



Yorktown High School Saxophone Survival Sheet

No student will be denied the opportunity to participate in the band program based on the quality/brand of their instrument. Achievement is enhanced when students perform on quality instruments and understand how to properly care for their instruments. The intent of this document is to serve as a guide for parents and students as they navigate the many options that are available for aspiring musicians who seek to upgrade their instruments and/or purchase the necessary materials to perform required routine maintenance on their instrument.

- **All Musicians Should Own a Metronome and a Tuner.**
- **It is better to buy a quality, used professional instrument than a new beginner/intermediate instrument. Many new instruments will never play in tune, and no amount of practice or hard work will help you make such an instrument sound good.**
- **Quality mouthpieces/reeds have a profound impact on the quality of your sound. Do not underestimate the value of a quality mouthpiece/reed!**
- **Routine maintenance can prevent the majority of reasons you would need to send an instrument to the repair shop. Clean instruments = Happy/working musicians.**

Saxophone Accessories/Cleaning Materials

- A swab (make sure to get the right length for your instrument) (~ \$5-\$20): To clean the inside of the body of the instrument, the best and most efficient swab is a chamois with a center brush attached to a cord, with a weight to pull the cord through the instrument. Cord must be long enough to drop through the full length of the instrument.
- Pad Saver (~ \$15): Do not store Pad Savers inside of the instruments! This will further damage your pads by keeping moisture in the instrument.
- Neck cleaner (~ \$4): a flexible metal wire with a soft wool swab on one end and a stiff brush on the other. *The neck is the most critical portion of the swabbing process, and a neck cleaner is the only way to keep the neck dry and clean.* One size fits all.
- Chamois/soft cloth (~ \$4): to clean the inside and outside of the mouthpiece.
- Mouthpiece brush (~ \$2)
- Polishing cloth (for lacquer) (~ \$4)
- Miracle Polishing Cloth, (for unlacquered areas) (~\$4)
- Reed Case (~ \$12)
- Cork Grease (~ \$2)
- Key Oil (~ \$3)
- Thumb rest cushion (~ \$1)
- Mouthpiece cushion (~ \$5)
- Saxophone Stand (~ \$20 - \$60)

Maintenance

- The inside of the saxophone body, neck, and mouthpiece must be thoroughly dried after each playing.
- Mouthpieces should be washed with mild dishwashing detergent and warm water once a week. The chamois can be rolled to dry/clean out the moisture from the mouthpiece after playing.
- The wool swab of the neck cleaner should be inserted from the large end of the neck after each playing to dry the neck. Once a week, use the brush end of the neck cleaner.

Speak with Band Director &/or Private Instructor before purchases to ensure best deal and appropriate choices

- Swab the body after each playing.
- The mechanism should be oiled 3-4 times a year. A half drop of oil on the end of a needle or toothpick should be placed at each pivot screw of each key. Don't let the oil get on the pads.
- Polish with a soft cloth so that after periods of long use to prevent the lacquer from wearing.
- Placing porous paper between sticky pads and tone holes can often help with sticking pads.
- A polishing cloth on lacquered parts of the instrument will maintain finish, and using a Miracle cloth, a chemically treated polishing cloth, on unlacquered parts, like where the neck connects with the body, can rid of oxidation.

Alto Saxophone

Instrument Recommendation (listed in order from step-up to professional)

- Yanagisawa A-901 Artist Alto Saxophone (~ \$2,700)
- Yanagisawa A-992 Bronze Alto Saxophone (~ \$4,400)
- Selmer Paris Series II Model 52 Jubilee Edition Alto Saxophone (~ \$5,000)

Mouthpiece

- Vandoren Optimum Alto Saxophone Mouthpiece, AL3 (~ \$115)
- Selmer Paris S80 Alto Saxophone mouthpiece, Model C* (~ \$145)

Ligature

- Rovner Dark Alto Sax Ligature & Cap (~ \$18)

Tenor Saxophone

Instrument Recommendation (listed in order from step-up to professional)

- Eastman ETS 640 GL: (~ \$3,400)
- Yanagisawa T-901: (~\$2,800)
- Yanagisawa T-992 Bronze Tenor Saxophone (\$5,000)
- Selmer Paris Series 2, 54 JU (~ \$5,700)

