

## **BANDROOM HACKS & SHORTCUTS**

### **An \*ongoing, ever-growing list of helpful suggestions**

*\*Readers: please send your suggestions!*

#### **ORGANIZATION FOR THE ROOM – Lockers/Storage/Inventory/Filing**

- **Label** almost everything! Consider all possible alternatives; just **a few possibilities include** adhesive labels, Dymo® (or equivalent) label-maker, Velcro strips, magnets & write-on magnetic tape, index cards, library cards in pockets, permanent marker, paint, paint-markers, and more.
- **Create a sign-out plan** (for music, materials and equipment) and use it diligently. Both online and in books, you'll find examples that are easily adapted to fit your specific needs. Consider including: Contact info, Dates [out/expected/returned], Identification [SN, Inventory #], Value, Condition, and more.
- **Inventory hack:** If your school offers **digital barcodes** for scanning school-owned inventory, ask for the bandroom's contents to be included.
- **Calendar hack:** Utilize all the **promotional printed calendars** you receive. Suggestions: an administrative calendar (tasks and record-keeping); a "count-down" calendar displaying the remaining days until an event; a performances calendar; facilities-usage schedule.
- **Inventory hack:** Add an **adhesive library-book pocket/card label** to each locker or instrument case; the director collects the card to keep track of which students are using a school-owned instrument. Or, use this system to identify who's using each locker. Note – this is also a great plan for method books!
- **Lockers/Inventory hack:** Create\* a pictorial template of the locker arrangement using Excel, Google Sheets or some other software (\*assign this job to a helpful volunteer); keep a searchable visual record of where to put – and where to *find* – instruments, students and even specific serial numbers. NOTE: This is especially helpful when a parent drops by to "*pick up my daughter's Flute for the weekend.*"
- **Lockers hack #1:** Write students' names and instrument assignments on old-style clothespins and attach them to locker doors
- **Lockers hack #2:** Assign Section Leaders to periodically inspect lockers. Garbage/recyclables get removed, and other concerns come to your attention
- **Lockers hack #3:** Any unused lockers – especially those near Brass instruments – can be used to house *mutes*, grouped by various types [Note: Add mutes to the *inventory* plan, because they're expensive and portable! Locks may be suggested for this storage]
- **Filing hack:** Put your Band music back into order with a sorting device: Excellent space-saving options include the "Swisher Sorter", "Score Order" (Cher Co., J.W. Pepper), any vertical file separator, and even an office document separator, described below (see "Sorting/Collecting Hack"). Sorting can be a fun, *quick* and even addictive social activity for students. Train them once, and they'll enjoy doing jobs for you in their free time.
- **Color-code papers:** Save time & confusion by using different colors when distributing papers. For forms and charts that students will use in class, colors accelerate the search in their crowded folders; colors also expedite sorting of forms to be collected. NOTE: With multiple groups, consider *color-coding each group* (i.e. the 7th Grade Band has *blue* folders, *blue* scale sheets, *blue* fingering charts, a *blue* handbook, a *blue* quiz, etc.)
- **Sorting/collecting hack:** Because collecting documents can be very time consuming, train students to turn in permission slips and other papers using a simple plastic file-sorter available at any office supply store. The sorter's plastic leaves are labeled with letters, numbers and months for forms. It is then easy and helpful to add our own instrument names with a marker or sticky labels for score-order sorting. When the papers have been deposited, carefully slide the sorter out and the stack falls into perfect order.
- **Number the music (Part 1)** – When you prepare a new Set, pencil labels on the Score (1), Piccolo (2), Flute I (3), etc. At the end of the usage, *anyone* can successfully put your music back in score-order. Note: by choosing 3a,3b,3c,etc. (for example) to label the different sheets of "Flute I" music, you'll also know who has not returned the music.

