

## Tom Taylor's Tips

### Starting Up a Brand-New Jazz Band

You have been a band teacher for ? years. The school you are in has never had a jazz band. For whatever reason - your idea, pressure from your principal - you are contemplating starting one, but you don't know how to go about it. Tom Taylor shares some suggestions and ideas developed from starting four jazz programs from scratch over a 40-year career.

1. Bring in a good established junior or even senior high jazz band to play for an event, assembly or just for the band kids.
2. Arrange a field trip to a school jazz band festival before even mentioning the idea of starting a jazz band at your school. It is way easier to garner interest after they know what you are talking about.
3. Teach a two-week unit on jazz big bands in your regular band classes. Use easy charts, transpose parts for flute, oboe, etc. Bassoon, euphonium can play trombone parts, clarinets play trumpet parts, etc. Every student plays no matter what their main instrument is. If the music is easy enough, some will choose to quickly learn a new instrument. Complete the unit with a performance of some sort.
4. Show videos in class and on school announcements.
5. Start with very easy and fun to play up-tempo charts.
6. Involve every kid who wants to try it. Who cares if the first 'big band' at your school has 45 members? Take them to a festival.
7. If the numbers do not support a full big band, start by forming a large combo and get them out there performing at every opportunity.
8. Download the free charts available from the U.S. Army Field Band Jazz Ambassadors website. Use the lesson plans, videos and other resources available on our website [www.teachjazz101.com](http://www.teachjazz101.com)
9. Ask local pros to do you a favor and run a clinic or two in return for the promise of future payback in the form of pay for performing at a concert.

10. Host a festival in November. That's right, I said it! Use one of the favors you've banked from the collegial relationship with your Phys-ed staff. Use the gym or the auditorium (if you are so lucky). Invite area schools with jazz programs to perform at your one-day festival for an adjudicator who will also work with every band for 20 – 30 minutes after the performance. Bands can play as many or as few pieces (maybe just 1) as they feel they are prepared for. Invite trustees, admin, parents, community leaders... Your band students can sit in the audience during their regularly scheduled class time. Sounds crazy? I started one such festival and it is now in its 21<sup>st</sup> year.

#### 11. Equipment

- Ask parents – you might be surprised by the number of parents who have drum sets, guitars, keyboards and amps that have not been used for years and are more than happy to lend or donate.
- If legally possible in your jurisdiction, offer tax receipts for the market value of any donated equipment.
- Ask your local retailer for help. A smart business owner will recognize the potential future sales by helping band directors expand their programs. Ask for huge discounts on rental fees on a rent-to-own agreement. It is much easier to convince trustees and administration to budget for the needed equipment purchase once they hear your jazz band perform.
- Although not the ideal situation but at last resort ask your students and/or their parents to haul their own equipment to and from rehearsals.
- Talk to your athletics people. If they have a large budget resulting from profitable gate revenue, describe how great it will be to have a permanent pep band in return for an investment in some much-needed equipment.

## Tom's 5 Steps to Teaching Improvisation

### 1. Play loud.

Almost every middle school and even most high school jazz band soloists I heard in 30 years of attending festivals had several good players with good tone. Almost every one of these fine young musicians would suddenly have a bad tone the moment they started a solo. Why? NO AIR!!! Once I started demanding loud soloing at all times during rehearsal, my kids got in the habit of playing with a good tone.

All of my soloists were allowed to start using varying dynamics to add variety and interest in their solos, but not until they demonstrated consistently that they would not stop doing all the things that enabled them to play with a beautiful sound.

### 2. Play stylistically. That is simply, use the same rhythms found in songs of that style or genre.

Simple – if the eighth notes in the song are swung (triplet structure) then they must also be swung in solos. Likewise, eighth notes, must be played evenly in rock/funk/Latin tunes. Some musicians swing sixteenth notes in funk charts.

### 3. No long notes allowed.

I will go through months of rehearsals not allowing anyone to play a note longer than a quarter note. I guarantee if you hear a middle school soloist play a long note, it will not fit the chord being played by the rhythm section and will sound bad. The same note played as an eighth note or shorter will not be noticed and may actually sound 'jazzy'.

4. Memorize 3 or 4 short 'licks' that work.

I usually start by having everybody in the band learn one short 2 to 4 measure chunk of the melody. Then I ask them to modify it and make it their own. I ask the rhythm section to vamp using the solo section of the piece and keep repeating until the exercise is done. Count the rhythm section in and start with your lead tenor who should be sitting next to the rhythm section asking that student to play her 2-measure lick. Instruct your 2<sup>nd</sup> alto to start on beat 1 in the third measure, or in other words, immediately following the tenor player. Follow this pattern throughout until everyone has played their 2 measures. If done correctly, it will sound like one long and very good solo.

5. Listen! Listen! Listen!

Jazz is a language. The only way to understand and 'speak' the language is by listening to the masters...Basie, Ellington, Coltrane, Gillespie, Myles, Hampton, et al.

I use many more teaching tools for guiding young improvisors, including regular separate rehearsals for combos but using these five steps will help improve the sound and quality of your band's solos immensely. Guaranteed!

# Starting a Student on Bass Guitar

Tom Taylor

## Starting Out

- Sit with bass across lap.
- Right hand. Place thumb on the top edge of a pickup. First two fingers are used to strum across the tops of the strings. Most common mistake is 'plucking' the strings.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnu2wAxXCTo>

- Left hand. Keep thumb behind the fingerboard. Begin by placing first finger immediately behind the first fret. Keep that finger in place while pushing the string down behind the second fret with middle finger. And so on...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7M7-lrEJHBw>


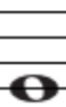

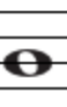



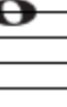

- Practice many different fingering exercises before introducing the concept of reading music.

- **Reading Music**

- Use a simple sheet of four major scales in one octave – Bb, F, Ab, Eb
- Student uses a pencil to print the note names over every note.
- Pencil the appropriate number combo, as described below, under every note.
- Say the names of every note out loud while playing it.
- Prevent student from memorizing fingering patterns of scales by moving on to different exercises such as thirds, arpeggios and such.

- **Numbering System**

- Two numbers printed one overtop of the other. Best way to describe the system is to give show it using Bb Maj.

	B $\flat$	C	D	E $\flat$	F	G	A	B $\flat$
								
	1	3	0	1	3	0	2	3
	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4

The bottom number represents the string number with low E string being 1, A string is 2 and so on. The top number is the fret number. '0' indicates an open string while 1 thru 4 tells the student which finger to place behind the corresponding fret.