

A Common Approach

Brass



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Introduction

Developing this revised and expanded version of *A Common Approach* has been a challenging and illuminating task. Our career paths and teaching experiences are diverse. We were aware that there are many different ways of teaching brass instruments. Nevertheless, we discovered considerable common ground. We also found that we shared many similar ideas and principles with colleagues from the other working parties. Indeed, it was reassuring to find that many colleagues who contributed to the consultative process not only concurred with much of our thinking but also use some of the activities included here in their own teaching. To all who responded to the draft documentation, we are extremely grateful. Your experience and expertise were particularly valuable, and helped to clarify and refine our thinking.

By drawing on good practice, *A Common Approach* aims to improve the quality of musical experience for all pupils by encouraging instrumental/vocal teachers to reflect on, develop and improve their professional skills, knowledge and understanding. But it is not intended to be prescriptive. Our hope is that teachers will find the suggestions useful and will be helped in developing their own work further. Instrumental teaching is always evolving and we can all benefit from a fresh look at even the most fundamental aspects of our work. All the ideas and activities have been proven to work on many occasions, in a variety of circumstances and with different pupils. We believe, therefore, that the learning objectives and activities, used in conjunction with a wide and attractive range of repertoire, offer pupils the opportunity to enjoy a broad and balanced instrumental curriculum. Above all, we hope that we are encouraging a musical approach to learning an instrument, an approach that at each stage of learning is stimulating, enlightening and rewarding, and gives pupils a deepening love of music and a range of skills, knowledge and understanding.

The following general points are intended to raise awareness of important issues. They may be of particular relevance to new teachers.

- Choosing the correct brass instrument for each individual is important. The age, size and maturity of the pupil have to be taken into account.
- It is vital to have the best quality instrument and mouthpiece so that pupils develop good tone quality, secure intonation and assured technique. Whenever possible, teachers should advise on the purchase of instruments. Although selection will probably be influenced by financial considerations, parents/carers should be reminded that the cheapest instrument will not necessarily represent the best value. Information about instrument insurance is also important.
- Initial lessons should include clear instructions for assembling and dismantling instruments. Similarly, instructions on the care and maintenance of instruments are essential in order to keep them in good working order.
- Teachers need to be aware of Health and Safety issues. These will include keeping instruments and mouthpieces clean, avoiding sharing instruments and ensuring that pupils never share mouthpieces. The potentially harmful effect of ingesting valve oil should be brought to pupils' attention.

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- Teachers who teach brass instruments other than their own specialist instrument are encouraged to seek advice whenever necessary.
 - Professional issues regarding pupil and teacher protection are of the utmost importance. Teachers working for Music Services and/or schools will probably have access to comprehensive guidelines. Private teachers should seek guidance from one of the professional associations.

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The Brass Framework

Pupils should be offered broad and balanced programmes of study that promote and develop musical playing and singing. They should be given opportunities to:

- ▶ *express their musical ideas and feelings*
- ▶ *use their creativity, imagination and intuition*
- ▶ *develop their skills, knowledge and understanding*
- ▶ *reflect on and evaluate their progress*

through the interrelated areas of:

A. listening and internalising

including:

- i listening to music with concentration in and out of lessons, building on their experiences
- ii having a clear aural perception of the music to be played
- iii recognising and discriminating between the musical elements of pulse, pitch, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, texture, and tone colour
- iv recognising and conveying structural elements in their playing
- v making links between sound and symbols when using notation

B. making and controlling musical sounds: developing technique

including:

- i posture, grip and freedom of movement
- ii embouchure
- iii breathing
- iv tone quality and intonation
- v articulation and co-ordination

C. creating, developing and interpreting musical ideas

including:

- i improvising expressively
- ii applying their instrumental skills in composing
- iii interpreting music, developing a personal response

D. playing music

including:

- i working out how to play music by ear
- ii repeating musical patterns and phrases accurately from memory
- iii playing pieces in a variety of styles with fluency, expression and understanding
- iv memorising pieces that have been learnt
- v reading and playing music at sight*

