

How to get a band instrument

(Opinions based on my observations over the last 20 years)

Starting band with a good quality instrument is vital to a student's success. Otherwise, they get frustrated and tend to give up, often before they even understand their own potential. Many times students show up with what band directors refer to as **“Instrument Shaped Objects” (ISOs)**. These instruments *look* like the real instruments, but they *do not perform* like them. They are made of inferior metal or wood, they do not play in tune, and the majority of music repair shops will refuse to work on them due to their low quality and parts being unavailable. Here are some tips to avoid ISOs and set your child up for success in band!

A **reputable music store** is usually the best source to get a new or used instrument. They offer monthly rent-to-own plans on instruments that are usually in stock.

Pros:

- A. Make smaller monthly payments instead of buying outright
- B. Have repairs made by the company's repairman, normally at no additional cost above the monthly payment.
- C. “Step up” to intermediate or professional models later, many times applying previous rent toward the upgrade
- D. Return the instrument and stop payments if your child is no longer in band

Cons:

- A. May cost slightly more (but you get more)

Places to avoid when purchasing an instrument:

- A. **Big box retailers**-You should be required to go to more than one store to buy underwear, produce, and a musical instrument. I know of no big box retailers selling quality instruments.
- B. **Online stores**. Some **quality music stores** do have **online rental** options for convenience, but I am referring to **non-music stores**. On many store's websites, the musical instruments are found under the “Toys” tab (for good reason!) If you buy a brand that is not on our preferred list of instruments, you are most likely not getting a quality instrument.
- C. **Online auctions** or **“garage sale”** sites. Buying from Craigslist, pawn shops, or eBay rarely turns out very well for students. Many times, parents buy the wrong brands or poor condition instruments out of ignorance. The key is knowing what you're getting and avoiding low quality, no matter how little the price tag is.

It is **always** okay to email me and ask my opinions about an instrument you are considering for purchase. I'd rather help you make an informed decision than you struggle with getting less for your money. troybell@misdmail.org