Sound Sculpting: Breath, Tone, and Flexibility

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1. Developing Resources – "The Why"

a. We wanted to improve the individual musicians.
b. We do not have access to a comprehensive private lesson program, even to this day, so we had to create a curriculum to develop instrument specific skills that would be typically taught in a private lesson program.
c. The students must understand what they are trying to accomplish and why. (Culture)
d. These fundamentals are covered in every rehearsal, including outdoors: "Band Vitamins."
e. The students recognize their individual growth, and how they can apply it to the literature we perform.
f. The fundamental routine applies to ALL bands – Varsity to Sub Non-Varsity B – this is VITAL.

2. Breathing

a. Always start with a quiet and still room (focused mind)
b. The Two-Count breath
    i. 1-te-2 or 5-te-6 to start
    ii. Students will be thinking subdivisions.
    iii. This is universal – for both indoor and outdoor band rehearsals.
    iv. Less tension in the body – focused mind
c. Position
    i. Body – good posture (relaxed vs. tension)
    ii. Instrument & hand position.
    iii. You must be aware of what your students are doing: walk around the ensemble.

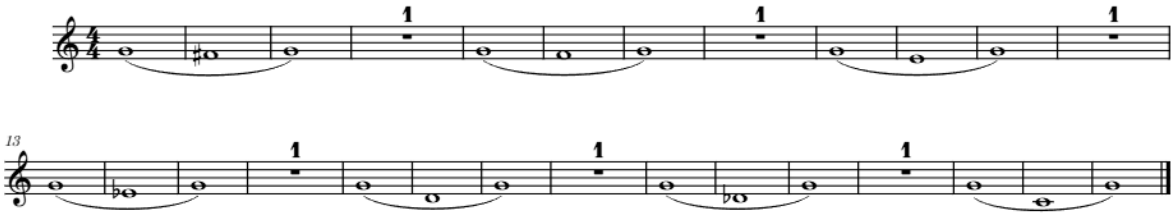
3. Tone

a. Individual tone quality vs. ensemble sound
    i. **Levels of listening (we use 4 levels)**
        1. Yourself (tone – characteristic sound)
            a. Demonstrate what a characteristic, focused sound is (or find someone that can do this for you), especially for younger students.
        2. Your neighbors (trio or quintet)
        3. Your section
        4. The entire ensemble (Can you hear the bassoon?)
    ii. **What are you listening for?**
        1. Tone/resonance
        2. Volume/Balance
        3. Tuning
        4. Timing
b. Tone and tuning go hand in hand – We love the harmony director! (always with metronome and drone)
    i. In tone usually means in tune
    ii. Beginning-Middle-End (BME)
        1. Timing of inhale and exhale
        2. Consistency of air speed (baby crescendo) – especially on larger intervals
        3. Subdivision within the long tone (1234, 1234, 1234, 1234)
c. Long Tone Exercises
    i. Whole note exercise (concert F)
        1. 2-count breath
        2. Hold 4 counts (BME)
        3. "off-out-in"
        4. Repeat
    ii. 4-8-12-16 & variations
    iii. Remington exercise (F & Bb)
        1. Use both Ascending/Descending intervals.
        2. For advanced groups
            a. Define intervals and tuning tendencies.
            b. Combine exercises (WWs ascending vs. brass descending for more advanced ensemble)
    iv. Have 1st chairs demonstrate.
    v. Individual Tuners and the "Green Light"
    vi. Instrument specific elements should be incorporated in sectional time once a week. (Sectionals = Masterclass)

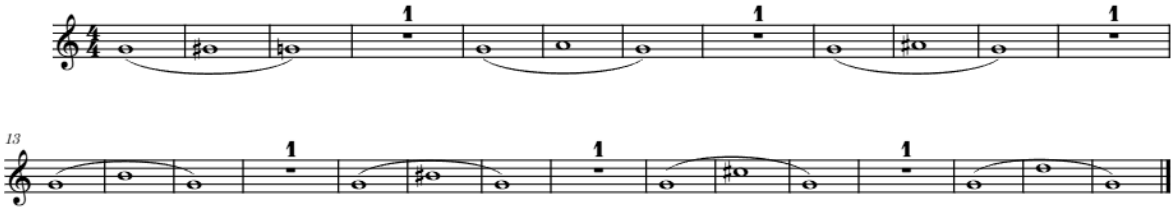
Trumpet (B Flat)

