

## CHOOSING A TRUMPET OR MOUTHPIECE

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### BRANDS OF TRUMPET

The professional world is (loosely speaking) divided into players who play Bach (Conn-Selmer) and those who play Yamaha.\* These brands are both outstanding and comparably priced, and your students will not go wrong with either one.

- If your student is buying a professional-quality Bach trumpet, s/he needs a **Stradivarius** or an **Artisan** model. Bach is known for hand-crafting and nuance; students wishing to purchase a used Bach trumpet should always play it first because they do not all play identically.
- If your student is buying a professional-quality Yamaha trumpet, s/he needs a **Xeno** model. Yamaha is known for consistency; a used Xeno is almost always a good purchase.

With student trumpets, many brands have merit and the market is constantly changing. Do NOT let your students purchase:

- Trumpets that are of abnormal coloring (blue, green, red, etc.).
- Trumpets made by off-brand manufacturers (Wal-Mart, eBay, etc.).

Many repair shops will refuse to work on instruments of these types!

Yamaha is almost always a good purchase at the student level, but students could also consider Eastman or Bach (Conn-Selmer). Brands such as Kanstul, Blessing, Jupiter, and Getzen are probably good horns if used or discounted and are good for rental purposes, but might not be the best choice new. However, many of these companies routinely redesign their student horns to attract market share. If you or your student's family is purchasing a new horn for a beginning player, your best bet is to contact your school's private trumpet instructor and ask that person to test out the various options. (Ideally, someone should also offer to pay this person according to his or her usual hourly rate!)

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*\* Of course there are many fine professional trumpet players who use neither of these brands, but many of the "custom" alternatives cost too much to be practical for pre-college students.*

## MOUTHPIECES

**There is no standardized mouthpiece sizing system.** In general, we describe mouthpieces according to:

- Cup diameter (how wide the mouthpiece is if measured from inner rim to inner rim)
- Cup shape (what type of contour the mouthpiece has inside the cup/bowl-shaped portion)

Cup shape is usually described as being more V-shaped (deep) or more flat (shallow). Students may have endurance problems if the mouthpiece is too shallow OR if it is too deep.

- Deep cups get a rich sound but are a challenge in the upper register because they emphasize low overtones, not high ones.
- Shallow mouthpieces emphasize the high overtones and can become very bright and zippy the shallower they get. They can make it difficult to play below the staff with a rich sound.

In general, your student should play a mid-range cup depth (usually denoted as a “C” cup mouthpiece).

It is possible to customize other aspects of the mouthpiece, but students should consult a private teacher before making these changes as they can spike the mouthpiece price from \$50 to \$200.

**Most beginners will need the equivalent of a Bach 7C or Yamaha 11B4.** Here is what “7C” means:

- 7 is the rim diameter. It is a relatively small diameter owing to the fact that beginners’ embouchures are under-developed.
- C is a cup depth of average contour. It is bowl-shaped, not too deep and not too shallow.

Some teachers prefer Yamaha mouthpieces because they believe the rim rests more comfortably on the face. You should experiment to see what works better in your band.

If your student has very full lips, you could recommend a larger size, such as Bach 5C or 3C or Yamaha 14B4. Note that the only descriptor we have changed is the number that goes before the letter. With Bach mouthpieces, smaller numbers mean wider rim diameters. With Yamaha, larger numbers mean wider diameters.

**Most pre-college players will change rim diameters as they advance but will keep the same cup.**

Trumpet players progress to bigger mouthpieces to allow more lip into the mouthpiece, since more lip in the mouthpiece creates a more mature sound. However, it may compromise endurance if the player changes sizes too early. Using Bach mouthpieces as a point of reference, here is a typical progression:

- Beginner: 7C (possibly 5C or 3C if easier to get a sound on one of those)
- High School: 3C (possibly 5C if 3C causes the student to tire too easily)
- Very advanced high school and/or early college: 1-½C or 1-¼ C (but only if there is reason to change; see next section)

**Your student should consider changing mouthpieces if...**

- S/he is becoming excessively fatigued (but is practicing regularly): mouthpiece is possibly too big (inner diameter is probably too wide)
- The sound is dull and has no sparkle (and your student plays lip slurs easily): mouthpiece is possibly too deep or too wide
- Sound is small and/or thin (and your student is using plenty of air): mouthpiece is possibly too small (inner diameter is too narrow)

If you try a new mouthpiece and notice that any of the above three variables gets worse (student loses several notes off of his or her range; sound loses sparkle; sound becomes too small or thin), you should conclude that either (a) you went too far in a certain direction or changed the wrong variable; and/or (b) the current mouthpiece is a better solution for the time being.

**Q. Should a student play a shallower mouthpiece if playing the lead book in jazz ensemble and/or first part in marching band?**

A. Possibly. The shallower mouthpiece will emphasize high overtones so the sound will become very bright. This style of mouthpiece is not appropriate for concert band but could be useful in jazz ensemble, musical theater, marching band, etc. Remember that a mouthpiece that is too shallow can compromise endurance, and the brightness can make it difficult to blend. There are many options for commercial-style mouthpieces, and selection is a matter of personal preference. Curry, Schilke, and Warburton all make options that would be appropriate for a high school student to try. Broadly speaking, your student could look into an M cup with Curry; an A cup with Schilke (usually labeled [rim number]A4A); or an SV cup with Warburton. Mouthpieces are expensive and very much like shoes, in that they are often a matter of personal fit and preference, so it might be worth trying to find a used one if a student is uncertain about whether a particular mouthpiece will be a good choice.

**Q. My student wants to play a “heavyweight” mouthpiece. What does this mean?**

A. Most students are attracted to heavy equipment at some point because it makes the sound feel very focused and rich from the player’s perspective. However, the presence of extra metal in the design of these mouthpieces (or in heavyweight trumpets) tends to reduce the presence of high overtones in the sound. A listener will then experience the sound as more dull (or sometimes as more bright because the player is trying to compensate). I prefer that my students avoid heavy equipment until they have mastered standard equipment and possess the discernment to judge their own playing with a recording device. Most students do not achieve this ability until late in their collegiate studies.