see?
- What did you hear?
- What did you like?
- What would you like to do better?

I get three or four quick answers and ask each student to pick one of those things to focus on, and then we play the same chorale again. Or maybe I pick the answer that suggests the area I agree needs the most work before playing again. Or perhaps I pick the one that got the most nods from other students.

Whatever questions I ask, we play, we critique, and then we go again, and we do this right away from the first downbeat of the rehearsal, which helps set the expectation that they'll do that throughout the rehearsal as well.

Another strategy I use is to send a section or a few students from each section out of the ensemble to listen and report back. In addition to the questions I usually ask, I also ask what they heard from the other side of the room that they didn't hear when they played in the ensemble. We'll play again, and I ask if the observers heard a change (the answer is almost always yes.) Then, we switch groups and do the same again.

This strategy takes a bit more time than I usually plan for chorales, so it's a once a week or every other week activity instead of one we do every day. It also goes more quickly as the semester progresses since students become more confident contributing their observations and faster with the transition into and out of the ensemble.

Final Thoughts

I use the Bach/Thurston edition for strings published by Southern Music Company ([available at J.W. Pepper](#)). While it does not include much in the way of bowings, this edition does include a variety of key signatures, time signatures, and both major and minor modes. If you happen to be teaching a full orchestra, you can order [select parts from the band version](#) to fill out your ensemble. The string version lists how the band version scores wind and brass parts and alternate keys for some of the chorales if you want to write out your own parts for one or two chorales.

I've seen chorales used in both bands and orchestras, and every time the students both learn something from them and enjoy playing them. I suggest spending about five to ten minutes playing one or two chorales per day. Remind students to listen and watch from the first downbeat and then pick one concept you'd like to reinforce, be it intonation, timbre, articulation, dynamics, pulse, or something else. You'll see better engagement right away and more productive rehearsals overall.

Excerpt from Bach Chorales for Strings, arranged by Richard E. Thurston, is used with permission from [Southern Music](#).



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warm ups are my secret weapon

There's a lot to get done in one orchestra rehearsal. Time management is always on my mind as I make lesson plans and determine the most effective ways to help my students learn and progress. It may sound strange, but I spent more time planning warm ups than any other portion of rehearsal. That is because warm ups are my secret weapon. Carefully crafted warm up activities set the stage for the entire rehearsal and help students learn repertoire more quickly. Warm up time is when every new skill is learned and reinforced.

Warm-up activities should never be random. I feel warm-up time should serve a specific purpose to help the students throughout the rehearsal. At the beginning of a rehearsal students are fresh and ready to work. During my 5-10 minute warm up, students are first introduced to new skills away from sheet music. We might practice a new rhythm and bowing using a familiar scale or learn a new note sequence by rote. Students are focusing and absorbing new skills without the worry of reading from a page.

Once new skills have been taught they must be reinforced. Warm up time is perfect for reinforcing and solidifying necessary performance skills. Below are some ideas and examples of warm up activities that reinforce skills.

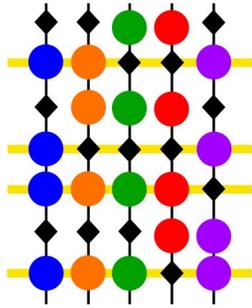
Rhythm Cards

Make slides featuring the various rhythms your students need to master. Students can practice by clapping/saying the counting, playing on open strings, or even playing each slide on a different note of a scale.

[Download my beginning orchestra first rhythm cards.](#)

Finger Patterns

Encourage students to practice finger patterns on various strings using this chart ([click here to see a full size, downloadable PDF](#)):



Using this chart, I can call out any color and any string and students will play the pattern. For example, I could say, "Orange, A" and students would play the orange pattern on the A string: A, B, C natural, D, E, D, C, B, A.