Permian Wind Fundamentals

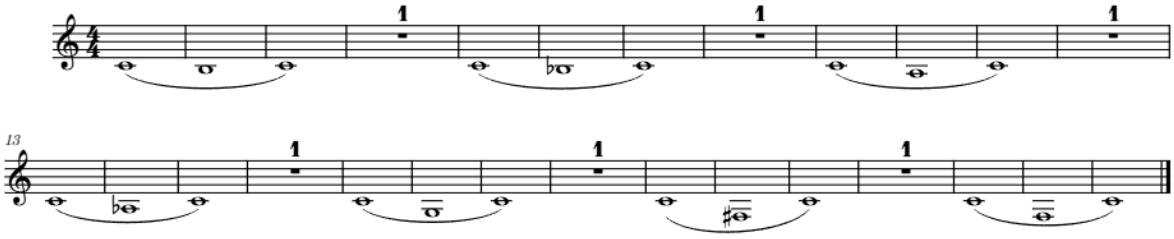
Long Tone - F Descending



Long Tone - F Ascending



Long Tone - Bb Descending



LONG TONE QUICK COMMENTS

“Hold it still”
“Relaxed breath”
“Listen to your neighbor”
“Beautiful sound”
“Release together”
“Listen for bassoon”
“No stick-outs”

4. Flexibility

a. Order of operations – fundamental foundation (breath & tone) must be established before working on flexibility.

b. Just as important for Woodwinds as it is for the Brass

   i. Everyone is focusing on the same fundamental goals *(This was a game changer for us.)*

c. Elements of study for each individual instrument

   i. Flutes – Harmonics

   ii. Oboe/Bassoon – Octave Studies (half-hole and flicking)

   iii. Clarinets – Register Studies – etc.

   iv. Saxes – Voicing (Don Sinta)

   v. Brass – Lip Slurs

      1. If you are relying solely on your face, you are doing it wrong!

d. End every rep with a sustain (4 or 6 counts) and align it with the 2-count breath.

e. Create progressive exercises

   i. Start simple – be sure that students understand how to achieve the goal.

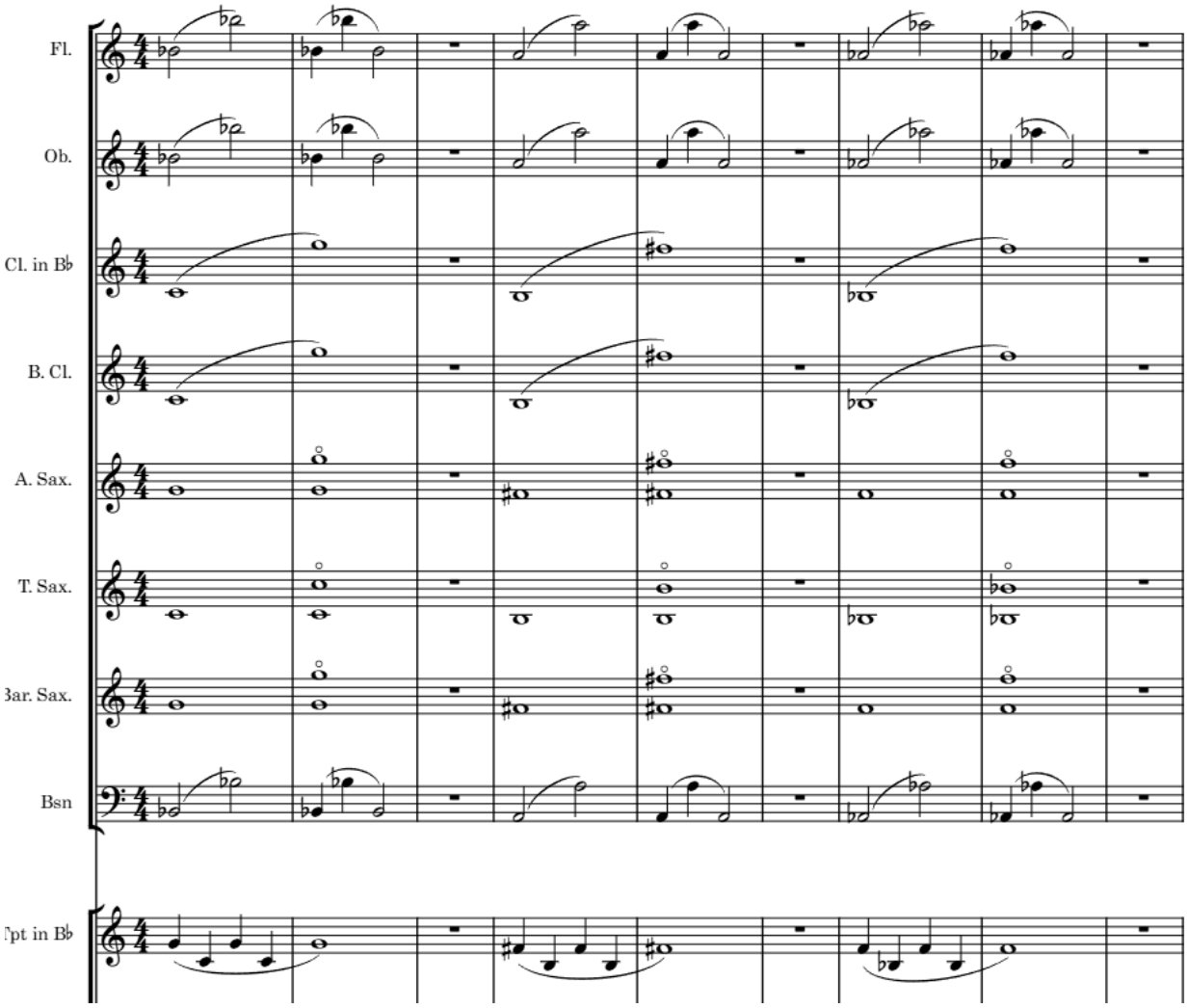
   ii. Do not "go through the motion" in these exercises. It is better to do multiple reps on one exercise than to do several exercises poorly.

