

How to Care for Your Musical Instrument

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To the Teacher

Repair of musical instruments is inconvenient and expensive and reduces the time that students have for practice and rehearsal. Many trips to the repair shop can be avoided by proper handling and maintenance of an instrument.

All beginning students (and their parents!) need the information in these reproducible pages. Students who know how to assemble, maintain, and clean their instruments properly will have instruments that play better and sound better. More advanced students also need to review instrument care on a yearly basis because they often get careless as they become more familiar with their instruments.

How to Care for Your Musical Instrument makes it easy for the band director, orchestral conductor, classroom music teacher, or private teacher to instruct and quiz students on the proper care of their instruments.

Teaching Methods

This set of reproducible masters is presented in a format that is easy to use and helpful to the classroom music teacher, the band director, the orchestra conductor, or the private instrumental teacher.

The masters consist of information pages and worksheets covering the care of musical instruments. Generally, the first one or two pages for each instrument give the student information on how to care for his or her instrument. The final page is a worksheet consisting of 15 matching questions for review or testing. The teacher needs to duplicate only the masters for the instruments he or she is teaching. Although the information given is unique for each instrument, the answers to the matching questions are in the same order for every worksheet, making it easy for the teacher to correct, or for the students to correct themselves. Because the care of the guitar or recorder is somewhat simpler than that of band and orchestral instruments, only one page is devoted to each.

It is suggested that students be given the information pages to keep in their folders or notebooks and that they hand in the review/testing questions for grading.

The information pages need to be presented to the students, especially the beginners, in conjunction with a demonstration. Usually each instrument should be demonstrated separately. Similar instruments, such as brasses, can be presented at the same time, but this is best done in small groups directed by the teacher or by a clinician. Have the students read the information while you demonstrate. Or you may prefer to read the information and have the students show you the correct procedures. Proper hand position and embouchure can also be demonstrated at this time.

I've never had a sink in my band room, so I use a baby bathtub when I demonstrate cleaning mouthpieces and bathing small instruments. It is a good idea to demonstrate how to bathe a brass instrument at the first parents' meeting of the year, so that parents are not alarmed when their son or daughter first asks to use the bathtub to wash the tuba!

The information given in the demonstration can be reinforced by using a filmstrip or video. There are several different audio-visual aids available, and these will enhance the information pages.

Grade the worksheet to help evaluate your students' understanding of the materials. It is also a valuable evaluation practice to carry out an instrument inspection after three or four weeks of rehearsals, and to grade the cleanliness of the instrument and mouthpiece and tidiness of the case.

There are several aspects of instrument care, tuning and maintenance in which individual teachers may prefer one method to another. In most instances the worksheets instruct the students to “ask your teacher which method he or she prefers.” You are the final authority on instrument care and must let your students know what your preferences are.

How to Care for Your Saxophone (I)

Assembly: How to Put Your Saxophone Together

Before you open your case, make sure that it is right side up. Grease the cork on the neckpiece so that the mouthpiece goes on easily. Put the mouthpiece and reed on the neckpiece. Place the neckpiece in the body of the saxophone. To avoid bending the neckpiece, do not apply any downward pressure. Use a gentle rotating, twisting motion. The octave key lever should go *under* the ring on the neckpiece.

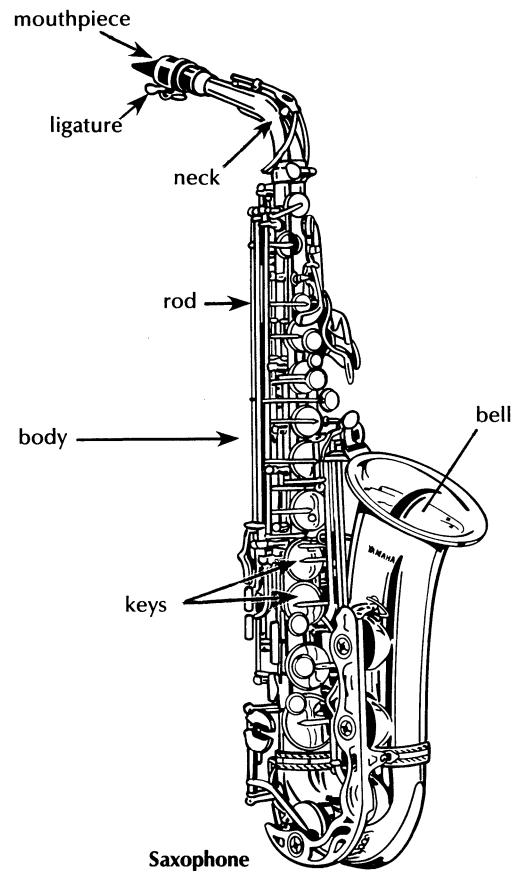
Tuning

To tune the saxophone, adjust the length of the instrument by moving the mouthpiece in or out. If you need to lower your pitch, pull the mouthpiece out, making the saxophone longer. If you need to raise your pitch, push the mouthpiece in.