- **Use QR Codes** for a variety of reasons. Four examples:
  - Display QR codes for each piece the Band will perform; students scan the code, and can listen to the repertoire on their devices, perhaps even during the daily bus-ride
  - Attach a QR code to each instrumental Solo piece in the Library; students can immediately hear a performance of the piece while they're browsing to choose a solo
  - Save paper, time and money: display a QR code linked to all details for an upcoming concert, trip, festival or fund-raiser. Students can collect the detailed information on their phones.
  - Display a QR code at every entrance to a performance: concert-goers scan for a link to information of your choosing (coming events, acknowledgements, trip or fundraiser details, honors, or perhaps the entire concert Program)

## **ORGANIZATION FOR TEACHING – Seating/Equipment/Percussion/Pencils/Folders/Music**

- **Provide golf pencils;** they're cheap, and students won't remove them from folders for other classes
- **Equip your students' folders** with everything they'll need for success: forms, vocabulary, help-sheets, fingering charts, etc.
- **"Self Serve"** - Create and train students to use a station for pencils, oils, cork grease, band-aids, etcetera. If students can *"get it yourself, and return it when you're done,"* you'll save the time it would normally take to respond to their needs
- **Wall files** (even temporary, made from manila envelopes) are indispensable for papers on trips, fundraising, lesson schedules, etc.
- **Add pencil-clips to music stands** to save time and encourage music-marking for little \$\$
- **Create an immersive educational environment:** Use your room to display music theory information, fingering charts, piano keyboard images, QR code links, motivational materials and so much more.
- **Consider the folder storage plan** (and locker assignments, perhaps): Align choices with the seating plan. Eliminate traffic jams by putting folders and instruments near where the users will be seated
- **Small locker mirrors** are great to encourage embouchure-work
- **Number the music (Part 2)** – For Bands where each student has an assigned number (folder/locker/cabinet-slot), pencil the number on the music *before* distributing it; Folder #24 therefore is filled with music all marked with #24. This preparation has a great effect on collecting music – and on inventory for who has/hasn't turned in their parts.
- **Attendance Hack** – Have buckets, with clothespins labeled with students' names around the rim. As they enter, students (in pre- and post-Covid times) take their clothespin off and drop it in the bucket. Whoever is left is either late or absent. Late passes can be left inside the bucket as well. I'll use a different bucket for brass & perc / woodwinds, or 7th / 8th grades if I have larger groups.

## **RECYCLING IN THE BANDROOM (repurposing other items to stretch the budget) -**

- **Adhesive stickers** have innumerable applications. Consider dots, post-it notes, highlighter tape, plastic tape, painter's tape and more; clean-release versions are best to avoid residue. Photoluminescent (glow-in-the-dark) tape safely illuminates walkways and obstacles on a darkened stage, and easily identifies buttons needed on record/playback and lighting boards.
- **Tape** (a wide variety of kind) can solve many problems. Examples include:
  - **Clean-release Painter's Tape** (or **masking tape**, but be careful of leftover residue) – mark seating locations on floors; locate groups of instruments before trips, to move to graduation, to prepare summer repair tips, etcetera; temporary labeling with just the tape, or with Sharpie markings;