   iii. Have individual students, sections, certain groups play.

      1. Wheel of Names
      2. Hot Seat

   iv. Add more challenging levels as your students improve.

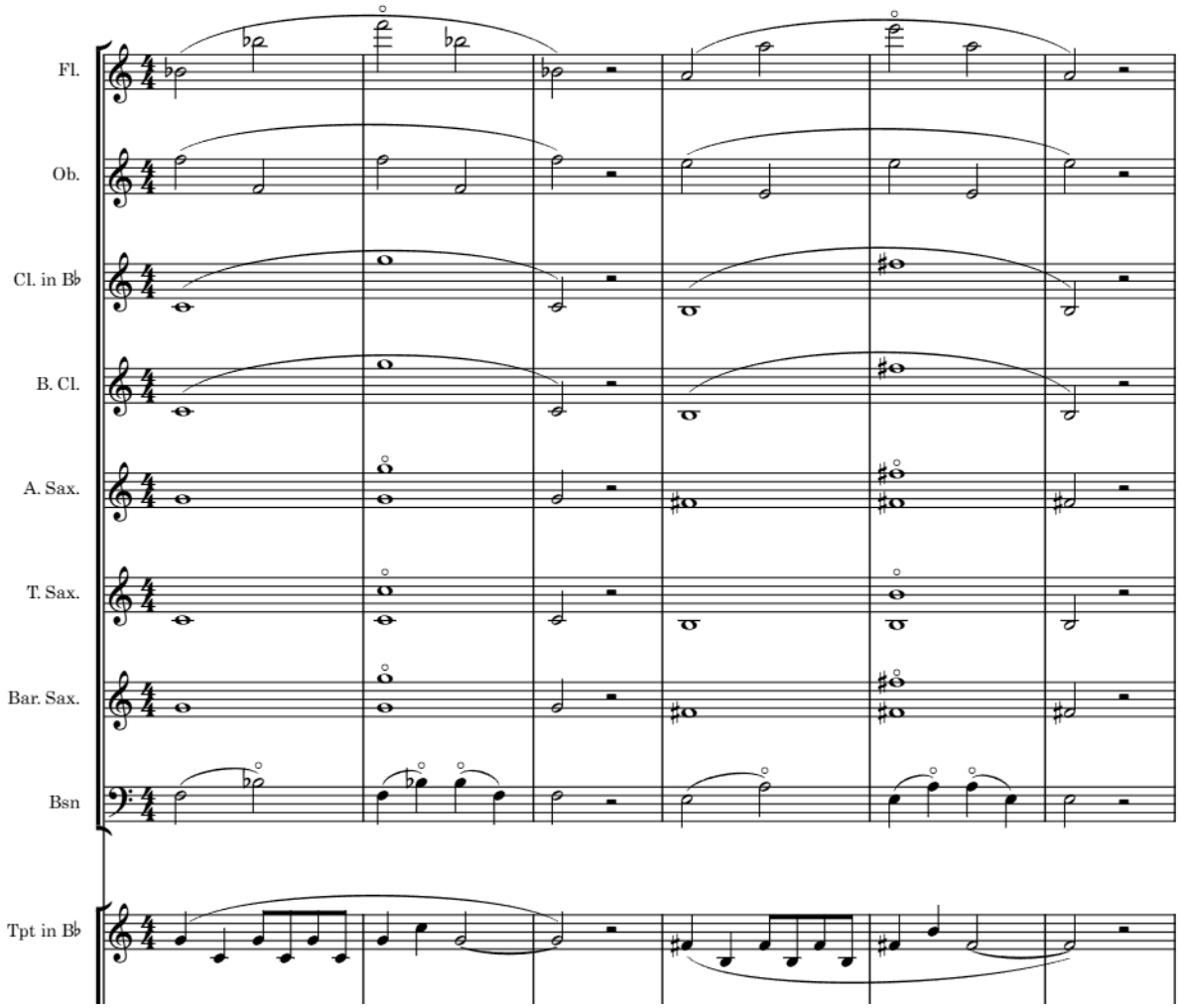
11. Flexibility 1