Finger-pattern Exercises

Have students practice patterns which are needed to master concert music. I created a series of drills to help students practice correct finger patterns based on the key signatures. [This page of examples](#) is from my book *Finger Pattern Drill Warm ups for String Orchestra*, available for purchase at orchestraclassroom.com.

Piece Previews

Create excerpts of difficult passages from your repertoire in Finale to use for warm ups. Students can learn their concert music so much more quickly when challenging passages are drilled as a class during warm-up time.

Andante: Warm-up

[View the entire warm up.](#)

Scales

There are so many ways to play scales. Instead of having students mindlessly play through a scale, add variety to keep them thinking. Using a standard scale, students can work on bowing, rhythm, dynamics, tone, intonation, balance, and ensemble skills.

A regular G major scale might start to feel really easy, but you can add some difficulty with a little creativity. Have students play double notes on the way up the scale one octave apart (see example below) or add a difficult bowing.

G Scale Challenge

I consider warm-up time to be the most important part of rehearsal. Warm ups should serve a purpose and be applicable in the repertoire. With carefully planned exercises, students will be better equipped to reach success.



Angela Harman teaches orchestra at Spanish Fork Junior High in Spanish Fork and is the founder of orchestraclassroom.com and the [orchestra teacher blog](#). Read her articles and bio on the [SmartMusic blog](#).



apply concert band warm up concepts to the jazz ensemble

If you are like me, your jazz band meets once a week and you are always in a hurry to get things accomplished. I get it! You start your first rehearsal in November or January with "Ok, guys and gals. We have 4 weeks to put a concert on. Here we go!" However, even in a time crunch, it is important to dedicate at least 10-15 minutes of fundamentals time with the jazz ensemble.

My goal is to share ideas on how to adapt and apply your concert band warm ups to the jazz ensemble rehearsal so that your students partake in an efficient, yet necessary, warm up.

If we "zoom out" on the typical concert band warm up, I think that most of us will find that we are focusing on three main goals:

1. Tone/Intonation,
2. Articulation, and
3. Rhythm/Reading

Within each of these three broad categories, there are several subsets of goals with the foremost focus being *Ensemble Unity*. While there are many "means to an end," here some of my ideas on what works.

Tone/Intonation

Your typical concert band will work through an assortment of long tone and tuning exercises. These exercises can be easily reinforced at the beginning jazz rehearsal. I would recommend taking these exercises and adding a rhythm section part.

Articulation

This section of your warm up can be most easily adapted. The goal in this section is to unify the execution of the following articulations in addition to swing 8ths:

You can rehearse these articulations just as you would in your concert band class. Some ideas would include call and response between director and student, matching player to player, matching section to section, matching as a full band in balance and vertical precision, playing articulations in unison and different registers, and playing articulations with chords (major, minor, dominant, sus, major7, etc.)

In addition to the above articulation techniques, you can work on swinging 8ths by playing through scales with swung 8ths. You can do this exercise in major, minor, and even Dorian and Mixolydian to introduce “jazz” scales. Below is a sample in the key of C mixolydian. This scale also includes accents to teach the swing concept of emphasizing the first, highest, and last notes of a phrase.

Rhythm/Reading

Your work above with articulations will segue well into rhythm reading. If you are proficient in Finale or Sibelius, or know someone who is, you can write out

simple rhythms, with articulations, to read through. I will add one step, and that is to have the students SING the rhythms with jazz syllables before playing. Many directors do rhythm charts, or something similar, with their concert bands. Why not do so with the jazz ensemble? The same principle applies. Get the students more familiar with rhythms that they will encounter in music so that they become better readers.

Setting Students up for Success

In my opinion, one of the quickest ways for a jazz ensemble to lose credibility with students and/or fellow directors alike is by skipping fundamentals. For example, allowing students to partake in an unstructured and unmonitored self warm up followed by going straight to music. It is important to not only show that the jazz ensemble, like any other ensemble, has processes that should be in place and respected, but to also make sure that all of your players are set up for success. I hope that I've been able to provide you with a springboard to help strengthen the rehearsals and performance of your jazz ensemble.



