

A Quick Guide to Buying a Step Up Instrument

Flutes:

A Step up would be an open-hole flute, meaning the fingerings have holes in them requiring the fingertips to cover the holes. This increases sensitivity and note response, which in turn makes the musician play better. The Novice models have a C-Foot joint, meaning the lowest note the instrument can play is a low C. Intermediate and beyond should have a B-foot joint, which not only goes one note lower, but that one key helps out amazingly well in the high register of the instrument. There is another attribute called the “offset-G.” This ring finger key is on left side and is adjusted forward for a more natural curve to the hand. A “straight G” means all the keys are aligned. It becomes a matter of physiology (the size of the student’s hand) and personal preference. Another feature is the “Split E,” which I am not personally a fan of based on the way I developed playing, but others may like. Due to the care and maintenance of a silver instrument, oftentimes high school flautists will reserve their open hole for indoor playing only, and have a closed-hole student line instrument (usually their first) for marching season.

Brands (in recommended order):	Options:	Cost
(Approx.):		
*Sonare 601 Series	Inline, Offset G, or Offset G with Split E	\$1,700
*Sonare 505 Intermediate Series	Inline, Offset G, or Offset G with Split E	\$1,200
Pearl Quantz 665 Series	Inline G or Offset G with Split E	\$1,000
Yamaha YFL Intermediate	Inline or Offset G	\$1,200

*Sonare flutes come with a Powell head joint, which is a professional level! Verne Q. Powell Flutes are considered the best Professional level flutes.

Piccolo:

Pearl PFP 105 Grenadite piccolo	(combination wood and plastic, durable)	\$1,000
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Professional Level Brands: Powell, Muramatzu, Haynes

Not recommended: Emerson, Gemeinhardt, Bundy, Jupiter

*Yamaha make decent instruments, though the sound on the flutes may be too thin over time...

Clarinets:

A Step-up clarinet may have silver keys as opposed to nickel plated. Touch and response will be greatly improved, but as silver can tarnish the student will need to polish more often. Generally the Step-up will be made of wood, or some hybrid. Care of a wooden instrument must be of utmost importance. It is recommended that the student have a plastic one for marching season and the wooden one reserved for indoor playing. A wooden Clarinet (or oboe or bassoon or for that matter violin, viola, cello, bass, or guitar) will change over time as the wood reacts to different temperatures and conditions. It takes an estimated 30 plus years for the wood to finally “settle” into itself. Stradivarius violins made over a hundred years ago can go for literally millions of dollars! Just think of how much that clarinet can be worth if treated properly over the years!

Brands (in recommended order): Options: Cost
(Approx.):

Buffet E-11 France Intermediate Grenadilla wood, silver keys \$1,500

*made in the same factory where they produce the R13 professional model!

Selmer CL 211 Intermediate Grenadilla wood, silver keys \$1,200

Yamaha YCL 450 Intermediate Grenadilla wood, silver keys \$1,200

Professional Level: Buffet R13, sells for about \$3,200

Not Recommended: Kohlert, Vito, Amati

Recommended Mouthpiece: Vandoren B45 or 5RV Lyre (try them out for preference)

Recommended Ligature: Rovner Clarinet Dark Ligature

*Yamaha makes decent reed family instruments, though for more bang for your buck I recommend the Buffet.

Saxophones:

For longevity and clarity, I strongly recommend the Yamaha line of Saxes. They are reliable horns that can last a long time. The other brand to research is Yanigasawa. It is recommended to stick with the standard Lacquer finish as it provides the necessary warmth to the sound. Different mouthpiece can change the overall tone, so a good instrument as the foundation will adapt better (such as changing between jazz and symphonic styles of playing)

Brands (in recommended order):	Cost (Approx.):
Yamaha YAS-475 Alto Saxophone	\$1,900
Yanigasawa A-901 Artist Alto Saxophone	\$2,500
Yamaha YTS-475 Tenor Saxophone	\$2,200
Yanigasawa T-901 Professional Tenor Saxophone	\$2,700

*Hold off on purchasing a Bari sax until college...

Professional Level:	Yamaha 52, Martin, Yanigasawa
Not Recommended:	Jupiter, Amati, Allora
Recommended Mouthpiece:	Altos: Selmer C*, Tenors: Selmer D*
Recommended Ligature:	Rovner Dark Ligature (for Alto or Tenor Sax)

Oboes/Bassoons:

The only company I whole heartedly recommend for these double reeds is Fox. Because these instruments are specialized in the modern day music idiom, the investment is pricey, but will have a long life and can even end up being the student's professional instrument:

Fox 330 Oboe	\$3,200
Fox 220 Bassoon	\$6,400

*These can function as professional level instruments. If your child is already playing a double reed, you know that it can be a cost demanding instrument. If buying a Double Reed instrument, consult local area musicians such as college professors or professional players, as they may have a used one for sale that has been well taken care of!

Trumpets:

When looking at Step Up brass it is important to note the different alloys used in brass instrument construction: yellow brass, gold brass, red brass and nickel silver. Yellow brass is the most common (70% copper, 30% zinc) and is generally used on student models. Gold brass (85% copper, 15% zinc) will produce a broad, rich tone, but can be pricey. Red brass generally contributes to softer mellow tones. Nickel silver (70% copper, 20% zinc, 10% nickel) produces a bright sound and because of the higher percentage of nickel and zinc will make for a more durable horn.