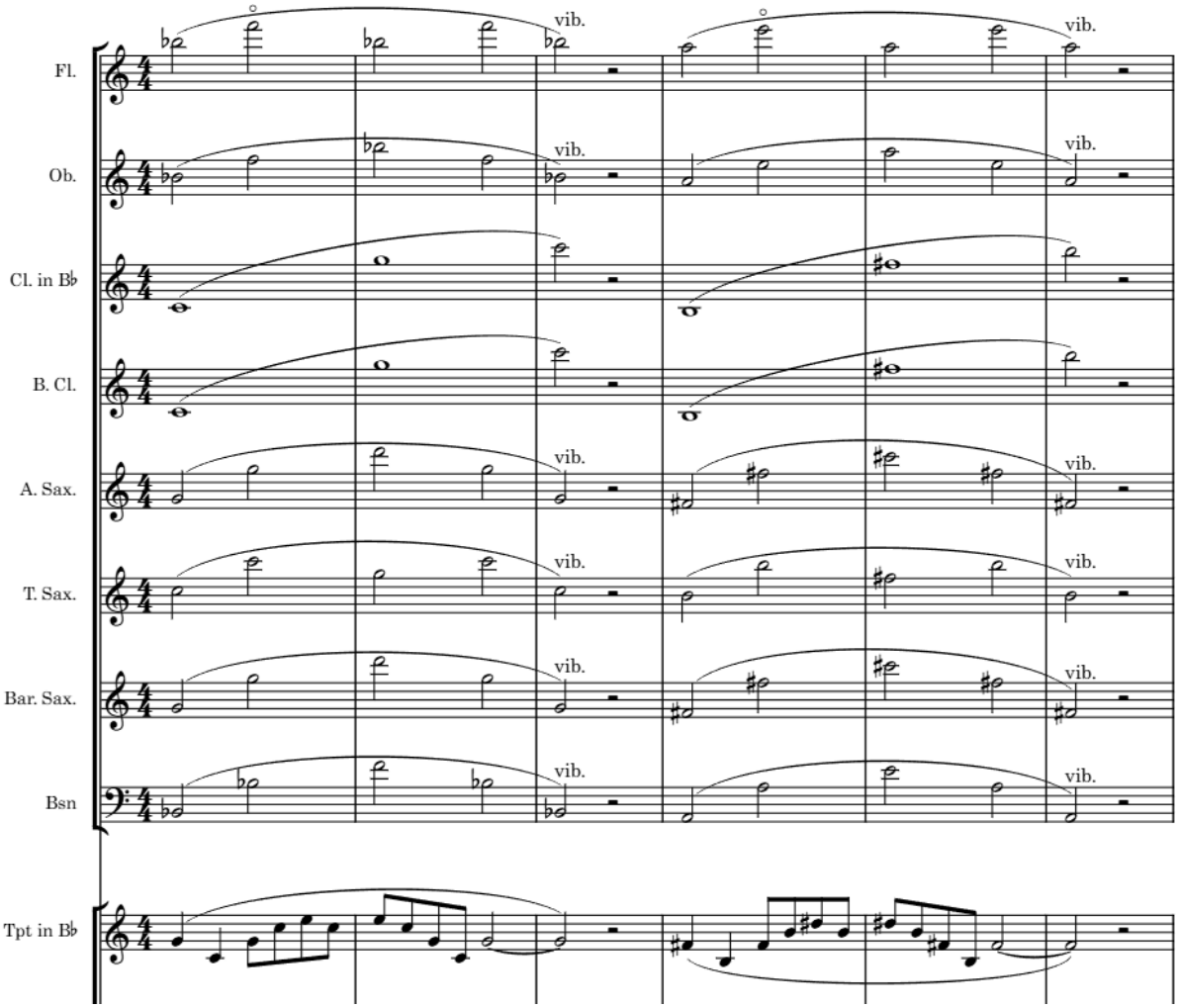
QUICK COMMENTS

“Smooth”
“All notes the same volume”
“Relaxed breath”
“No tension in the sound”
“Listen to your neighbor”
“Beautiful sound”
“Release together”
“Listen for bassoon”
“No stick-outs”
“Hold it steady”