E. playing music with others

including:

- i listening, watching, responding and leading
- ii contributing to collective decisions, including interpretation

F. performing and communicating

including:

- i interpreting and communicating the character of the music
- ii evaluating their performances and making improvements

* where appropriate

Programme of Study 1

NQF entry level/Pre-grade 1

Learning objectives

A. listening and internalising

Pupils should learn to:

- i listen to music with concentration in and out of lessons, enjoying their experiences and building on them

- ii have some aural perception of the music to be played

- iii recognise and discriminate between the musical elements of pulse, pitch, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, texture, and notice changes of tone quality and colour

- iv recognise and convey in their playing simple rhythmic and melodic patterns, e.g. repetition of main tune

- v make links between sounds and symbols when using notation, e.g. shape of the melody

During programme 1, pupils aim to control sounds on their instruments. They start to develop technical and musical skills. They learn how to play simple pieces, enjoying their experiences and building on them with increasing confidence.

Programme of Study 1

NQF entry level/Pre-grade 1

Possible teaching activities

A. listening and internalising

- Ask pupils to listen with concentration to different pieces of music in their own time and then describe them in the lesson, including aspects of dynamics, instrumentation, character, etc.
- Encourage pupils to jot down details of favourite pieces in their notebooks.
- Perform a piece to be learnt to pupils. Ask them to describe its character.
- Ask pupils to tap the pulse of music played by the teacher or other pupils.
- Ask pupils to respond physically to music being played, i.e. moving in time or beating time to music with a regular pulse. Repeat at different tempi.
- Go through the piece again with pupils, using gestures or actions to indicate rests.
- Help pupils to play/sing short, simple rhythmic/melodic phrases by ear.
- Ask pupils simple questions about pulse, pitch, rhythm, dynamics, etc.
- Ask pupils to sing songs they know well, singing some phrases in their heads at a given signal from the teacher. When pupils sing aloud again, they should be singing at the correct pitch and pulse.
- Ask pupils to sing the final note to complete a melodic phrase played/sung by the teacher.
- Ask pupils how many phrases there are in a short piece. Where do they start and finish?
- Listen to other short pieces, e.g. 'Hot Cross Buns', and ask pupils to indicate when the main tune is repeated: count the number of times it is repeated and describe what happens in between.
- Using notation, ask pupils to play/sing or clap short phrases of a piece and count silent bars in their heads, e.g. bars 1-2 clapped/played/sung, bars 3-4 counted and bars 5-6 clapped/played/sung.
- Using notation, ask pupils to describe the main features of a piece before playing/singing it - e.g. shape of melody and obvious repetitions.
- Play a familiar piece incorrectly. Ask pupils to spot the mistakes.

Points to note

It is important that listening is approached in a relaxed and enjoyable way.

Listening games can be linked to all the pieces being learnt in the early stages.

Ensure that pupils understand the difference between tempo, pulse and rhythm.

Further ideas in developing aural acuity can be found in the approaches of Kodaly and Dalcroze (Eurhythmics).

The main aim is to internalise the sound before relating it to a symbol.

In the first instance, it helps if the penultimate note is either the leading note or the supertonic.

There are many opportunities to use a wide range of musical styles from around the world.

Learning objectives

B. making and controlling musical sounds: developing technique

- Pupils should learn to:*
- i posture and freedom of movement
 - develop an appropriate balanced and relaxed posture, both sitting and standing:
 - holding the instrument in an appropriate manner

Possible teaching activities

B. making and controlling musical sounds: developing technique

posture and freedom of movement

- Demonstrate the correct posture for playing the instrument. Ask pupils to imitate. If appropriate, invite more experienced pupils to demonstrate.
- Ensure that pupils practise re-establishing the correct hold from rest.
- Explain and discuss the reasons for good posture, e.g. enabling freedom of breathing, avoiding physical damage.
- Help pupils to experiment and find the appropriate (natural and comfortable) posture for themselves, providing guidance where necessary.