It is recommended that the step up trumpet be made of nickel silver. Not only does this add a bright sound, but will also enhance the richness of sound from a student line yellow brass instrument. Because nickel silver tarnishes more than yellow brass, the student will want to take great care in maintenance and polishing. Many individuals will play while holding their polishing cloth, as well as get valve casing wraps for added protection. A silver trumpet is practically a badge of honor in a high school, where the student models are generally composed of yellow brass trumpets. Students wishing to pursue interests in drum and bugle corps will find that many of the top corps will be playing silver nickel instruments.

When shopping for a trumpet, you want to look for a Bb trumpet. There are trumpets in C and D, which are used in orchestra settings, and not used in high school or college bands. Be very cautious of the pawn shop trumpet... many times a beautiful trumpet can be found in a shop for a great price, and will turn out to be a C trumpet.

Brands (in recommended order):	Cost (Approx.):
Bach 182 Stradivarius Series Bb Trumpet	\$1,665
Bach TR 200S Series Bb Trumpet	\$1,450
Conn 52BSP CONNstellation Series Bb Trumpet	\$1,350
Kanstul 900-2 Series Bb Trumpet	\$1,500
King 2055 Silver Flair Bb Trumpet (Saddle)	\$1,250
Professional Level:	Bach Stradivarius, Yamaha Xeno, Kanstul
Not Recommended:	Jupiter, Blessing, Allora, Amati
Recommended Mouthpiece:	Bach 1C, 1 ½C, 1F (student should try out)

French Horns:

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When shopping for a Horn, make sure to get a Double Horn, meaning it has both an F and Bb wrap. This is standard in the modern day music world. Two brands come to mind: Holton and Conn. These are instruments that will last, sound great and provide a semi-pro level instrument.

Brands (in recommended order):	Cost (Approx.):
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Holton H379 (nickel silver) Double Horn:	\$2,850
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HoltonH378 (yellow brass) Double Horn:	\$2,650
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Conn 6D Double Horn:	\$2,750
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Professional Level:	Holton H288, Holton Farkas, Conn 8D
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Not Recommended:	Jupiter, Blessing, Yamaha, Amati
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Recommended Mouthpiece:	Holton Farkas Medium Cup, Holton Deep Cup
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Trombones:

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When shopping for a Trombone, look to get one with an F attachment. The student should try out both small and large bore instruments when possible. Small bores will make the air more precise and sustainable. Large bores require more air, but contribute to a darker and fuller sound.

When checking instruments out, be sure to check into the open or closed wrap versions where applicable, and make sure you are shopping for a Tenor Trombone. There are also bass trombones that the student should look into once they go to college.

Brands (in recommended order):	Cost (Approx.):
Conn 88H:	\$2,100
Conn 52H Artist Series with F attachment:	\$1,450
Bach TB200 Series with F attachment:	\$1,500
King 608F Rose Bell with F attachment:	\$1,300
Professional Level:	Conn 88 series, Bach
Not Recommended:	Jupiter, Blessing, Amati
Recommended Mouthpiece:	Bach 6 ½ AL, Bach 5

Euphoniums:

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When shopping for a euphonium, you want to look at two things: that it has a fourth valve, and what it is made of. The fourth valve provides more clarity in certain valve combinations as well as extends the range of the instrument. The euphonium is a conical instrument, and as such will have a mellower and rounder tone than the cylindrical trombone. Warmth of sound is important. A yellow brass euphonium will sound perfectly fine and is recommended a little more than a nickel silver one. If possible a red brass (sometimes called rose brass) is a strong recommendation as it assists in providing a warm sound.

Make sure you are purchasing a euphonium, not a baritone. Those are two different horns, but the baritone is a cylindrical instrument.

Brands (in recommended order):	Cost (Approx.):
Yamaha YEP 321 four valve Euphonium	\$2,000
Kanstul 985-1 four valve Euphonium:	\$2,560
King 2280 Series Euphonium:	\$2,000

Professional Level:	Meinl Weston, Miraphone, Kanstul
Not Recommended:	Jupiter, Amati, Allora
Recommended Mouthpiece:	Bach 6 ½ AL, Bach 5G, Bach 3G, Yamaha 51D

Tubas:

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When shopping for a tuba, it is important to understand that this will not be a cheap endeavor. Pending the store you purchase it from you may need to make payments. As far as details go, tubas come in different sizes depending on the make and model. A $\frac{3}{4}$ size tuba, while being cheaper was made and designed for elementary and middle school band sized students. There are also tubas tuned to Bb, C, Eb and F.

For the purposes of band, I recommend a four rotor Bb tuba. Tubas come with either piston valves or rotors. Generally it is a matter of preference to the player. Each has benefits and issues. I personally recommend rotors, based on fingering agility and easier to maintain.

If you are buying your child a tuba, make sure that they are serious about their studies as this is a large upfront investment. Along with that, a good quality tuba will last a lifetime if well maintained!

Brands (in recommended order):	Cost (Approx.):
Miraphone 282 Series $\frac{3}{4}$ Size BBb Tuba	\$5,300
Miraphone S186 Standard Series BBb Tuba:	\$6,900
Meinl Weston 18 Handy Series $\frac{3}{4}$ BBb Tuba:	\$6,700

Professional Level: Meinl Weston, Miraphone, Kanstul

Not Recommended: Jupiter, Amati, Allora

Recommended Mouthpiece: Conn Helleberg Standard, Perantucci PT-50,
Bach 22, Bach 18