

# Your Instrumental Music Plan

## Determining Your Goals

Before beginning, you should have at least some understanding of what your ideal relationship with classical instrumental music looks like. All of your decisions moving forward will be tested against your goals, so it is important to try to understand what you want.

Use the table below to contemplate your goals and to quantify your interests so you may understand them more easily.

*Rate your thoughts on each statement with 0 being total disagreement, 2 being neutral, and 4 being complete agreement.*

PRIMARY CATEGORY	STATEMENT	RATING (0-4)
Hobbyist	I want to enjoy listening to classical music.	
	I want to know about the instruments of the orchestra.	
	I want to hear stories surrounding musical works.	
Hobbyist Musician	I want to perform with classical instruments occasionally.	
	I want to play at least one classical instrument.	
	I want to read sheet music.	
Professional Musician	I want to perform with classical instruments frequently.	
	I want to share classical instrumental music with others.	
	I want to make money with my classical instrumental skills.	
Composer	I want to learn how to write sheet music.	
	I want to understand music theory (the mechanics of music).	
	I want to compose for classical instruments as a creative medium.	

## Playing Non-Classical Instruments

When reflecting on your goals, you might have determined that classical instruments and learning to read music will not give you satisfaction; however, there are still other ways to engage with music-making.

The following instruments are popular amongst hobbyists, and most of them are relatively accessible to acquire and learn. Most are often played in rock ensembles or with vocal accompaniment, and they are often played without sheet music.

*Press the instrument name to see a video demonstration of the corresponding instrument.*

<a href="#">Ukulele</a>	A small string instrument with a light-sounding tone. Strummed or plucked.
<a href="#">Electric Piano</a>	Piano with synthesized sounds and additional features like sliding notes.
<a href="#">Acoustic Guitar</a>	A string instrument strummed or plucked with hands or guitar picks.
<a href="#">Bass Guitar</a>	An electric string instrument requiring a sound amplifier. Plays low notes.
<a href="#">Drum Kit</a>	A set of battery percussion instruments played all by one musician.

## Deciding on an Instrument

Whether or not you have an instrument in mind that you want to play, you will need to consider several factors whenever deciding on an instrument.

### *Natural Inclination*

Physical circumstances can make you more inclined or less inclined to perform certain instruments due to the characteristics of those instruments. A lesson instructor can help you determine whether or not an instrument is a good fit for you.

### *Time Commitment*

Although some instruments are often learned more quickly than others, the time investment that an instrument takes to learn varies by the individual learning it; furthermore, someone can invest an infinite amount of time learning any instrument and still increase their mastery of it.

### *Monetary Commitment*

Classical instruments are sold by different brands, and each brand often has its own student model(s) on sale as well as their professional model(s). Student model instruments are significantly cheaper, and are recommended for beginners of any age. Professional level instruments typically play with higher tone quality due to the materials that they are made from, and they sometimes have additional features not present on student models, but student models are still good quality.

## Instrument Families and Popular Classical Instruments

*Press the instrument name to see a video demonstration of the corresponding instrument.*

*Strings: Played by vibrating strings using one's fingers and a bow. Can play multiple notes at once.*

<a href="#">Violin</a>	A small instrument that plays higher notes and can play very quickly.
<a href="#">Viola</a>	Similar to a violin, but with a slightly larger size, lower notes, and more rich tone.
<a href="#">Cello</a>	A large instrument with high versatility of notes and a dark tone.
<a href="#">Double Bass</a>	A very large instrument that plays very low notes.

*Woodwinds: Played by blowing through the instrument, often through a reed. Buttons pressed change notes.*

<a href="#">Flute</a>	Requiring much air blown over a tone hole, it can play very high notes.
<a href="#">Oboe</a>	Plays medium to high notes with a truly unique sound, but notorious for its reeds.
<a href="#">Clarinet</a>	Known for its huge range of notes it can play low and high.
<a href="#">Saxophone</a>	Plays medium to high notes with relative ease, and loudly with little effort.

*Brass: Played by buzzing lips in a mouthpiece. Heavily requires training and upkeep of lip muscles.*

<a href="#">Trumpet</a>	Plays medium to high notes with a light tone, capable of playing very loudly.
<a href="#">Horn</a>	Plays medium to high notes with a dark or light tone similar to a woodwind.
<a href="#">Trombone</a>	Uses a sliding joint to change notes. Capable of low and medium notes.
<a href="#">Tuba</a>	Plays very low to medium notes, known for its large size and dark tone.