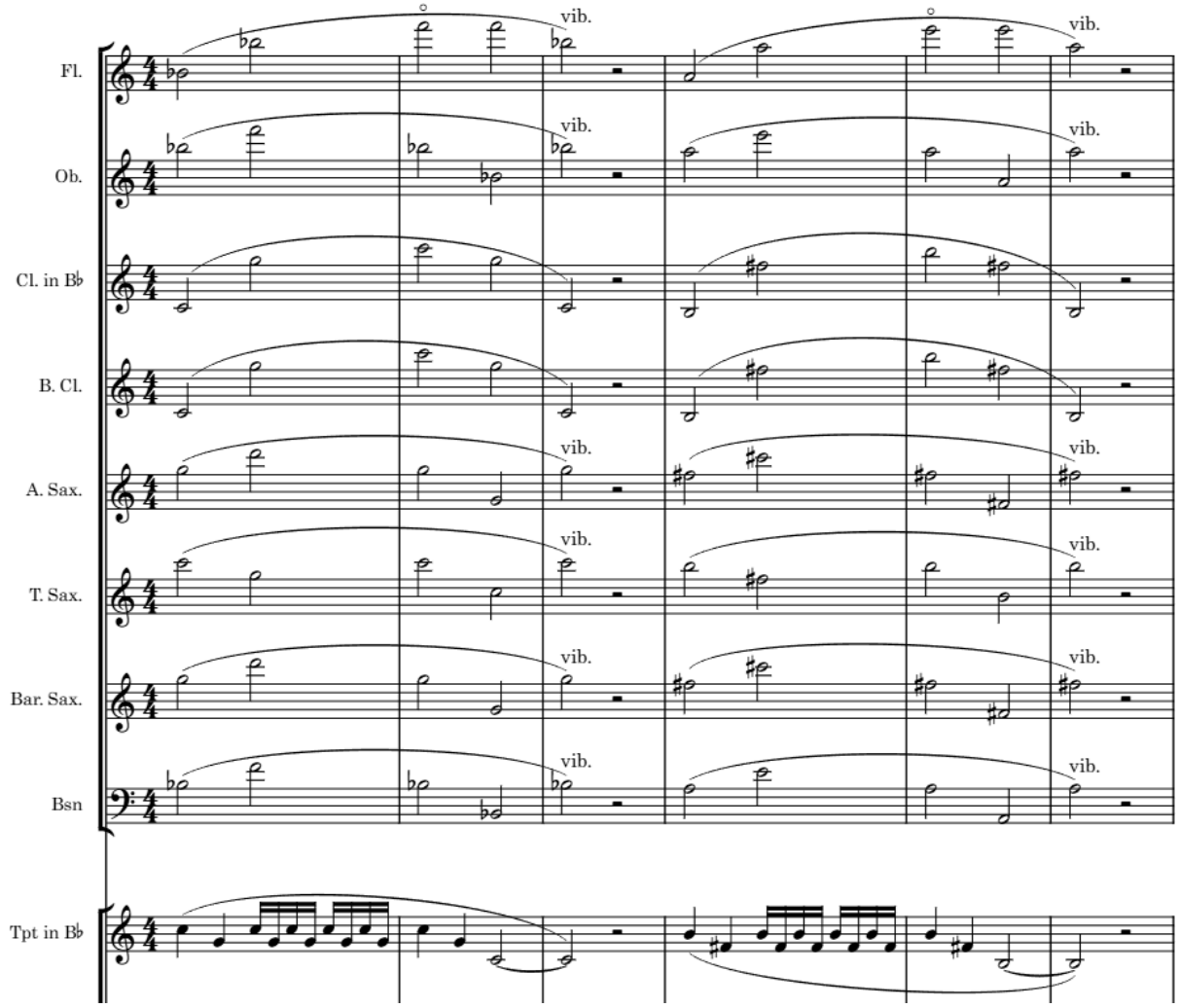
12. Flexibility 2



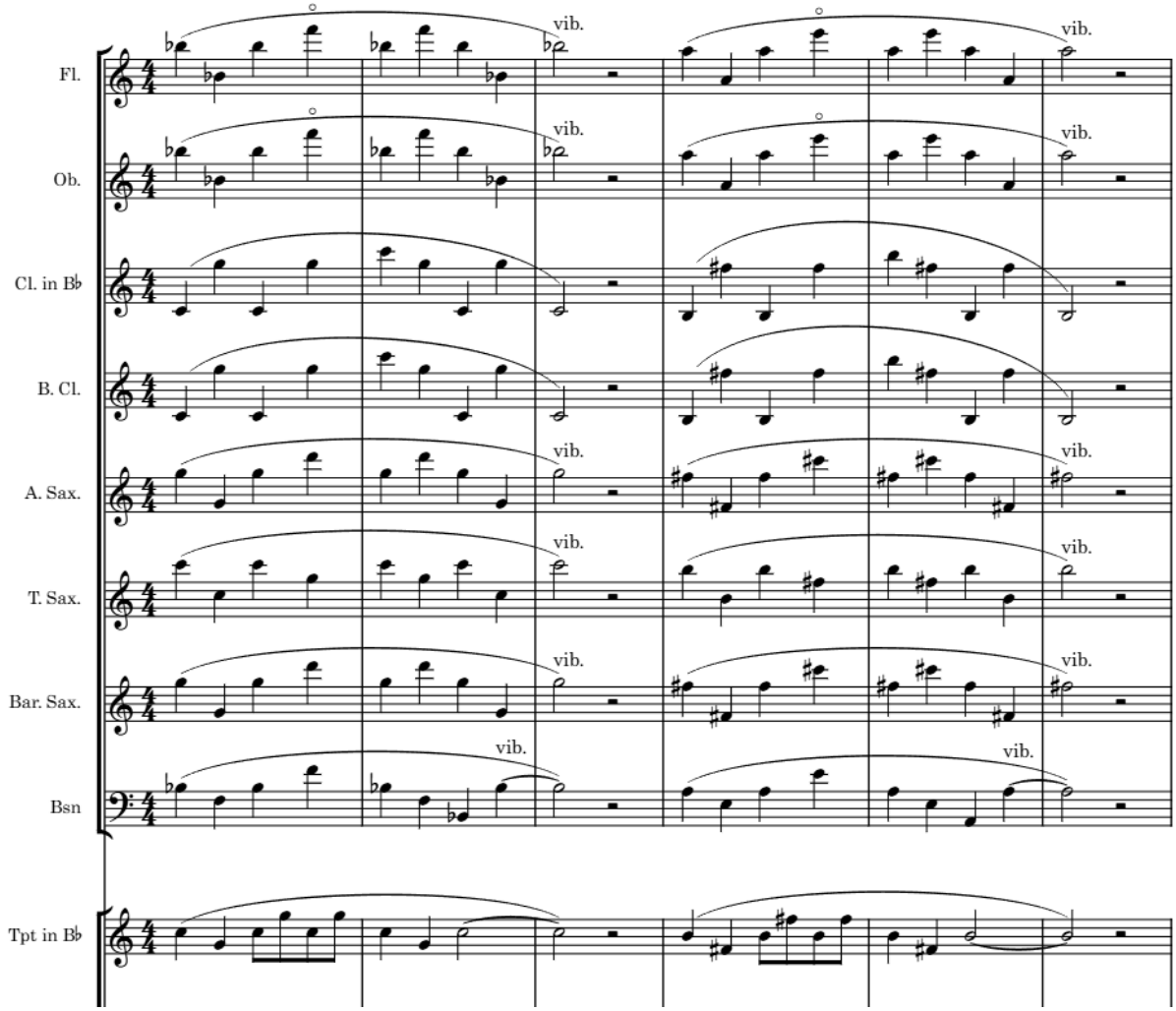
