

Good Playing Posture: A Fundamental Concept, Not a Small Detail

If there is one thing that is guaranteed to throw off a performer's ability to make a nice tone, it is poor posture. When most folks think of posture they think of sitting or standing straight with a comfortable well-balanced stance. Although this is essentially true, posture is actually a whole lot more for us as musicians. It not only involves how we hold our body but also how we connect with the instrument itself. This means that as well as being conscious of our general body position, we must be aware of things like our angle of approach to the instrument, the placement of our fingers on keys or strings, as well as our embouchure (the shape of our mouth as it connects with the instrument).*

Why is this so critical? Well, there are a few reasons actually. Here are 5 reasons you can easily explain to your students when they claim that they can "play just as well sitting like this".

Reason 1 - Breathing. Since we are talking for the most part about wind instruments here, it is important to recognize that our air is what fuels the sound we produce. Because of this we need to maintain a posture that allows for complete control over that air. This control can only be achieved when the back is straight, the ribcage comfortably up and the abdomen able to expand without effort.

Reason 2 - Relaxation. Sound is vibrational, it travels in waves. A good tone is a stable tone, meaning it consists of uniform, stable vibrations. Because of this, we know that the more relaxed we can make our body the less we interfere with the tone. The easiest way to minimize our body's interference with our tone is by ensuring that it is placed in a posture that provides the most stability while creating the least amount of effort and tension.

Reason 3 - Stability. As mentioned above, stability is an important part of the equation. Playing music is a whole body endeavour and as such will involve some whole-body movement. It is important to have a well-placed centre of gravity so as to maintain a relaxed, tension-free posture.

Reason 4 - Dexterity. How we hold the instrument and how we place our hands and finger upon it will largely determine how much freedom these body parts will have to move as needed. Severe bends in wrists and flat fingers for instance will severely impede a player's ability to move fluidly and may in some situations actually lead to injury over time.

Reason 5 - Sound is Directional. Since sound travels in waves through the air it is a very directional form of energy. This means that the centre of our tone will literally go where we aim it. This is why some instruments have their bells pointed towards the audience (trumpets) and others do not (French horns). Proper playing posture ensures that the instrument is 'aimed' as it should be for the best sound dispersion.

Clearly we can see that musical posture is not just a detail to be reminded about occasionally but a foundational concept that performers must be aware of at all times. If teachers are careful to explain its importance and insist on its application early on, good posture will become second nature to students and they will have taken the first step towards a lovely stable tone.

Here are some basic posture concepts that apply to all performers, unless specific characteristics of their instrument require otherwise. It should be noted that standing certainly allows for a more open body stance and is generally preferred when the choice is available in situations like individual practice and solo performance.

Standing Posture Basics

- stand straight, like half of your weight is being lifted by a crane from the top of your head.

- head up and forward facing so air flow is maximized

- shoulders relaxed

- feet generally shoulders-width apart with one foot slightly forward of the other. This provides for stability in all directions.

Sitting Posture Basics

-sit forward on your chair so that your back is NOT in contact with the back of the chair.

-back straight like half of your weight is being lifted by a crane from the top of your head. A slight lean forward from the hips is fine as it helps centre the weight of the body. This slight lean should not in any way impede the freedom of the abdomen to expand freely.

-feet flat on the floor with one foot slightly ahead of the other for stability.

The following are some links to articles, photos and videos dealing with the postural considerations specific to each of the most common beginning band instruments. Enjoy.

Flute

<https://www.jennifercluff.com/posture.htm#posture>

Jennifer Cluff - A.R.C.T., Bachelor of Music in Performance, University of Toronto. Principal Flute of The Vancouver Island Symphony from 1995 to 2006 & Instructor at Vancouver Island University since 1993. This page contains a great article explaining flute posture in detail. While you are there look around the site, it is a fantastic resource for all flute players.

Clarinet

[How Great Posture Can Create Good Tone and Ease of Playing](#)

Michelle Anderson, founder of Clarinet Mentors (www.learnclarinetnow.com), presents a demonstration of how to sit and shape your body in the optimum position to produce good clarinet tone. This lesson gives you a tool to try at home, to check on your own posture. At 4' 12", Michelle also demonstrates how to avoid having tension in your body that can get in the way of easy performance. Michelle also provides a number of excellent videos detailing proper hand, finger and wrist positions.

Saxophone

[How to Hold the Saxophone](#)

In this beginner sax lesson, we learn the correct way to hold our alto saxophone in playing position. We hope you find these lessons helpful!

[Posture, Horn Position, and Hand Position](#)

Taimur Sullivan, Artist-Faculty at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and member of the PRISM Quartet, with another video for beginning saxophone players.

Trumpet

[Trumpet Playing Posture](#)

Trumpet Master Classes with Dr. Brian Shook

[Correct Trumpet Playing](#)

Proper Posture and Hand Position Arm Position / Left Hand Position / Right Hand Position / Instrument Angle / Correct Standing and Sitting Posture "Welcome to the Correct Trumpet Playing Video Series. These videos are designed to show you the correct way to learn and play trumpet, so you can make fast progress as you practice."

French Horn

[Holding Your French Horn Properly](#)

Left hand finger position, Right hand position, Sitting position.

[Posture and bell position](#)

Corbin Wagner, instructor of horn at Interlochen Arts Academy, discusses when you should—and should not—rest your horn's bell on your leg. Join Corbin at Interlochen Arts Academy by applying here: <https://academy.interlochen.org>.

Trombone

[Posture and playing position](#)

[Proper hand position](#)

Euphonium / Baritone Horn / Tuba

[Baritone - Posture, Hand Position, and Embouchure](#)

[Playing Tuba: Posture Do's and Dont's](#)

[Tuba: Posture and Playing Position](#)

Electric Bass

[The Perfect Bass Position... a must for all bass players!](#)

Taken from Scott's Bass Lessons: the largest and fastest growing online bass resource site in the world. Check it out.