Mouthpiece

- Vandoren V5 Classic Series Tenor Saxophone Mouthpiece, T25 (~ \$125)
- Selmer Paris S80 Tenor Saxophone mouthpiece, Model C* (~ \$170)

Ligature

- Rovner Dark Tenor Sax Ligature & Cap (~ \$18)

Bari Saxophone

Instrument Recommendation (listed in order from step-up to professional)

- Eastman EBS 640 GL: (~\$5,700)
- Yanagasawa B-901: List - (~ \$5,800)
- Yanagisawa B992P Eb Baritone Saxophone, Bronze (\$9,000)
- Selmer Series 2, 55 AFJ (~ \$10,000)

Mouthpiece

- Selmer Paris S80 Bari Saxophone mouthpiece, Model C* (~ \$240)

Ligature

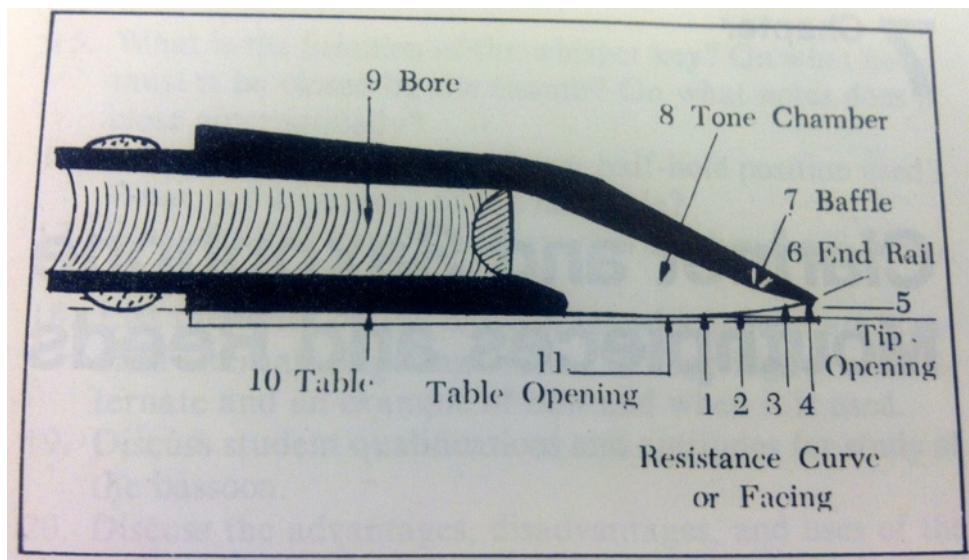
- Rovner Dark Baritone Sax Ligature & Cap (~ \$18)

Mouthpieces

A quality mouthpiece can dramatically improve your sound on any instrument.

Criteria for a Good Mouthpiece

- Produces a tone that has good body, is characteristic of the instrument, and is matching in quality in all registers.
- Plays perfectly in tune in all registers, with no more than normal embouchure adjustments.
- Allows for easy production of all types of articulations from hard short staccato to broad legato at all dynamic ranges.
- Has a wide dynamic range over which the tone quality remains constant.
- Does not require too much or too little mouthpiece in the mouth so that a standard embouchure may be formed.
- Is not too demanding of the reeds, but is one for which it is fairly easy to find and adjust a satisfactory reed of medium strength.



Parts of the Mouthpiece

- Facing: a.k.a. resistance curve or lay, is the portion of the flat side that slants away from the reed. It varies greatly in both length and amount of curvature.
 - A short lay requires less mouthpiece in the mouth and frequently produces a stuffy tone quality with little volume or projection. Needs a stiff reed.
 - An excessively long lay requires more than the normal amount of mouthpiece in the mouth with results in greater length of the reed vibrating, less control, necessitates more than normal breath pressure, is tiring to play and often produces a rough tone. Needs a soft reed.

