

## MICHIGAN MUSIC CONFERENCE 2009

# The K.I.S.S. Technique

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- Q. Ask yourself...what is the one thing that continues to work against us?  
(if your answer is your administrator, you are incorrect.....this time☺)
- A. TIME! Finding the time to get it all done and still have something left for yourself and your family.
- Q. Therefore, what are we all looking for?
- A. A more effective method of teaching that saves time and increases comprehension.  
Sound impossible? It's not, but we all need the tools to assist us in getting the job done.

TITLE DESCRIPTION: Keeping it simple ideas will be presented to enhance the effectiveness of teaching the basics of tone, intonation, rhythm, techniques, and interpretation. Using these techniques, the level of proficiency for each student in your program proceeds at a faster pace.

What I am going to talk to you about today may seem like common sense, but many of us still are not doing it or haven't quite developed our ideas for the best presentation to our students. My ideas are borrowed/stolen and some are original. All have been retooled for my style of teaching and personality. The main focus today is on the developing young instrumentalist. Another presentation focusing on more advanced ideas for your band will be forthcoming.

## I. TONE

### A. Air, Air, Air

1. Demonstrate the diaphragm muscle and describe
2. Stand up with hand over belly button, big breath
3. Lying down at home with a stack of books works too
4. Breath down to your toes
5. Open throat – yawn to demonstrate the muscle opening
6. By seventh grade begin warm air/cold air techniques (thus, slow and fast air)
7. Do a long note competition with prizes for being able to hold a note for a certain amount of time

### B. Posture

1. Sit on edge of chair with back straight
2. Feet flat on floor

### C. Embouchure

1. The clarinet embouchure is almost perfect for all instruments
2. Sucking on tip of finger assists in flattening the chin since these are difficult muscles to train
3. Using a mirror is an asset

### D. Hand Position - I will discuss my rationale for each instrument

1. Flute – (in a separate first class) begin with Right Hand, check thumb
2. Clarinet/Oboe – Right Hand check, make ‘C’s with both
3. Saxophone – Good ‘C’s with both hands
4. Trumpet – Left Hand holds, Right Hand plays, check Rt Thumb, ‘C’s
5. French Horn – Right Hand (no rings) begin properly in bell and its use, Left Hand ‘C’s
6. Trombone – Left Hand check forefinger, Right Hand three fingers and last two for 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> positions
7. Baritone – Right Hand ‘C’s, do not hug the instrument with Left Hand
8. Tuba – Right Hand ‘C’s
9. Percussion – Begin with sticks down the middle of the hand working the wrists in a very natural motion. (begin bells after hands are set)

### E. Mouthpieces and Reeds – There are many opinions about this subject - listed below are my suggestions for beginners:

1. Clarinet – Vandoran B-45 mouthpiece, ML #3 reed
2. Oboe – plastic reed for a short time, then to a med. Bamboo
3. Saxophone – stock mouthpiece okay – LaVoz medium reed
4. Trumpet – Bach 3C
5. French Horn – Holton MDC
6. Trombone/Baritone – Bach 6 ½ AL
7. Tuba – Bach 18
8. Percussion – Vic Firth General stick/pad and bell kit

In all cases, more air will be needed for good tone, but it will also set the embouchure more securely for future tone quality. Whether you agree or

disagree with me is not important. What is important is that you find what works well for you and your students.

#### F. Understanding

1. Make sure you can play ALL instruments to some degree of proficiency
2. This will give you more understanding as to each challenge present in each instrument
3. Early in your career, take time to practice each instrument often probably focusing on a different instrument each week

## II. INTONATION

### A. Individual Tuning - once a characteristic tone has been established begin this process

1. Teach each student how to use the 'idiot box' (tuner) and/or have them acquire their own
2. Teach them the idiosyncrasies of their instrument, thus, the best notes for tuning. My preferences are:  
Flute – top line F and fourth line D  
Oboe – third line Bb and second space A  
Clarinet – second line (open) G and low C  
Saxophone – second line G (even though F# is the only note in tune on this instrument☺)  
Trumpet – second line G and third space C  
French Horn – low C and third space C utilizing both sides of the horn  
(I recommend beginning on double horns)  
Trombone/Baritone – fourth line F and high Bb  
Tuba – second line Bb and F just below the staff  
Percussion – yeah, right – just play soft☺  
(I can say this and get away with it)
3. Demonstrate the waves of sound with two players (you being one of them) from fast waves to slow to non-existent. Once students understand how to play in tune, they will become sensitive to the idea and demand it of themselves.

### B. Group Tuning

1. Sing first – concert Bb or F works well, then play and match the pitch (almost all students sing in tune)
2. Sing first five notes of the Bb scale, then play
3. Use your fingers to indicate what pitch to sing, then play
4. Match pitches within the band beginning with the lows then add upper voices.