13. Flexibility 3



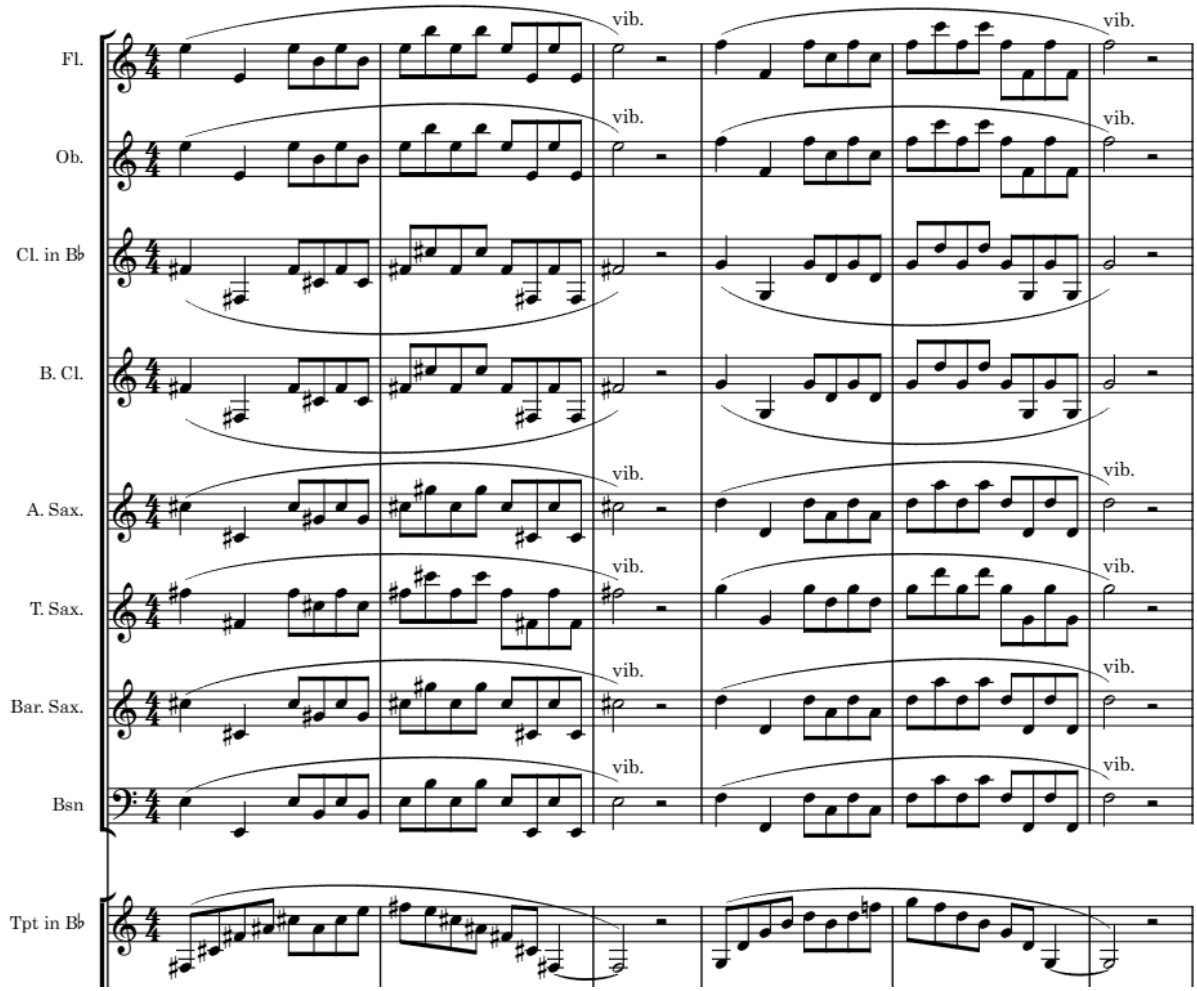
14. Flexibility 4



15. Flexibility 5

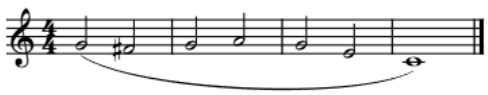


16. Flexibility 6

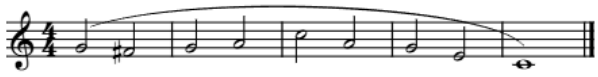


Trumpet (B Flat)