- **Duct tape** – Make temporary repairs of all kinds (furniture, stands, case-handles, lockers, etc.) but *do not apply to instruments themselves*; a loop of tape, adhesive-side-out, quickly removes lint and hairs from uniforms;
- **Plastic/rubber tape** (often found in bright colors) – with administrators’ approval, mark step-intervals on the floor of the music room/halls for marching practice while entering/exiting; cover sharp edges of frames/mirrors;
- **“Hook-and-loop” tape** (2-piece Velcro) – hold cables to mic stands; bind (mic, music, speaker) stands together for storage or to carry; create emergency case-handles;
- Note: **“Goo Gone”** or similar products will be handy for removing the inevitable adhesive residue
- **Velcro & 3M “Command Strips”** have many uses: adding temporary markers/labels; hanging plaques & pictures without damage; marking set-up locations on a carpeted floor;
- **Clear plastic hanging shoe organizers** are multi-purpose wonder items for the bandroom – besides office supplies, markers, tools and the like, consider storing tuners, mutes, and other musical supplies. Use to organize cell phones during class. Dedicate one to the Percussion Section for an easy way to organize shakers, claves, woodblocks, sirens, whistles, jingle sticks, flextones and many more small auxiliary pieces.
- Put various forms into **plastic page-protector sheets**; dry-erase markers (or grease pencils) allow the same form to be used many times.
- Need a quick comfortable thumb rest? Cut it from **padded toe sleeves, rubber pencil-grips, silicone tubing**, etc.
- **Adhesive felt dots, furniture protectors, moleskin padding**, etcetera: replace woodwind bumpers; create muting devices; level wobbly furniture; the clear *rubber* dots applied to a door frame can help reduce noise as people enter/exit your rehearsal room; *Adhesive moleskin is excellent for softening the attack of certain Percussion mallets*;
- Repair broken Concert Bass Drum suspensions using **worn-out vacuum cleaner belts**.
- Place small **carpet samples** – inexpensive or even free – by your Tuba and Euphonium players to help keep the bells safer from scratches. Carpet samples, as well as ...
- **Carabiners** – Hang patchcords, speaker cables, extension cords (etc.) on a pegboard wall; (with training) learn to tighten curtain ropes and travel case straps; attach water bottles where needed; attach several tote bags or backpacks together for trips; create an impromptu 3-ring binder; a “Jumbo Carabiner” makes a great carry handle; hang belts, accessories, color guard items in the uniform room;
- **Plasti-Dip** – Add a comfortable no-slip grip to sticks/mallets, repair tools (screwdrivers, mallets);
- **Golf Tees** –
- **Plastic Coffee Containers** (Liquid Laundry Detergent, Fabric Softener, Kitty Litter, etc.) – Glue sandpaper to a flat spot on two matching empty containers for impromptu Sandpaper Blocks; cut resonance holes for louder special-use sounds
- **Plastic Jars, Soda Cans, Oatmeal tubs, etc.** – Add BBs, small beans, bird-shot, rice, or other materials for a wide variety of Maracas/Shaker applications
- **Spring Clamps** – Handy for *many* reasons, including:
- **Strap Clamps / Cam Straps / Band Clamps / Ratchet Straps** – Although these items are better known for home improvement purposes,
- **Egg Crates** – Help temper the volume inside a practice room
- **Packing Materials** --
- **Hose clamps** (*sometimes: stainless steel hose clamps; turn-key hose clamps; worm-gear hose clamps*) are available in many sizes. These can provide a fast temporary solution to ‘slipping’ rods/tubes, like: cymbal stands with lost screws, microphone stands that ‘sink’, Bass Clarinet pegs, percussion stands, etcetera.
- Did you drop a clarinet hinge-screw and can’t find it? Consider **magnets** and **stockings**: A *rolling magnetic sweeper* (also called a magnetic broom, or magnetic floor sweeper) can pick it up very quickly. If you don’t have access to one, put a magnet in a stocking and drag it across the floor, *or* use a rubber band to put a stocking over the open end of a vacuum hose (the

vacuum pulls the lost items to the cloth, but not into the hose). Note: the quickest method may be to use a powerful **flashlight**: put the flashlight right at floor-level and shine across the surface, where it will cast a shadow from even the smallest of items.

- **Hand towels** are helpful to line Percussion trays (music stands) and trap tables to reduce noise and contain sticks from rolling. **Bath towels**, even in bad shape, will come in handy after a rainy parade or bleachers performance.
- **Rubber bands** can provide emergency ligatures, water-key springs\* and many other uses (\*caveat: certain rubber products can affect brass finishes, so the usage should be temporary; consider pony-tail bands instead). Save the large bands from broccoli bouquets for the heavy-duty uses.
- Affix a **binder clip** to the edge of your conductor's stand, then slide your conducting baton down through the loop of its handles for "quick draw" storage
- Carefully slice openings in **worn-out tennis balls**; add to chair legs and percussion stands to protect floors and soften the sound-level in the room.
- Ask a science teacher for **rubber stoppers** in sizes to close the end of the tube for suction-testing flutes, clarinets, etc.
- Make quick & inexpensive repairs on mallet instruments with **parachute/survival cord**.
- **PVC pipes, collars and caps** can be useful: slip a length of PVC onto each leg of a percussion instrument or table to change its height immediately; put a mallet instrument's caster wheels into a slightly-smaller PVC cap or collar to make a subtle change in height/angle, and to prevent rolling; find online instructions to build a rain stick or other sound effects device.
- Stack PVC pipes (or for larger items, **cardboard concrete form tubes**) horizontally in an instrument locker with the openings facing outward to create additional well-organized storage space for sticks, mallets, beaters without a mess, and even percussion stands and portable music stands.
- If the budget doesn't allow purchasing Chimes Mallets, try wooden **croquet mallets, carver's hammers**, or even basic **tent-stake mallets** (note: wood or plastic only); affix adhesive moleskin, or glue felt, leather, or wood material to the striking surface to provide the desired sound
- A wall-mounted **broom/mop/tool rack** is perfect for folding microphone stands, flags, and percussion stands. Similarly, there's no limit to the usages of pegboard and hooks.
- A **kitchen "lids" rack** provides vertical storage for small marching cymbals, and gives easy access to the "in use" Band music envelopes
- A very inexpensive **canvas carpenter's apron** helps the busy percussionist, and can serve various other purposes.
- **Plastic bread-bag closure tabs** quickly slip on to label the many cables in Jazz Band and other sound-reinforcement situations
- **"Garage leftovers"** – You'll surely find uses for donations of caster wheels; sandpaper; shims (*to level wobbly risers or cabinets*); wood scraps; plexiglass sheets (*hold music down during windy outdoor performances*); pipes/chains/brake drums/metal scraps as sound-effects for the percussionists; empty plastic buckets (*tangle-free storage for long extension cords*); metal buckets (*Percussion features*); unused storage tubs; large sheets of galvanized metal (*protect sharp edges with duct tape for use as a "Thunder Sheet"*); *etcetera*. Note: while you risk becoming (or *appearing to be*) a hoarder, many of our Band-specific problems can be solved using donated odds-and-ends
- **Cardboard Paper Towel Rolls** can keep small extension cables and patch-cords separated; simply loop/bend the cable a few times and slide into the tube
- **Pill containers**, carefully rinsed, can become water containers for Oboe/Bassoon players
- **Dryer sheets** can keep instrument cases smelling fresh during summer storage; additionally, use them to brush off dust, hair, lint and more (i.e. the often-dusty lowest portions of mallet frames, percussion stands, amplifiers, the bottom-most parts of Timpani, etc.).
- **Nail polish remover** (or **Goof-Off**, or **Windex**, or **rubbing alcohol**, or **WD-40**, or **stainless steel polish**) can help remove students' permanent-marker errors from your whiteboard [try a small corner first]. Liquid car wax applied to the surface may protect from a repeated problem.