Points to note

All music examples are given as for trumpet in B_♭,



Horns and tubas, in particular, should begin to explore notes below middle C.

Basic posture should be the same when both sitting and standing.

When pupils are sitting, check the suitability of the chair and ensure that good posture is maintained, e.g. legs are not crossed.

Always try to fit the instrument to the student, not the student around the instrument, e.g. tenor horn should not rest on the upper leg.

Be aware of pupils' individual physical characteristics, including disabilities.

Be aware that the use of sixth position on the trombone with small students could compromise posture and embouchure.

The use of a stand / support for tubas may need to be considered.

When playing from notation, ensure that the music stand is at a height that maintains good posture. The sequence should be: posture, instrument, stand.

Normally, with the exception of the French horn, the instrument should be held / supported with the left hand and played with the right. It is helpful for teachers to seek advice from colleagues when teaching instruments other than their own specialism.

To avoid fatigue, possibly leading to bad posture, ensure that periods of playing are kept short and mixed with appropriate non-playing musical activities.

Learning objectives

B. making and controlling musical sounds: developing technique

contd...

Pupils should learn to:

- ii embouchure
 - form and establish an appropriate and functional embouchure, suitable for the particular instrument:
 - gradually strengthening their embouchure
 - slur notes

iii breathing

- produce a controlled column of air

iv tone quality and intonation

- tune the instrument with guidance
 - recognise and play with reasonable intonation:
 - beginning to develop some ability to adjust and effect change
 - develop a pleasing sound at two or more dynamic levels
-

Possible teaching activities

B. making and controlling musical sounds: developing technique

contd...

embouchure

- Ask pupils to explore sounds, e.g. emergency vehicle siren, car, motorbike, cuckoo, produced by buzzing their lips, with and without the mouthpiece.
- Ask pupils to buzz a sustained, consistent sound with their lips, with the mouthpiece and with the instrument, e.g. by playing long-note competitions.
- Ask pupils to play rhythmic patterns on one note, maintaining a consistent sound, e.g. copying rhythmic patterns, playing call-and-response or echo games.
- Invite pupils to explore higher and lower notes from the harmonic series, e.g. creating 'fanfares' on two notes.
- Set the task of improvising a piece, e.g. entitled 'Slime', using lip and valve slurs. This activity can be extended by introducing chromatic notes within the range.
- Ensure that pupils practise tunes of extended length to help develop stamina, e.g. rounds, multiple verses, at different dynamics and speeds.
- Ask pupils to play tunes on the mouthpiece, e.g. TV themes, 'When the Saints'.
- Introduce slurs between open harmonics in call-and-response and echo games, and in warm-up patterns.
- Encourage pupils to use a mirror to check embouchure and mouthpiece placement.

breathing

- Ask pupils to sing sustained melodic phrases using call-and-response or echo games, vocal exercises, etc.
- Ask pupils to play notes with a sustained, consistent sound, using a range of dynamics.
- To facilitate tonguing within a single column of air, ask pupils to sing a phrase, then play it.
- Demonstrate holding a piece of paper against a wall using just breath control. Encourage pupils to try this activity, timing themselves.

tone quality and intonation

- Encourage pupils to explore the use of the tuning slide. While the teacher or another pupil plays a sustained note, ask pupils in turn to play the same note, starting with the tuning slide out and gradually pushing it in until the sounds match.
- Ask pupils to listen to and match their intonation to that of the teacher.
- Say the letter names of notes before playing tunes.
- In groups, ask pupils to play different notes of a chord simultaneously, listening to the intonation and adjusting the tuning.
- Ask pupils to play a tune and make some changes to the dynamics. Discuss any effect this has on tone quality and intonation.
- Demonstrate a good tone quality to pupils. Ask them to imitate and then compare their tone quality and clarity of sound. Discuss why these may be different.

Points to note

Help pupils to form a firm, workable embouchure, free from excessive pressure.

Pupils should be encouraged to relax.