When You Have Finished Playing

Moisture left in the instrument after you have finished playing will cause the pads to deteriorate. Swab your saxophone out each time you play. There are two kinds of swabs available for the saxophone. The most common is a cloth attached by a string to a weight. The weight is dropped through each section and the cloth pulled through. The other kind of swab is a brush type that is pushed through and left for storage in the body of the instrument and neck.

Wipe the keys with a cloth to remove finger marks and acid left by perspiration. This acid will tarnish the metal if it isn't removed.



Remove your reed from the mouthpiece and place it in a reed guard. This will extend the life of the reed. Leave the ligature on the mouthpiece to keep it from getting bent, swab out the mouthpiece, and be sure to replace the mouthpiece cover on the mouthpiece.

Always keep your saxophone in its case when you are not playing it. To prevent damage to the octave key lever, always replace the end plug when you put your saxophone away. Never put anything into your case that it was not designed to hold because the pressure from papers or music can bend the rods and keys.

How to Care for Your Saxophone (II)

Regular Maintenance

Try to keep dust from accumulating in the key mechanism of the saxophone. If you are extremely careful, you can use a small brush or cotton swab to clean under the keys and rods. If this is not done with great care, springs could be pushed out of place, or rods bent. Vacuum your case several times a year. Once or twice a year apply a small amount of thin key oil to all key joints and posts.

Under each key is a pad that seals the tone hole when the key closes. If pads stick, they are dirty. To clean the pads place a clean cloth under the pad, close the key, and pull the cloth through. To keep pads clean, don't eat candy or chew gum before playing! Pads can and should be replaced after several years of use, but this is expensive, so make them last as long as possible.

Wash the mouthpiece regularly with lukewarm water and clean it using a mouthpiece brush.

The body of the saxophone can be polished with a soft cloth. Never use polish on the saxophone as this can damage the finish. Avoid bumps when you are playing. Dents in the saxophone look ugly and are very expensive to have removed. This is especially important to watch for when playing sitting down because it's very easy to bump the sax on your chair. Rest the saxophone against your right hip—not against the chair.

Always use a neck strap as additional support for holding the sax, and as a safety measure to prevent accidental dropping of the instrument. However, don't depend entirely on the neck strap to hold the saxophone. The strap itself can snap, or the hook can break or bend. Keep both hands on the saxophone at all times.

Supplies needed to Care for the Saxophone

1. Swab
2. Cloth to remove finger marks
3. Thin key oil
4. Cork grease
5. Clean cloth
6. Mouthpiece brush

Handling the Saxophone

The saxophone is a delicate instrument which must be handled carefully. Do not let anyone else but your teacher play your saxophone. If you must set it down during rehearsal or during practice, put it on a flat surface with the keys up. Never leave your saxophone on a music stand or on a chair. The saxophone can even be damaged when it is inside the case! The saxophone is an expensive instrument—not a toy—and should be handled with care.

How to Care for Your Saxophone (III)

Directions: Match each clue in the left column with the correct answer in the right column. Write the letter of the answer in the blank.

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1. _____ Never put anything in this that it was not designed to hold. | A. hip |
| 2. _____ Rods might do this if papers are crammed into the case. | B. brush |
| 3. _____ To prevent chipping, keep this on the mouthpiece. | C. case |
| 4. _____ Before you put the mouthpiece on, you should do this to the cork. | D. gently |
| 5. _____ Once or twice a year you should apply this to key joints and posts. | E. grease |
| 6. _____ This is under each key to seal the tone hole when the key closes. | F. end plug |
| 7. _____ Rest the saxophone against this—not your chair. | G. cover |
| 8. _____ This cap helps prevent damage to the octave key mechanism. | H. pad |
| 9. _____ Always twist the neckpiece onto the body of the saxophone this way. | I. candy |
| 10. _____ You can use this to clean dirty pads. | J. polish |
| 11. _____ This can scratch the surface of your saxophone. | K. clean cloth |
| 12. _____ You should do this to the saxophone every time you finish playing. | L. swab it out |
| 13. _____ Never eat this before playing your saxophone. | M. key oil |
| 14. _____ Use this to wash and clean the mouthpiece. | N. bend |
| 15. _____ Always remember that your saxophone is an _____ musical instrument and handle it with care. | O. expensive |

How to Care for Your Acoustic Guitar

Storing and Transporting Your Guitar

The best way to prevent an expensive repair is to handle your guitar with care, remembering that it is made of thin wood. Most cracks are caused by dropping or banging the guitar. A good case will give your instrument some protection when it is being carried or transported. Be sure to use a case that fits your instrument well. Your case should have a soft lining and some padding. When you aren't playing your instrument, keep it in its case and make sure that the latches are securely fastened.