This is an example of tuning concert Bb:

- 1<sup>st</sup> group – Tubas-upper Bb
  - Bass Clarinets-low C
  - Bari Sax-low G
  - Bassoon-upper or lower Bb
- 2<sup>nd</sup> group – Trombones/Baritones-upper Bb
  - Tenor Sax-low C
- 3<sup>rd</sup> group – French Horns-lower F
  - Alto Sax-low G
  - Clarinets-low C
- 4<sup>th</sup> group – Trumpets-third space C
  - Oboes-third line Bb
  - Flutes-upper Bb (but it will be sharp, so teach how to fix)

This is an example of tuning concert F:

- 1<sup>st</sup> group – Tubas-F just below the staff
  - Bass Clarinets-open G
  - Bari Sax-low D
  - Bassoon-upper F
- 2<sup>nd</sup> group – Trombones/Baritones-4<sup>th</sup> line F
  - Tenor Sax-low G
- 3<sup>rd</sup> group – French Horns-low C and high C (with trigger)
  - Alto Sax-low D, then an octave higher
  - Clarinets-open G
- 4<sup>th</sup> group – Trumpets-2<sup>nd</sup> line G
  - Flutes-top line F
  - Oboe-low and high F

During this entire process teach your students to listen down to the lowest pitch. Reason – the lows do not change as much as the upper voices. Before beginning this part of the tuning process accurately tune the Tubas, Bass Clarinets, Bari Sax and Bassoon with a tuner.

### C. Chords

1. Singing once again, practice 1-3-5 of Bb or F scale, then divide into groups
2. Add playing while listening and tuning to the tonic  
(in a future session I will describe more advanced ideas to use)

## III. RHYTHM

### A. Note Values – remember this is nothing more than 3<sup>rd</sup> grade math!

Note      Rest

1 =            =            a whole rest is strong and hangs, chin-ups

2 =            =            a half rest is lazy and sits on the line

$$4 = \quad =$$

$$8 = \quad =$$

$$16 = \quad =$$

$$32 = \quad =$$

Nothing more than doubling each sequence. Kids understand this.  
Use money! 4 quarters equals a WHOLE dollar.

Below is the Basic Chart for note values. A Pie Chart could also be used.

#### B. Dotted Notes

All dotted notes are worth three of the next sub-division, period!  
In addition, all double dotted notes are worth double the next  
sub-division.  
Forget every explanation ever noted in any method book.

Thus:

=

=

=

etc.

### C. Time Signatures

1. The top number can be any number, but generally is 2,3,4,6
2. The bottom number can only be:

$$1 =$$

$$2 =$$

$$4 =$$

$$8 =$$

etc.

If we relate time signatures to fractions, even 5<sup>th</sup> graders will understand the concept – such as:  $4/4=1$ ,  $2/4=1/2$ , etc. (again, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade math)

This relates directly to note values as stated earlier, but now we have a method of an easy explanation to our students.

### D. Counting and Clapping

1. This should be done from Day One – VERY LOUD. Yes, LOUD – when kids commit themselves to something unabashedly, they tend to be more confident. In addition, you will also be able to see and hear those who are having trouble with their coordination and assist them.
2. Begin with just the basic numbers of 1-2-3-4, but add the subdivision of 1+2+3+4+ within a few weeks and demonstrate that you are counting 8<sup>th</sup> notes and refer to Basic Rhythm Chart

### E. Writing In Counting

1. Don't wait too long before teaching this very easy concept which will reinforce their understanding.
2. Obviously, there are a few different ideas about what to use, but I prefer the more universal method:
  - a. 1 2 3 4
  - b. 1+2+3+4+
  - c. 1e+a2e+a3e+a4e+a
  - d. 1+a2+a3+a4+a (for triplets)
  - e. 1 2 3 4 5 6 (I prefer this counting for 6/8 time rather than 1+a2+a)

## IV. TECHNIQUE

- A. Notes – While there are many available methods of teaching note names, the main idea here is to teach it fast and thoroughly.

1. Simply, notes are an alphabet of seven letters – A-G, they are in order and have a pattern of repetition.
2. Learning the lines and spaces separately works quite well as long as the student understands how they are related alphabetically
  - a. Treble Clef: lines – E-G-B-D-F (Every Good Boy Does Fine)  
spaces – f-a-c-e (FACE)
  - b. Bass Clef: lines – G-B-D-F-A (Good Boys Do Fine Always)  
spaces – A-C-E-G (All Cows Eat Grass)
3. Also show how the two clefs are connected by ‘C’ and the alphabetical relationship that also connects them

B. Theory – This is something I recommend to begin late the first year or beginning of the second year.

1. Major Scale construction begins with knowledge of the piano (keyboard) with the whole step/half step formula underneath. Be sure to explain that these are the entire 12 notes used in music and that they are each a half step apart.