When using rhythmic games, try to keep a regular pulse, perhaps using backing materials on CD / tape.

Encourage pupils how to play lip slurs at different speeds.

Tuba players may need to be encouraged to sigh rather than buzz!

Encourage pupils to breath deeply and freely whilst maintaining an appropriate posture.

Bring pupils' attention to the importance of good breath control in all aspects of playing.

Ensure that pupils understand the essential aspects of care and maintenance of the instrument, e.g. cleaning valves and tuning slides.

Assuming the instrument is well set up, good tone production and careful listening will facilitate secure intonation.

Learning objectives

B. making and controlling musical sounds: developing technique

contd...

- Pupils should learn to:*
- v articulation and co-ordination
 - use the tongue to articulate notes at a regular pulse:
 - co-ordinating hand and tongue when playing
 - slur notes

C. creating, developing and interpreting musical ideas

- Pupils should learn to:*
- i improvise expressively by exploring different sounds and creating satisfying repeated musical patterns or phrases

-
- ii make use of instrumental skills when beginning to compose¹

¹ Instrumental teachers should harness the composing interests of pupils wherever it is appropriate. This may be as an integral part of the instrumental curriculum or to support the pupils in other areas of the National Curriculum.

Possible teaching activities

B. making and controlling musical sounds: developing technique

contd...

articulation and co-ordination

- Ask pupils to sing back vocal patterns in call-and-response or echo games, using appropriate syllables, e.g. 'daa', 'taa', 'du'.
- Invite pupils to imitate various monotone rhythm patterns played by the teacher or other pupils on the mouthpiece or the instrument.
- Teach pupils to play simple tunes and exercises using repeated notes at a regular pulse.
- Set a task to create simple rhythms using pupils' names.
- Teach pupils to play simple pieces and exercises that use moving pitch and repeated notes, e.g. the 'upstairs/downstairs' game: one pupil plays a repeated pattern, C/D/E



then another responds with E/D/C.



- Ask pupils to play familiar pieces using slurs for step-wise movement. (N.B. This activity is not applicable for trombones.)
- Encourage the use of a mixture of tongued and slurred patterns in call-and-response or echo games. Ask pupils to identify and reproduce the different articulations.

C. creating, developing and interpreting musical ideas

- Ask pupils to create a tone-cluster improvisation. The group starts on a unison single note, e.g. E. Each player then takes turn to move to an adjacent note whilst the others sustain the E. Discuss the resulting musical effect.
 - Help pupils to make up short and simple rhythmic/melodic patterns from suggested musical starting points, e.g. pentatonic phrases, drones, ostinati/riffs. Abstract or pictorial ideas could also be used.
 - Repeat the process, selecting and discarding ideas and aiming for musical coherence.
 - Lead pupils in a discussion about the musical effect of their improvisations.
 - Play 'Follow my Leader': a pupil plays three or four notes, then the next pupil plays three or four more, starting on the last note of the first player, and so on.
- Ask pupils to compose short tunes using known notes, starting from a visual stimulus or mood. Give the piece a title and perform it to others, e.g. 'The Haunted House' using notes D/E/F.



Discuss the outcomes. Initially, this could consist of asking pupils to write down their compositions as an aid to memory, perhaps using their own forms of shorthand as a precursor to staff notation.

- Provide opportunities for pupils to perform their compositions to others.
- Encourage pupils to use their instruments in creative activities in the classroom, applying technical skills already acquired.

Points to note

Encourage pupils to articulate by using the tongue to break a continuous column of air.

Maintain a steady pulse when using exercises and call-and-response or echo games.

Slurs using valve combinations can also be introduced at this stage.

The teacher can promote pupils' confidence by:

- demonstrating how to experiment with musical ideas
- providing step-by-step assistance with models, patterns and procedures
- emphasising the open-ended nature of the activity – all outcomes are valued and enjoyed

Through composing, pupils are able to explore the music from the inside. Composing is valid in its own right, but it can also be used to develop performing skills, knowledge and understanding. Productive links with general classroom work should be made wherever possible.

