

Recommendations for Young Saxophonists:

Todd Wilkinson, DMA

If a student is even halfway serious about playing saxophone, I would recommend purchasing an instrument, as the fees charged in rental are usually fairly high and the quality of the instruments and playing condition are often suspicious. And, if you purchase a good used horn, you can almost always resell the instrument and get most of your money back.

If you can afford it, get a good quality instrument, as they will make playing easier and more enjoyable. Yamaha, Yanagisawa, and Selmer make good quality student model horns. I'm am fond of the P. Mauriat line of instruments. They actually produce professional quality instruments at affordable prices, so this might be an option. Keilworth has also made some great horns.

If possible, steer clear of the older Bundy, and Conn student horns (these usually have a brass body and silver keys), and try not to get bush-wacked by one of the brand new and inexpensive Chinese or Italian made 'knock-offs.' They look nice but play terribly out of tune. I'm not convinced about the quality of Cannonball, Jupiter, Bauhuas Walstein, Santee, LC Chang, and Monique. If you can, have a reputable saxophonist play them first! See if you can find a used Yamaha or Yanagisawa for around \$1,200. There are several professional repairmen that are having these produced under their own names as well. Beware.

Some good places to check out good high quality saxophones are:

<http://saxalley.com/>

<http://tenormadness.com/>

and locally you should try: <http://www.bachorndocor.com/>

Playing set-ups:

Neckstraps: **Stay away from the Neotech straps.** They are very comfortable but they allow the horn to float around. Look for a padded sax strap that doesn't stretch. Here's a link to one that will work just fine:

http://shop.weinermusic.com/BLUE-NOTE-STANDARD-SAX-STRAP-W_PLASTIC-HOOK-STSSNP

Don't worry so much about polish and swabs, but try to give the neck and mouthpiece and good cleaning with warm (not hot) water every few days at least. A brush for cleaning the neck and mouthpiece is handy to have. Reed holders don't have to be fancy. A sheet of stiff plexiglass and rubber bands will work. Keep it in a plastic bag.

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Saxophone Mouthpieces:

In concert band and classical playing, the woodwind element of the sax sound is very important. In band the instrument is expected to blend with clarinets and bassoon, as well as trumpets and euphoniums. Often arrangers and composers will use the saxophone to tonally knit together the woodwinds and brass sections. The rubber Selmer C* mouthpiece with a Selmer ligature is a good choice for all of the saxophones in concert band and classical solo/ensemble work. Just go with a regular two- screw design for the ligatures. I don't like the Rovner or Gigliotti designs as they stretch and allow the reed to float around on the mouthpiece.

Here's a link to a new tenor mouthpiece. I'd suggest trying to get one of these for every sax you own. They aren't difficult for young students to play on, and they will get a better sound quality than the mouthpieces that come with the non-Selmer horns.

<http://shop.weinermusic.com/SELMER-PARIS-S-80-SERIES-TENOR-SAXOPHONE-EBONITE-MOUTHPIECE/productinfo/MST/>

There are several shops that sell used mouthpieces. See links for horns above. The Selmer caps are getting fairly expensive, so get a plastic one, but be certain that all the students have a mouthpiece cap. It will save reeds.

Reeds:

Speaking of reeds, I'd suggest buying Vandoren traditional saxophone reeds, probably in the 2 to 3 1/2 strength range, especially for concert band. They are fairly consistent and long lasting (as reeds go). If you buy reeds locally it will be very expensive, as much as \$5-6 per reed. Buy reeds by the box only. Here's a link for tenor reeds that are \$3.17 per reed. Here's a link:

<http://shop.weinermusic.com/VANDOREN-TRADITIONAL-TENOR-SAXOPHONE-REEDS-5-PER-BOX/productinfo/RVT/>

Jazz Band Mouthpiece Setups:

Jazz Ensemble saxophones have to blend with trumpets and trombones. The 'brass' tone-quality of the sax is usually emphasized, and the C* mouthpieces don't cut the mustard. The trick is, however, in finding a mouthpiece that isn't too radically different from the C*, as younger students may find the jazz mouthpieces more difficult to play on. I'd stay away from Brillhart metal, Claude Lakey plastic, Runyon plastic, Metal Dukoff, and any mouthpiece that is over \$150. Don't worry much over metal verses rubber. It's not the material, but the way the mouthpiece is designed that makes the difference, and rubber is less expensive. As students mature they can begin experimenting with other mouthpieces and facings that suit their individual preferences and needs.

For jazz alto players I recommend a Meyer 5 medium chamber, medium facing, mouthpiece, but as the tip opening is larger, softer reeds will probably be needed. You can still use the Vandoren reeds, but I'd suggest they try a #2 or 2-1/2 strength.

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I've had success with Rico Jazz Select, Rico Royals, Vandoren Java reeds as well. Here's a link:

<http://shop.weinermusic.com/MEYER-RUBBER-ALTO-SAX-MOUTHPIECE/productinfo/MMAR/>

For jazz tenor players a good standard choice is an Otto Link. I'd suggest a 5 or 5*, maybe a 6 or 7.

<http://shop.weinermusic.com/LINK-HARD-RUBBER-TENOR-SAX-MOUTHPIECE/productinfo/MLTHR/>

Again, I'd experiment a bit with reeds, but if the student has been using a C* mouthpiece, #2-3 is probably about the right strength.

For jazz baritone players, it's a tough call. The Berg Larsen ebonite (rubber) mouthpieces are pretty good, and probably a 100/1 in size.

<http://shop.weinermusic.com/LARSEN-EBONITE-BARI-SAX-MOUTHPIECE/productinfo/MLBR%2A/>

I've had good luck with the metal and rubber Otto Links, probably about a 6 or 6*. I've been playing on a 7, and it's a nice sound. Plus they are a bit less expensive.

<http://shop.weinermusic.com/LINK-GOLD-PLATED-BARI-SAX-MOUTHPIECE/productinfo/MLBGP/>

Baritone reeds would follow the same brand and strength as the alto and tenor recommendations.

Methods for Saxophone Instruction:

Probably the most complete (and one of the oldest) method books is: The Universal Method for Saxophone, by Paul DeVille. This book is good for all around saxophone playing, especially if there isn't a great saxophone teacher in the vicinity.

<http://www.amazon.com/Universal-Method-Saxophone-Paul-DeVille/dp/082580146X>

Here's a nice etude book that isn't too difficult to negotiate: It's David Hite's Melodious and Progressive Studies for Saxophone Book 1.

http://jwpepper.com/sheet-music/pdfviewer.jsp?prodnum=4978607&pf=S_4978607

This is a nice book for teaching jazz style articulation:

Developing Jazz Concepts for Saxophone and other instruments , by Lennie Niehaus
http://www.birdlandjazz.it/Lennie-Niehaus_Developing-Jazz-Concepts-for-Sax-P5151.html

Recommendations for Young Saxophonists:

If you would like any other suggestions for saxophone or jazz ensemble, I'd be happy to speak with you any time. I'd also be glad to come to your school and demonstrate different horns, setups and playing styles that involve the saxophone. As well, I can help with choice of literature, set-ups, rehearsals, rhythm section equipment choices. Maybe we can do a clinic? If you have used equipment, horns, mouthpieces, etc., I'll put you in touch with people that can help.

Just give me a call and I will try my best to answer your questions, or set up a time for a visit. My cell phone is **816-797-3264** and my email address is **todd.wilkinson@ottwawa.edu**

Sincerely,

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