Keyboard	C	C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	A#	B	C
		Db		Eb			Gb		Ab		Bb		
Major Scale Formula	1		1		½		1		1		1		½

The next step is to demonstrate the formula to construct a major scale. Remind them that all scales are alphabetical with no letters repeated except for the final note. Below are the steps I follow to teach scale construction:

- 1<sup>st</sup>    Bb    —    —    —    —    —    —    Bb    begin with first and last notes
- 2<sup>nd</sup>    Bb    C    D    E    F    G    A    Bb    add note names in alpha order
- 3<sup>rd</sup>    Bb    C    D    Eb    F    G    A    Bb    use the formula to add accidentals

This formula can be used for all twelve major scales and students catch on to this concept quickly.

2. Key Signatures are very simple when not explained by a university professor☺ Begin with teaching the order of all the flats, then the sharps using the following ideas:

Flats: Just teach very fast: Bb,Eb,Ab,Db,Gb,Cb,Fb....or  
 Teach with some fun added:  
 Betty Eats Apples During Gym Class Frequently

Sharps: Again, just teach very fast: F#,C#,G#,D#,A#,E#,B#....or  
 Teach with some fun added:  
 Fat Cats Go Down Alleys Eating Bugs

The order of flats and sharps are exactly the opposite of each other.  
 Next, we teach the number of flats and sharps for each key:

<u>Order of Flats</u>				<u>Order of Sharps</u>
B E A D G C F	b's	Qty	#'s	F C G D A E B
	F	1	G	
	Bb	2	D	
	Eb	3	A	
	Ab	4	E	
	Db	5	B	
	Gb	6	F#	
	Cb	7	C#	

Now we demonstrate how to identify key signatures as indicated in their music.

How to: Flats – Second to the last flat identifies the key or know the order

Sharps – From the last sharp go up to the next line or space

Be sure to draw the correlation between key signatures and scales.

- C. Articulation – This is an area I find most neglected by many music educators.

1. Single Tonguing – for most situations

- a. Reed instruments – I have found that the ‘thumb in the mouth’ technique is quite effective. Put the thumb behind the front top teeth firmly and have the students practice a soft tongue using the syllable ‘D’ which brings the tongue off the reed quickly and helps to avoid slapping the reed. This same syllable works well for teaching fast tonguing as well.
- b. Brass/Flute – I prefer teaching the students having the tongue hit approximately near where the top front teeth and upper palate meet using a variety of ‘T’ syllables. I mention variety since any variation of the ‘T’ syllable can work and will depend on the individual characteristics of the student.
- c. In both WW and BR, I ask the kids to lock the back of the tongue between the upper back teeth. Demands of the music being performed will require different types of tonguing styles ranging from staccato to legato. Just make sure you can demonstrate them on all instruments.  
 (and that includes those of you who are percussionists)

2. Double Tonguing
  - a. Brass/Flute – There are so many ways to effectively teach this technique.  
Here are a few:
    1. use the syllables ‘Ta Ka’
    2. use the syllables ‘Tu Ku’
    3. use the syllables ‘Te Ke’

In all cases, practice first with a finger in front of the mouth making sure the air pressure is the same with the ‘k’ part of the syllable knowing that the back of the tongue is producing the ‘k’. Next, add only the mouthpiece and then the instrument itself. I recommend beginning teaching this sometime in seventh grade. By the time they are in high school, it will be second nature to them. There are some fairly easy King marches that have a few opportunities to use double tonguing for younger students.
3. Staccato and Legato – Practice differences using a ‘T’ syllable for staccato or normal tonguing and a ‘D’ syllable for legato, thus, a softer touch. Alternating measures between the ‘T’ and ‘D’ syllables in a simple repetitive quarter note scale exercise will reinforce the differences.
4. Fingering – In all cases, practice firm placement with a quick snap. For trombone make sure the students are holding the slide correctly, then add a relaxed wrist to assist the arm in faster movement. To build speed early, practice the first five notes of the Bb scale tongued and slurred.
5. Vibrato – Not sure if I want to get into this one, especially with trumpet players☺ Without a doubt this is probably one of the most controversial technique subjects around, but I will add my two cents worth about ONE instrument. FLUTE – teach vibrato to them by their second year of playing so it becomes automatic for them. Using the ‘ha’ syllable with one hand on their belly, practice slow to fast – quarters to eighths to triplets.

Without a doubt there are certainly much more advanced techniques for each instrument. Be sure to do your research.

## V. Interpretation

### A. Dynamics!

1. Over emphasize the differences between soft and loud. Remind students more air is needed to control tone and intonation in the soft dynamic ranges and produce the proper resonance.
2. I consider accents as a part of dynamics and in the interpretation area, not the rhythm area as indicated on the MSBOA adjudicator form. There are two main types of accents I mainly focus on – regular and marcato. For the regular accent I stress the use of more air and a little more edge on the

front of the note. For *marcato* I prefer to stress the use of the tongue for a much more pointed attack.