Speak with Band Director &/or Private Instructor before purchases to ensure best deal and appropriate choices

- **Tip Opening:** distance between the mouthpiece and the reed at the tip. This opening provides the resistance to the flow of breath into the instrument.
 - Close opening: offers great resistance, requires a stiff reed, produces a small, stuffy tone quality.
 - Wide opening: offers little resistance, requires a soft reed, a strong embouchure, and is difficult to control.
 - Medium tip opening is recommended for all students at all levels.*
- 3. **End Rail:** the edge of the mouthpiece tip against which the tip of the reed beats. If the end rail is too wide, the reed responds more slowly (the reed may stick making it difficult to articulate properly). The shape of the end rail should correspond exactly with the shape of the reed.
- 4. **Baffle:** If it is too high, the mouthpiece squeaks, if it is too low, it is difficult to produce and control notes in upper register.
- 5. **Tone Chamber:** the interior of the mouthpiece under the facing. Its proportions determine quality of the tone and response. Avoid radical variations from the standard.
- 6. **Bore:** the portion which fits on the barrel joint. The size and shape of the bore must be a continuation of the bore of the instrument upon which it is used. If the tone is uneven, or if there are serious intonation problems that cannot be identified, you may need to find a different brand with a different bore.

How do I Choose a Mouthpiece that is Right for Me?

- There are numerous combinations of facings and tip openings, but regardless of brand, the most popular facings are of a medium length with a medium tip opening.
- Despite what the model numbers may indicate, no two mouthpieces are identical. Do a playing test before purchasing your mouthpiece.

Reeds

Reeds are the “soul” of your instrument! Clarinet and sax reeds are machine made and are not pre-tested. Expect that within any box you buy there will be some that work, some that need small adjustments, and some that need to be discarded. You should have a rotation of 4 reeds that you use to preserve the quality and longevity of your reeds. Keep them in a proper reed case (not what they come in the boxes) so that they dry properly, are well protected, and last longer.

Criteria for a Good Reed

- Responds freely and easily over the entire range of the instrument.
- Plays all octaves of the instrument well in tune without undue adjustments in embouchure or lip pressure.
- May be controlled throughout the full dynamic range in all octaves of the instrument.
- Produces the correct resistance to wind pressure.
- Allows the complete scope of articulations from hard staccato to soft legato to be played in all octaves.

Reed Recommendations

It is important to try a variety of reeds to find the one that works best for you. We recommend Vandoren V12 and “Blue Box” reeds, or Rico Reserve Classic.

- A harder reed gives a heavier, thicker, and fuller sound. It's more difficult to correct the pitch with a harder reed, but changing dynamics won't result in pitch variations as easily. It's also more difficult to play low pitches softly with a hard reed, but altissimo notes are easier to reach. If a reed is offering so much resistance that it is hard to blow, it is too stiff for you.
- A softer reed makes playing easier - the reed speaks more easily, and gives a lighter, brighter sound. However, there is a greater chance for pitch variations as you play, though it is easier to correct the pitch with your embouchure. High notes can be difficult to achieve with a soft reed. If you have a thin, reedy tone quality, your middle register is difficult to play in tune, lower notes buzz, or less than normal breath pressure produces a tone, this reed is too soft for you.
- The more mature the player, the harder the reed strength they should be playing on. Most high school musicians are playing on 2.5-3.5 strength reeds. Remember, there will be some variation in the strength and quality of reeds within any box, and also among brands. One brand's 2.5 could be equal to another's 3.

Ready to Evaluate a Reed?

- Hold it up to the light - if you can see a symmetrical, inverted V shape, that's the sign of a good reed. “Crooked” V's can lead to squeaking.
- If there is an uneven grain to the reed, chances are it will not play well.
- If there are knots in the reed, it will not vibrate evenly. (note: irregular brown or dark colored marks in the bark will not affect its quality)
- If the reed is greenish in color, the cane is too young - leave it somewhere a few months to see if it will mature to the yellow or golden-brown color you're looking for.
- Fingernail test: The most accurate way of testing the flexibility of a reed is to gently move the tip across the thumbnail to determine how much pressure is necessary to flex it back. The more pressure, the harder the reed. It should flex evenly across the width of the tip. Flexing will also reveal any splits that may be present. If the tip is split, discard the reed.