Note: while some people say to *not* choose Magic Eraser for a whiteboard (as they report it roughs the surface), others suggest the Magic Eraser dampened slightly with **Murphy's Oil Soap**.

- **Purchased products** for low-cost solutions (e.g. **Harbor Freight; Oriental Trading Company; Dollar Stores; etc.**):
  - Storage drawers, bins and compartments – store reeds, oils and supplies cheaply
  - Furniture dollies, hand trucks, folding wheeled platforms and low-cost caster wheels – move your large equipment with less effort
  - Electrical heat-shrink tubing – replace linkage bumpers on woodwind keys, or add no-slip grips to marching sticks, triangle beaters and more
  - Bungee cords, Velcro straps, lashing straps and ratcheting tie-downs – Replace broken case handles; hold equipment in place (i.e. marching band flags); support cases and boxes; **(other?)**
  - Inexpensive magnification glasses, jeweler's loupe – Improve your vision for precision repair tasks
  - Specialty Paints (e.g. Chalkboard surface; Dry Erase surface; White Primer.) Older fiberglass sousaphones (white) and music stands (black) can be freshened with a coat of spray paint (*match the type of finish, and choose your painters carefully!*)
  - Glossy white adhesive shelf-liner works as an extra dry-erase space
- Some other **repair/maintenance hacks** include:
  - **Small crochet hook** – moves needle springs back into place
  - **Zip Ties** – Temporary replacement for broken or missing (*fill in the blank*): e.g. case handles, percussion braces, broken solder-joints on braces for Brass instruments. These can also provide temporary security on lockers and cabinets. Available in many sizes, the larger ones can keep a small instrument case closed when the latch or hinges fail. Several zip-ties can be looped together to create a longer link (ex: when a traveling Vibes frame or a wobbly LP Table needs support)
  - **Clear nail polish** – helps regulation by keeping woodwind screws in position
  - **Black nail polish** – disguises the inevitable music stand graffiti
  - **Waxed dental floss** – indispensable as an emergency tenon-cork, or to secure one in place when it's ready to fall off
  - **"Mr. Clean Magic Eraser"** – many uses, including refreshing white fiberglass sousas
  - **Fine-grade Steel wool** (00 or *finer*) – used carefully, helps the fit of metal parts and removes tarnish and corrosion
  - **Hot glue** – a glue gun is indispensable around the bandroom (seek advice from trusted repair person for limitations about when *not* to use hot glue)