B. Phrasing – which is expression.

1. The first main concept in phrasing is to practice four measure phrases, thus, not breathing in the middle of a phrase. This is the most basic and used method.
2. Take the phrasing to the next level and add dynamic variation, even though it is not written in the music – it is expected. Therefore, as the melody ascends in pitch the volume increases; when descending the volume decreases. This is a very easy concept for students to grasp, but you can reinforce it with your conducting skills. Begin teaching phrasing early – at least by the second year.

Long notes and repetitive notes also need dynamic direction.

C. Style – I believe tradition is also a part of this category, not separate as stated on the adjudicator form. I think that marches are the best area to begin teaching style.

1. This is an area that begins with understanding the shape of a note – front, middle and back sides. Here is an illustration:

Be able to demonstrate this with a wind instrument using quarter notes.

2. When teaching march style, I emphasize playing to the middle side of each note. Essentially, every note in a march is accented with a slight edge on each attack. There should be a space between each note. As a mentor once told me – “you should be able to drive a semi-truck between each note”. That may be a slight exaggeration, but at least the point is made and you can adjust from there.
3. Depending on the styles demanded of other compositions, many times you will play to the entire back side of a note, thus connecting it to the next. I recommend listening to many recordings as well as practicing on your own so as to properly demonstrate how you want certain areas of the music played stylistically.

D. Acoustics

1. Understand the acoustics of your rehearsal room – is it live, dead or in between?
2. Know your performance room keeping the same things in mind. Also know the best placement on the stage for best overall sound.

3. If you rehearse in a dead room, chances are that your performance room will be more live, thus the potential for sounding like you are overblowing. If your rehearsal room is more live than your performance room, you may be surprised at how weak you sound. Therefore, knowledge is the key and that must also be passed on to your students so they are prepared as well.
4. My preferences for rehearsal rooms are as follows:
  - a. Middle School – I really like this room to be dead so the kids have to work hard for a good tone. Just be careful not to let them go over the edge. You may have a more difficult time hearing the upper ranges in the flute section, but they will have a good tone.
  - b. High School – I prefer this room to be a little more live. By now the students should be producing characteristic tones. Balancing your ensemble will be a little easier with the HS acoustic set up.There are many ways to adjust your room for very little investment.

In this world of ‘no time’, we need to use every device possible to assist our students to reach the highest possible level of excellence. Remember, you are teaching a life-long skill, not just worried about getting first divisions, but....they do go hand in hand – excellence begets excellence everywhere. This is a competitive world and you are competing in the music world. Your main competition is yourself. Are you coasting or constantly challenging yourself to achieve better, thus, helping your students to achieve better? We need to use every device possible to assist our students to reach the highest possible level of excellence. Remember, none of us knows it all.

My very first suggestion in saving time.....don't talk too much during rehearsals! Teach! Passion in your delivery is the key to being convincing. You must also be entertaining. Monotones are boring (record yourself). If you don't have the energy, neither will your students, no matter how smart you are. You will need at least twice as much energy as your students in every rehearsal, regardless of the age of the student.

If you teach more than one age group (HS, MS, EL) adjust your personality approach for each group. Definitely be more fun with the younger kids, but focused too. The more fun and success you have with younger students, the more they will want to continue to be a part of your program.

Program your music carefully, especially for festivals. Do your research, understand your groups strengths and weaknesses, and make sure you and your students enjoy the music you have selected (advice from your colleagues and mentors is invaluable). It is okay to challenge them, but be able to show them how to get there one step at a time. The more you thoroughly teach the basics while pushing them in the early years, the more advanced music you can attempt when they are older.

Repetition is the key, regardless of the age of the student. Everyday you need to remind them about embouchure, posture, hand position, breath control, etc. Never play one note in rehearsal until EVERYONE is ready – wait as long as necessary, they will get the idea and peer pressure always works wonders.

Know your goals and objectives and share them with your students. Raise the bar, but be prepared to show them the path to achieve your goals.

If your students have a question you don't know the answer to, admit it, but tell them you will have the answer tomorrow (make sure you do!) Be genuine. As smart as you think you might be, you cannot fool kids, except for beginners. Students see through fake sincerity and enthusiasm very easily.

IMPORTANT! The career we have chosen is not a job! It is a passion for the arts, uplifting society in our own special way in our particular community. If it were a job, we might actually be paid what we are worth. In any case, we get paid to have fun doing what we love to do. Be one of those teachers your students will never forget! Let them see who you are (hide 10%). Crazy is good and fine, but being organized and disciplined is a must. Being picky doesn't hurt either☺

HAVE FUN!

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