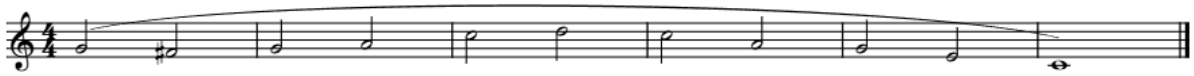
Flow Study 1



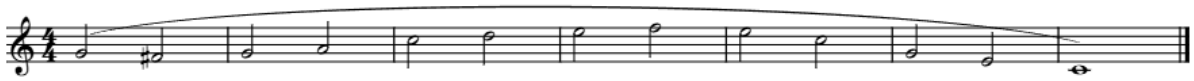
Flow Study 2



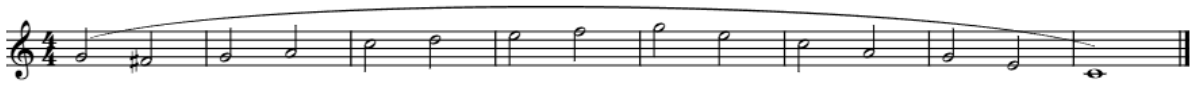
Flow Study 3



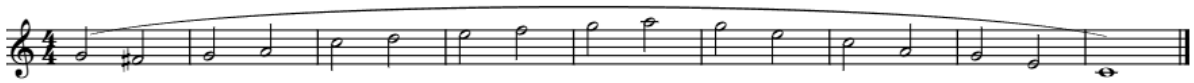
Flow Study 4



Flow Study 5

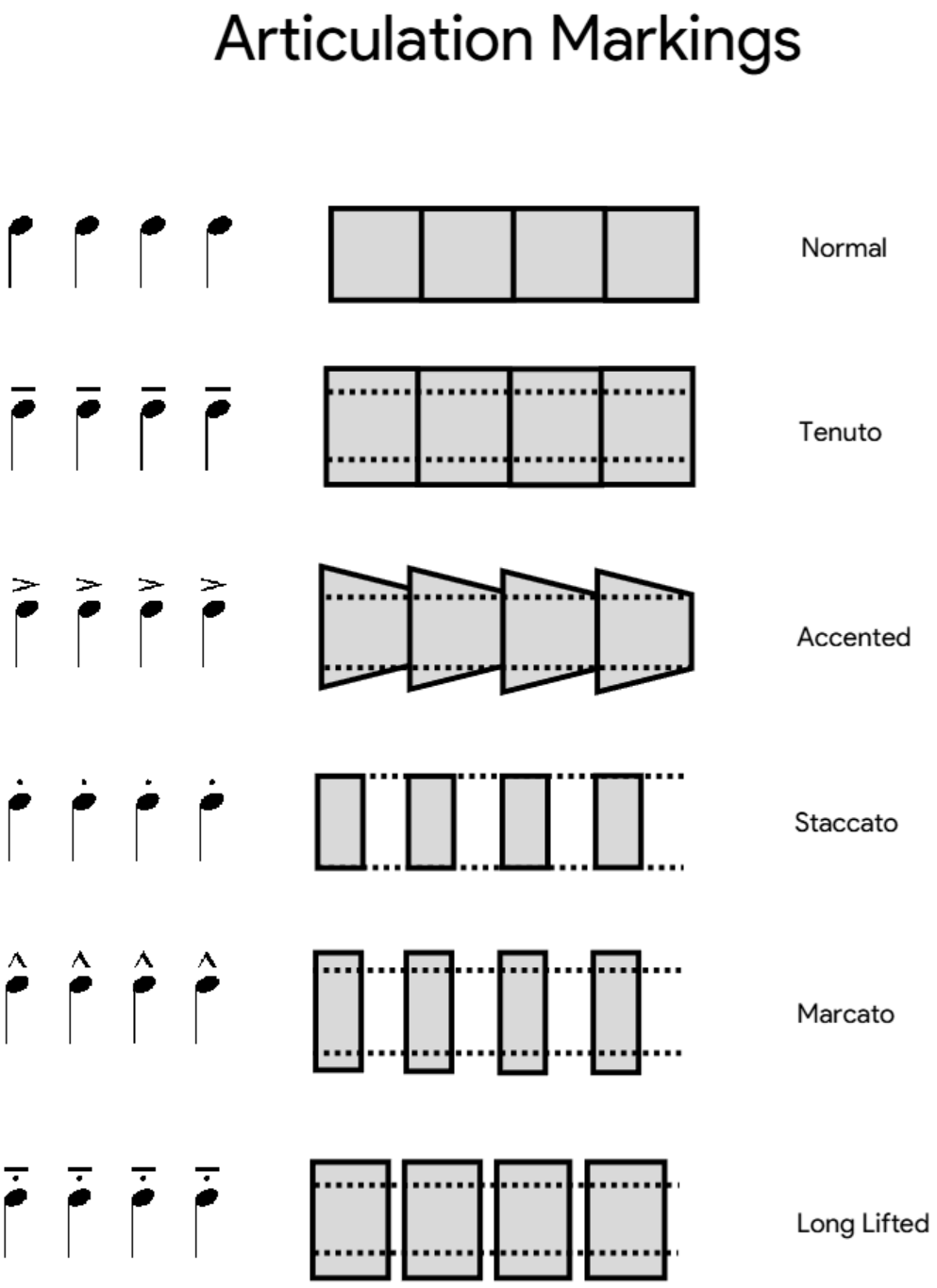


Flow Study 6



5. Articulation

a. Start & end articulation with a long tone exercise
b. Practice articulation while playing the flow studies
c. Address note-length when articulating (style)



Other thoughts:

Keep adapting and changing as needed! We re-write these exercises each season as we learn more and as our students grow as musicians.

How much time do we spend on these exercises, and does it vary throughout the year?

We use these fundamentals for our ensemble auditions.

Some Apps We Use:

- Lesson Launchpad
- Newzik
- Tonal Energy

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