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rethinking your warm up: never tune again

I have found over the years that I tune my band less and less. In the past, I would frequently ask a student to sound a pitch, perhaps on tuba or oboe, and have the rest of the ensemble play their own notes and compare. Today this happens far less often.

Skipping tuning wasn't a conscious decision, I didn't wake up one day and decide, "You know what? No more tuning. It's over. Done." It is just something that has happened over the course of time.

That isn't to say my students do not focus on tuning. Instead, they always focus on tuning. We talk about it throughout rehearsal, it comes up with the first note

of the day, and oftentimes with the last note. There is a tuning awareness that is part of their subconscious when playing.

My Philosophy

I believe that developing a subconscious sense of tuning (and other elements of musicianship) is the goal of our warm ups. We have students focus on the fundamentals of music to make their awareness and performance of ensemble skills automatic. I want to encourage students to play with excellent tone, in tune, with attention to articulation, dynamics, and phrasing while playing the right notes with the proper balance. And I want them to do this automatically, without thinking about it.

Reflections on Tuning During Class

When I realized that I turned away from “tuning” as part of the warm up, I thought deeply about why this occurred. I mean, all the cool band directors tune. Right? The fact is, as I have developed the warm up program with my ensembles, I have experienced fewer instances when I have found it necessary to stop the rehearsal momentum to tune.

I also realized that defining part of the rehearsal as “tuning” might suggest to students that tuning was a task we could complete during that time. As if we were saying; “This is it. This is when we tune. Ok, that’s done, let’s move on to something else.” Clearly the last thing I want is for students to think we no longer need to focus on tuning.

Here’s Where I Backpedal – a Little

I don’t mean to say that it is wrong to have a student sound a pitch, add in the ensemble to compare pitch, and get them relatively close. I still do that from time to time. It is good practice and sometimes the quickest way to get students focused. But it’s important that students learn that part of their job as an ensemble member is to always have an awareness of their relative pitch compared with those around them. It’s my goal that through our deliberate and consistent practice of fundamentals, their attention to tuning (and many other ensemble concepts) are becoming part of their musical fabric.

How to Make It Automatic

For an example of how you can help your students become more automatic with their tuning, take a peek at an exercise called Passing the Tonic. This is a technique used in all three levels of Sound Innovations Ensemble Development.

While this specific exercise is not duplicated in the books (every exercise is different), the concept remains the same. We simply pass the tonic pitch of the given key around the band. This could mean high voices to low voices, or first parts to second parts, or all through the families of instruments. It means listening to, and then comparing your pitch, as it occurs all around the ensemble.

[Download Passing the Tonic](#)

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Students use a few different skills with this kind of exercise. First, they have to listen to the sound they are producing and ask themselves, “Is this a good sound?” Then they have to compare their pitch to what they just heard, decide if they are the same or different, adjust as needed by using their critical listening skills, and check again to see if their change is better.

Why It Works

The beauty of this is that this type of exercise is so simple but the goals are so complex. Students are responsible for making the decisions and they get practice playing in tune. They are in charge, not me. I’m not yelling, “Flat, Sharp, Good, Flat, Sharp, SUPER Sharp...” from the podium. There is a great sense of accomplishment, for everyone, when students go from out-of-tune to in-tune. You can see their faces light up when the pitch locks in. You can see they get it!

As a teacher it is gratifying to hear their progress, knowing that soon we are going to translate their newfound skill to their music, because that is truly our goal, right? Having our warm up come to life through the music?

More Philosophy

We work diligently through our warm ups to prepare students so they play their fundamentals instinctively. Our warm up goal is to help students practice musical intuition as much as it is to prepare their minds and bodies for performance. Ultimately, the warm up is a training ground so we can get to the true goal of our ensemble which is to facilitate our students in making a personal connection with music as they perform as a group.



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