Be very careful to avoid extreme temperatures and humidity. In summer a car can get very hot very quickly. The trunk of a car can get hot enough in summer to melt the varnish, crack the top, or loosen the glue that holds the instrument together. If you have air conditioning in your car, the back seat is a safer place for your instrument to travel. Dry winter air can cause cracks. Use a humidifier in the room where you keep your guitar. Keep it away from heating vents. There are products in repair shops to help keep the humidity in your instrument case. If you live in a dry winter climate, you should use them.

Questions for Review

Directions: Write the answer to each of the following questions.
You may use the back of this sheet.

1. What is the best way to avoid an expensive guitar repair?
2. When should you replace strings?
3. Where is the best place to put your guitar when traveling in a car?
4. What can cause cracks in the guitar?
5. What kind of case is the best for your guitar?

During breaks in rehearsal or practice, put your guitar back into its case. If you use a guitar stand, be sure that it is sturdy.

Cleaning and Maintenance

Use a soft cloth to wipe off dust and finger marks from the strings, fingerboard, and the top of the instrument.

Do not cram music into your instrument case. The pressure from papers can damage the instrument.

Strings must be replaced when they become false (go dead) or when they fray. Avoid overtensioning the strings when you tune the guitar. Use a tuning fork or pitch pipe so that you don't mistakenly tune the guitar to too high a pitch. This can put stress on the strings and neck.

If you notice any cracks in your instrument, take it to a repairperson immediately. This is not a repair that you should attempt yourself.

Supplies Needed to Care for the Acoustic Guitar

1. Soft cloth
2. Tuning fork or pitch pipe
3. Humidifier



How to Care for Your Electric Guitar

Storing and Transporting the Electric Guitar

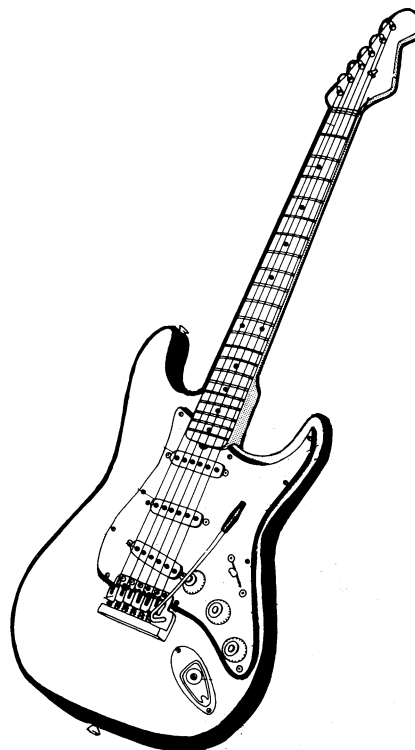
The best way to prevent an expensive repair is to handle your guitar with care. A good case will give your instrument some protection when it is being carried or transported. Be sure to use a case that fits your instrument well. Your case should have a soft lining and some padding. When you aren't playing your instrument, keep it in its case and make sure that the latches are securely fastened.

During breaks in rehearsal or practice, put the guitar back into its case. Don't lean your guitar against a chair or a wall. If it falls, the tuning pegs can snap off. If you use a guitar stand, be sure that it is sturdy.

Cleaning and Maintenance

Use a soft cloth to wipe off dust and finger marks from the strings, fingerboard, and the top of the instrument.

Strings must be replaced when they become false (go dead) or when they fray. Avoid overtensioning the strings when you tune the guitar. Use a tuning fork, pitch pipe, or electronic tuner so that you don't mistakenly tune the guitar to too high a pitch. This can put stress on the strings and neck.



Supplies Needed to Care for Your Electric Guitar

1. Soft cloth
2. Tuning fork, pitch pipe, or electronic tuner

Questions for Review

Directions: Write the answer to each of the following questions. You may use the back of this sheet.

1. What is the best way to avoid an expensive guitar repair?
2. When should you replace strings?
3. Where should you leave your guitar when you take a break?
4. Why should you use an electronic tuner or pitch pipe when you tune your guitar?
5. What kind of case is the best for your guitar?