

# Plan with Purpose, Teach with Intent

Success in your performing ensembles doesn't happen by chance. It comes from thoughtful planning, intentional instruction, and consistent accountability. One of the most effective things you can do each year is to begin with the end in mind. Backwards planning helps you identify your goals, whether that's specific music for concerts, contests, or individual student milestones. With intention, you can map out the steps to get to your end goal with confidence. Every rehearsal, assessment, and sectional fits into the bigger picture. This blueprint for success can make an immediate impact on your program, regardless of classification, size, or location!

## In the Summer: Light Engagement, Big Benefits

Planning begins in the summer, but not with traditional rehearsals!

- Focus on activities that build community and keep your performing band students engaged in the musical learning process.
- Host open band hall time where students can practice together, spend time with friends, and ask for teacher input! You can even have regular mini rehearsals that focus on pep tunes for the upcoming year, while allowing students the opportunity to converse and reconnect throughout the summer.
- Introduce ensemble fundamentals that they will use in band, but in a smaller setting with less pressure or time constraints. This is a great time to start taking note of who your strong leaders are and identify potential future soloists as well!

Students thrive when given challenges and opportunities for growth...prizes don't hurt either!

- Use your favorite LMS (Google Classroom, Canvas, etc) to create weekly challenges to keep students engaged and learning. The challenges can be short and attainable for all, like performing a scale.
- Create a tiered system where students earn more points for going faster or playing something from memory. Students crave rewards for their efforts, so be sure to include prizes and recognition for the winners of the challenges when school starts!

Summer is a great time to start crafting your list of potential pieces for the year!

- Attend summer conventions, specifically sessions that expose you to some of the new literature that has been published. One example is the Phi Beta Mu Reading Band session at the Texas Bandmasters Association conference each July.
- Take a little time during your summer break to listen to music, check out our Band BFF's podcast with helpful information on specific pieces, and work to construct your perfect lineup for the year!

## In the Fall: Gauge your Group and Develop the Individual

When school starts, focus on assessing your students immediately.

- Who are your rising stars? Who might be a great soloist for the year? Which sections are already solid, and which need more attention? Taking this time up front helps customize your instruction and set realistic and ambitious goals for each group.
- Tailor your literature line up to find the pieces that will not only fit your band, but enhance their strengths as they grow together throughout the year.

Teach any educational concepts students have not been exposed to or that may need reinforcement.

- If you are looking to perform a piece in 6/8 meter, spend some time in the fall teaching them how to count and perform independently from a specific piece. Program an easy 6/8 piece for your fall concert in order to solidify these skills and create more confidence as they continue to develop.

Make a plan and stick to it!

- Keep record of student growth throughout the year. This can serve as data driven evidence for your T-Tess or TIA evaluations. Assess each student in sectionals, prioritizing tone quality issues, tuning tendencies, and articulation clarity from the very beginning.
- Once areas for growth have been identified, provide intentional instruction. Give achievable objectives to each student to foster slow but steady progress.

Approach All-Region audition preparation as a golden opportunity for growth!

- Whether a student earns a chair or not, the process itself builds discipline and skill. Use it as an opportunity to teach how to practice, not just WHAT to practice.
- Try tempo bumping strategies to build confidence without rushing or having messy technique.
- Create a sectional lesson plan that includes technique, repertoire, and a schedule of assessments that helps maximize your time. Focus on instrument-specific pedagogy such as flow studies, lip slurs, articulation exercises, etc. Incorporate rhythm drills, mock auditions, and tools like the “Wheel of Doom” to keep things FUN!
- Most importantly, use that time to build relationships and grow each individual musician.

Whether you have regular sectionals or not, make sure your students are held to high standards. If sectionals aren’t possible, consider inviting neighboring directors to assist, or find a mentor in the state using the TMEA Mentoring Network!

## In the Spring: Maximize Rehearsal Efficiency

Make the most out of every minute of rehearsal!

- One of the best ways to do this is by marking the music for your students in advance. This gives you the opportunity to see every part from *their* perspective. For example, mark accidentals, write out difficult rhythms, include phrasing considerations, or notate alternate fingering/technique issues.
- This helps streamline the learning process so you can focus on musical detail. YOU already know what is marked in their part from the start of the learning process.

Efficient rehearsals start with the fundamentals and the basics!

- Incorporate daily exercises that target specific skills like articulation, dynamics, or rhythmic clarity. Create Melody Sheets and Rhythm Studies that unify the band, regardless of instrument.
- Keep students accountable with regular pencil and tuner checks to reinforce daily habits. Monitor posture, hand position, and foot tap! Don’t neglect these basics, even late in the year.
- Have clear, planned rehearsal objectives that outline your priorities. Record yourself to reflect on how you’re using time, and adjust as needed.

- Avoid getting stuck in one section or difficult passage. If a group needs help, ask a co-worker or student leader to step in. You can also provide students with individual practice plans to revisit in sectionals or future rehearsals.

## Plan Your Literature Lineup: Performance Milestones

Structure your curriculum around intentional performance milestones. Each concert should develop your students' skills and confidence.

Plan ahead with the end goal in mind. If you want to program a piece by a specific composer in the spring, consider introducing a similar work by them earlier in the year to build familiarity with their writing style. If you have your eye on a chosen piece in a more difficult key signature, prepare for the tuning challenges in advance.

- **Fall Concert:** Highlight your advanced musicians and have fun with spooky or seasonal music. Invite select students to perform All Region etudes, scales, or chromatic live to reduce performance anxiety and show off their new skills!
- **Winter Concert:** Increase technical demands and give more students opportunities to shine with solos or small ensemble features. Push range, endurance, and articulation requirements without the pressure of a formal evaluation.
- **UIL Preparation:** Focus on musical precision and clarity. Feature your strongest sections and individuals. Because you have had a year-long literature plan, students are set up for success and mastery.
- **Spring Concert:** Stretch students with more challenging parts, especially your younger ones! Pave the way for an easy start to the next school year by programming some pep tunes or pop pieces that can be performed in the future. This allows you to focus more on fundamentals at the start of the year instead of learning all new pieces at once, a game changer for NV and Sub-NV groups!

## Teach with Intent

Teaching band is both an art and a science. Success comes from intentionality in planning, instruction, and how we care for our students. This process is not always easy, but when you backwards plan, you create an enjoyable and successful year for your entire program! Plan with purpose and teach with intent so that you don't just help students play the music, you help them become confident, disciplined, and inspired.

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