

How to Develop a Better Horn Section

Be prepared

Be a team player

Listen, Listen, Listen

Know your role in the section or ensemble

Preparation

The number one way to become a better section/ensemble player is to come to rehearsal having already learned your music. Rehearsals are not the time to learn the music. Take the responsibility upon yourself to learn your music through individual practice. Learning your notes and rhythms during rehearsal is a waste of time. Rehearsals should be used to improve balance, intonation, and music expression.

Come to rehearsal with the essentials: music, properly working equipment, mouthpiece, pencil, and a good attitude.

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| Music | Spending time locating the librarian for your lost part is best done before rehearsal starts. Find a time outside of rehearsal to ask about music. |
| Equipment | Make a daily maintenance check. Have you oiled your valves? Greased your slides? Cleaned your mouthpiece? Is there anything loose or rattling? |
| Mouthpiece | Do you have your mouthpiece? |
| Pencil | Do you have a pencil with you? Sharpened? |
| Attitude | Have you set your mind to work? Are you using positive language? Do you have positive body language? Are you congenial? |

Team Player

We have all heard about teamwork in sports. But how does that translate to music?

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| Playing too loudly | You are only one slice of a whole pie. If there are too many berries in your slice, then there will not be enough in the others. So if you are playing as an individual, you are taking away from the section. Make sure your loudest dynamics and softest dynamic are consistent with all members of the section. Gage dynamics to the player on your right. |
| Playing too softly | The opposite is just as bad. You must do your part to complete the section. If you are allowing other to cover for your weaknesses, they will have to play too loudly. Match to the loudest player and to the softest player (within reason, of course). |
| Using the wrong articulation | Articulations should be kept consistent among the players in the section. Dissimilar articulation results in a muddy sound. Make you agree upon the articulation style both verbally and aurally. |
| Courtesy | It is always important to be thoughtful of your fellow section/ensemble members. Treat each other with respect. If someone is having difficulty with a passage, take the time to help them work it out. Offer suggestions and ideas to help them improve. Do not ridicule or criticize, it just creates a negative atmosphere, resulting in a poor section. |

Listen

Listen! Listen! Listen! Learning to be a better listener takes time. To start you could begin asking yourself questions as you play.

Am I in tune?

Am I matching pitches with other members of the section/ensemble?

Am I playing the same rhythm/melody as other members of the section/ensemble?

Am I matching articulation, phrasing, style with other members of the section/ensemble?

Am I playing too loudly or too softly?

Do I have the melody? Should I bring it out more?

Do I have the supporting line? Am I covering up or complimenting the melody?

Awareness

Listening well leads to awareness. The more aware you are of others, not only the horn section, but beyond; the more sensitive a musician you will become. Your director will love you! Why? An aware player does not have to be told that they are sharp or flat, too loud or too soft, etc. You will be a team player and make adjustment on your own.

Roles

- 1st Horn duties
1. You are responsible for the section.
 2. You set the example for intonation, articulation, style, etc.
 3. You are responsible for making sure the section follows you.
 4. You must be aware of what each 1st chair in each section of the ensemble is playing.
- 3rd Horn
- When 1st is not playing, the other high part is “acting” 1st Horn. Know where you fit in.
- Low Horns
- The section’s sound is built from the bottom voice up. So low horns must play a bit louder than the high horns for better balance and blend.

Tuning

- Tuners
- The LEAST effective way to tune a section is for each member to use a tuner. 1st Horn sets the intonation for the section. In sectionals, 1st Horn keeps the tuner on the stand at all times. However, in ensemble rehearsal and performance, 1st Horn tunes to the 1st chairs throughout the ensemble. The section always tunes to 1st Horn.
- Chords
- Most of the music you play will be tonal, meaning the chords consist of triads and seventh chords. Know what part of the chord you are playing. Take time in sectional rehearsal to adjust the pitches as follows:
1. Root and 5th of a chord should be perfectly in tune.
 2. The 3rd of a major chord should be placed a little lower.
 3. The 3rd of a minor chord should be placed a little higher.
 4. The minor 7th of a chord should be placed a little lower.
- Ear Training
- Spend time in the horn sectional working on exercises that train the ear to know what to listen for in triads and chords. This takes practice, but over time you will learn to adjust immediately for pleasing and balanced harmonies.
1. Play harmonic M/m 3, P4, P5, and octave.
 2. Practice chord progressions, such as I-IV-V-I.
 3. Practice chorals.