## **CONCERTS (PART 1) – Tickets/Seating/(what else?) [incomplete Jan 2021]**

- **Pre-print Tickets** – even when Concerts are *free*, potential audience members are more likely to attend when they've received an Invitation or a Ticket; each can be provided by students in the band. Use *templates* (Microsoft Word; Google; etc.) to design your tickets, and task students with delivering them to school staff members, friends, coaches, peers, neighbors and others.
- **Other tickets** – Use a double-roll of raffle-style tickets to: make extra use of randomness activities [see *Strategies, Tips, and Activities for the Effective Band Director*]; choose students or audience members randomly/fairly; offer two separate printed programs (one version, with a ticket-stub stapled to it, is given when the concert-goer makes a free-will *donation*; then, with administration's preapproval, you might also pull a random ticket as a *raffle* during the performance); similarly, see "surprise drawing" in the **numbered seating** section below.
- **Utilize school services wisely** – Whether in-building, on-campus, or via a cooperative school services plan, look for *printing/numbering* (card-stock for tickets), *folding/stapling* (programs), *laminating* and other time-saving services. Some will even *perforate* larger sheets, and/or even pre-cut tickets into desired sizes.

- **Numbered seating** – Know the exact size of your performance space. If Rows and Seats are already numbered, you'll have options that include: assigned seating via seat numbers on tickets; predetermined space for performing groups as they wait for their time on stage; a designed seating plan for groups of visitors, especially during in-school assemblies ("Mr. L's class in Rows A-B-C. Mrs. B's class in Rows D-E-F"); choose a surprise drawing during events ("*The Music Boosters are giving away an embroidered Spartan Band blanket tonight; we're pulling a ticket, and the blanket goes home with the person seated in Row \_\_\_, Seat \_\_\_*"); for special non-playing days, you can use numbers to space seating as you like ("*this morning we'll have a special guest performance, so please sit only in Section 2, and only in Rows A-through-L*")
- **Publicity Hacks** – Mail (email) your Concert details to all local churches/synagogues for their public announcements; create and guide a *Publicity Committee* made of students; put a small flyer in every school staff member's mailbox (or attach a nice digital flyer to a group email); post brief audio/video clips to in-school announcements & displays; make full use of your digital communications (*Remind, Constant Contact, Facebook, Twitter* or other emerging technologies);

## **CONCERTS (PART 2) – Repertoire/Programs/Staging/(what else?) [incomplete Jan 2021]**

- **Repertoire hacks** –
  - **"Student-selected Repertoire"** – with careful oversight (incl. polls – digital and otherwise), you can use students' input during literature selection. Example: Post five-to-ten titles the wall, each on its own chart paper; give each student a strip of three sticky dots; "*walk by, and stick your dots to your own favorite titles;*" it's easy to get a visual picture of students' opinions.
  - **Literature rotation** – if you have a personal list of "must-do" pieces, create a 3- or 4-year rotation of titles; each student therefore gets to experience the strongest music of your choice over the course of membership. Plus, this is a step toward avoiding accidental unwanted repetition of music, which is helpful for Directors managing multiple groups
  - **Repertoire programming** – write the date/event on the Score to avoid repetition too soon; add performance details (date, event, adjudication results, students' opinions, teaching-problems) to your digital or hardcopy Library listing
- **Program hacks** – Save your personal time by offering roles to band members:
  - **Design** – Check *templates* in your Word, Google, Publisher, Open Office and other software choices. *Concert Program* templates offer a paint-by-number approach to help create programs quickly.
  - **The cover** – allow students (or the art club) to prepare artwork; consider a competition
  - **The contents** – work with a colleague (Keyboarding, Typing or related classes) to assign typing/formatting as an in-school project; assign projects (or offer extra credit) for students to research & type *Program Notes*; create a digital *Survey* where students can all enter their own preferred spellings in the Personnel listings (Note: proof-reading is essential!)
- **Staging hacks** –
  - Apply clean-release tape to the stage floor to identify the setup, especially when multiple groups share the same Concert
  - Assign specific roles to Student Officers, who can then re-set the stage during Concerts
- **Concert/Performances hacks** –
  - Students announce/introduce titles from a pre-written script

## **SPECIAL THANKS TO ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTORS ON THIS DOCUMENT:**

Alexandria Jackson, Spencer Van-Etten Middle School (NY)  
 Cheryl Nages, Unatego Jr-Sr HS (NY)  
 Robert Oldroyd, Dryden HS (NY)  
 Joel Smales, Binghamton HS (NY)