It may be necessary to store pupils' ideas for them since their creative imagination may run ahead of their ability to write down their ideas, at least where staff notation is concerned.

Learning objectives

C. creating, developing and interpreting musical ideas

contd...

- Pupils should learn to:*
- iii begin to interpret music with some expression and with a sense of its intended effect; talk about its mood and how it is played and suggest improvements

D. playing music

- Pupils should learn to:*
- i work out **by ear** how to play short, easy phrases from well-known tunes

-
- ii **repeat** with accuracy short, easy rhythmic and melodic patterns by playing back from memory

-
- iii **play** short, easy pieces from notation / symbols, conveying the character of the music
-

Possible teaching activities

C. creating, developing and interpreting musical ideas

contd...

- Ask pupils to perform a known piece with both smooth and detached notes. Discuss which effect is most appropriate for the piece.
- Show pupils how to experiment with different ways of playing pieces, perhaps in relation to dynamics, tempi and articulation. Ask them to listen and decide which way of playing is most appropriate to the character of the music.
- Involving all pupils in the group, discuss ways of improving the interpretation, particularly in pieces that have few expressive indications.

D. playing music

- Choosing appropriate starting notes, play short, simple tunes with a limited range of notes, e.g. television jingles, folk-tunes, nursery rhymes. Ask pupils to select one and, on their instruments, work out separate phrases by ear, gradually building up the complete tune.
- Ask pupils to play the complete tune expressively to others.
- As an extension activity, ask pupils to teach the tune to other pupils.

- Perform a piece and ask pupils to respond to the music by clapping, tapping or moving with a regular pulse and at a variety of tempi.
- Repeat, with pupils substituting a different sound, gesture or action to indicate rests.

- Engage pupils in 'copycat playing', either with or without notation, maintaining a secure pulse and rhythm. Incorporate different musical effects, such as contrasts of dynamics and articulation.
- Ask pupils to sing easy intervals and match them to notes on their instruments where appropriate.

- Select pieces for pupils to learn, from a range of different times and places, and in a variety of styles. Take into account:
 - the musical and technical skills that will be needed
 - opportunities to develop musical ideas
 - pupils' prior experience
 - their personal response to the music
 - their general musical interests
- Show pupils how to practise their pieces and make improvements.

Points to note

Interpretation is the creative dimension of performing. At the earliest stage, pupils should be encouraged to make expressive musical decisions, either intuitively or by evaluating their work. The teacher can help by being an informed listener, giving feedback and encouragement.

This is not as difficult as it sounds. Many pupils experiment with tunes they know before starting formal instrumental lessons.

If tunes exceed pupils' note range, teach a simple accompaniment or bass line by ear instead and play or sing the tune with them.

There is always scope to design new musical games in order to develop pupils' short-term memory. These can often be invented together as the activity proceeds, building on prior learning.

At first, limit the phrase to be copied to possibly two bars of 2/4 or equivalent, using only two notes.

Adopt the holistic approach to teaching and learning as outlined in Section 1.

Learning objectives

D. playing music

contd...

Pupils should learn to: iv **memorise** with accuracy selected short, simple pieces from their repertoire

v read and play **at sight** short, simple phrases at a regular pulse; begin to make links between sound and symbol

E. playing music with others

Pupils should learn to: i play with others, demonstrating some basic ensemble skills by listening, watching and keeping in time with the group

Possible teaching activities

D. playing music

contd...

- Help pupils to memorise selected pieces from their repertoire by:
 - building up short sections at a time
 - identifying and remembering rhythmic patterns and the shape of the melody
 - noting where repetitions and contrasts occur
 - focusing on expressive details
- From time to time, teach a short piece away from the music, only referring to the notation once it is learnt.
- Encourage pupils to play from memory to other pupils.

- Play short, simple rhythmic/melodic patterns and ask pupils to copy them.
- Using flash cards, help pupils to:
 - recognise different note values and their rests
 - clap, sing and play simple rhythmic/melodic patterns, maintaining a regular pulse, perhaps at different tempi
 - name notes and find them on the instrument (note recognition)
 - read and play simple dynamics
 - read and play staccato and legato
- Devise a variety of games to explain staff notation to young beginners, e.g:
 - use a large staff with movable notes
 - space permitting, play 'note jumping': lay out five skipping ropes and ask pupils to step or jump between them, calling out the note names and perhaps singing them as well
 - play the 'musical alphabet' game: a pupil says/sings a note name, the next pupil says/sings the next one, and so on, up and down. Do the same missing out a note – G/B/D, etc.

E. playing music with others

- Create opportunities for pupils to:
 - play with an accompaniment, provided either by the teacher or by recorded means, e.g. keyboard, tape, CD/minidisc, computer/midi sequencing
 - play in a small ensemble, e.g. school band
- Ask pupils to follow someone beating time.

Points to note

Playing from memory is an important and realistic expectation in learning pieces from the earliest stages. Promote confidence by making memorisation of whole pieces a natural part of the learning process. Bear in mind that they are unlikely to be memorised properly until the performance is technically fluent.

Some objectives are:

- to strengthen pupils' confidence
- to focus on the expressive qualities of the music
- to enable pupils to communicate more freely without having the constraints of notation

The maxim 'sound before symbol' is as important now as ever. Reading notation is a means to making music, not an end in itself.

Different forms of notation can be used, e.g. staff, graphic, as an aid to learning. Consider carefully whether notation is a help or hindrance in learning music from aural/oral traditions.

The overall aim is to help pupils to develop instant recall of notes and rhythms, thus heightening musical memory.

Help pupils to gain enthusiasm for learning pieces, using notation when appropriate. Ensure that its use is encouraging rather than discouraging.

In addition to their lessons, all pupils should be provided with opportunities for participation in ensembles. By playing with others, they are likely to:

- increase their motivation and interest
- quicken their rate of progress
- widen their performing skills
- improve their personal and social skills

This can be a fun activity, with teacher or pupils beating time at a variety of tempi.

Learning objectives

E. playing music with others

contd...

Pupils should learn to: ii explore and discuss the character of the music and the expressive possibilities

F. performing and communicating

Pupils should learn to: i perform music to others, e.g. parents / carers, teachers and friends, demonstrating an awareness of the mood of the music

ii discuss the quality of their playing and, with guidance, learn from their performance

Possible teaching activities

Points to note

E. playing music with others

contd...

- Discuss the mood of the music and how it can be conveyed.
- With pupils, assess their ensemble playing, identifying strengths and areas for further development. Make a recording for this purpose, if appropriate.

F. performing and communicating

- Organise opportunities for informal performances in lessons and for parents / carers, relatives and friends at home.
- Ask pupils to revise pieces already learnt and to perform them with expression.
- Encourage pupils to perform from memory where this will enhance confidence, musical awareness and communication.
- Demonstrate to pupils where and how to stand or sit. If notation is used, ensure that stands are appropriately placed and at the correct height.

- Help pupils to evaluate each performance and suggest ways of making improvements and building up confidence. Promote self-evaluation as much as possible.
- Encourage pupils to develop their own library of pieces that can be repeated in future.

Performance is a key skill that should be a natural part of the learning process from the earliest lessons. Simulated performances in instrumental lessons are particularly beneficial, helping pupils to gain confidence.

Allow plenty of time so the music is thoroughly prepared.

Pupils should be well prepared for every performance so that it is a positive experience for everyone.

Pieces need to be chosen with care so that they are well within pupils' capabilities.

References to nerves can be counter-productive. If pupils are thoroughly prepared, however, nerves can be viewed as an aid to concentration. Encourage pupils to have a sense of anticipation and enjoyment about performing.

On-going assessment is an integral part of successful teaching and learning. Opportunities for formal assessments need to be built into the activities. Informal assessments, however, are to be encouraged throughout the teaching, prompted by effective teacher-pupil discussion.