*Percussion: Played by hitting, scraping, or shaking. Some, but not all play different notes.*

<a href="#">Piano</a>	Plays a very large range of notes by pressing buttons. Pedals change the sound.
<a href="#">Kalimba</a>	A hand-held instrument played by flicking keys with thumbs. Variety of kinds.
<a href="#">Hand-Drums</a>	Drums held, strapped, or placed in the lap, played with palms. Variety of kinds.
<a href="#">Keyboards</a>	Instruments like pianos, but played with mallets, like marimbas and xylophones.
<a href="#">Snare Drum</a>	A drum played with sticks. Known for its capability to play loudly and quickly.

## Practice Plan

Build your practicing habits slowly and patiently to work long at the foundation that will support your continued musicianship. For a new skill to be learned and for its practice to become a routine, **persistence and patience are most important.**

- **Determine specific days/times in the week that you will practice your instrument.**  
As more time passes, adjust the time used practicing each week based on the need. If you practice more frequently, you will improve more quickly than if your practice times are spread far from one another. This has to do with training your brain to retain the information by making it recognize that it is important.
- **Purchase a method book and set goals for how far you progress through it** in a practice session, in a week, and in a month. Method books are used by students in public schools
- **Document and plan the contents of your practice sessions with a practice log.**  
Musicians are experts of self-reflection, and you can practice this and make certain that you are making progress in your practice by documenting how you use your practice time so that you might reflect on it and inform your decisions for future practice sessions. There are practice planner books specifically designed for this purpose if you prefer pen and paper, but I have also provided a [\\*practice planner](#) that you can make a digital copy of for yourself.
- **Record yourself practicing and performing your instrument** so that you can more easily reflect on your progress and pick out what aspects that you want to improve, and then use that information to look for ways that you can improve in that aspect.
- **Take breaks during practice** to prevent becoming bored or too frustrated. You might choose to set a timer to give yourself your allotted break time before returning to practice.
- **Begin learning an instrument at the same time as a friend.** It will help you to keep yourself held accountable, and it will help you learn from one another while you get to perform on your instruments together.
- **Use resources available to you online.** There are innumerable guides online for learning near any instrument and learning how to read and write sheet music, and these guides come in many different formats. Make use of these resources.
- **Keep yourself committed and engaged by getting lessons from a private instructor** that can help accelerate your learning by being a more knowledgeable other that can address your unique and specific needs.

## Resources

### Glossaries

Should you run into any terms or jargon that you do not know the meaning of, there are glossaries available to clarify musical language.

[Glossary of Music Terms - Western Michigan University](#)

[Glossary of Music Terminology - Wikipedia](#)

[Glossary of Musical Terms - SF Classical Voice](#)

### Instrument Learning

#### Websites

The following is a sampling of the large amount of instrument learning and musical skill learning resources available online. You can almost certainly find resources for any instrument you want to learn.

[Talk Classical - Beginners Thread](#)

On the Talk Classical forums for enthusiasts of classical music, there is a thread designed for beginners to post their questions and get assistance from the Talk Classical community.

[Toned Ear](#)

Toned Ear is a website with a wide variety of customizable ear training exercises. These exercises are designed to help identify certain musical concepts just by listening to them. Musicians naturally train their ears over time, but dedicated practice helps accelerate the process.

- [Online Resources for Beginning Violinists](#)
- [Lauren Teaches Flute - Printable Exercises](#)
- [Trumpet Learning Resources: Helpful Links for Beginner and Developing Trumpet Players](#)
- [Percussion Resources - Josh Gottry](#)

#### YouTube Channels

There are many resources for learning instruments to be found on YouTube. A few YouTube channels that upload such resources are listed below, as well as playlists containing information for learning classical instruments. You can find similar resources as the ones listed for any instrument that you are interested in learning.

[The United States Army Band "Pershing's Own"](#)

Has many educational playlists that instruct about learning classical instruments as a beginner. There are different playlists prepared to teach specific instruments.

- [AdultCello](#)
- [The Flute Channel](#)
- [katieflute - Educational Flute Topics](#)
- [Lauren Teaches Flute](#)
- [United States Navy Band - 1st Lessons](#)
- [Music Teacher Walker](#)
- [Shawn Bell - Beginning Trombone Lessons](#)
- [Percussion Solutions for Band Directors](#)

## *Applications*

### [Tonal Energy Tuner & Metronome](#)

Tonal Energy Tuner & Metronome is an excellent application for all musicians, offering many features that are useful for practicing. It includes highly configurable tuners and metronomes, a pitch analyzer, drone tones capabilities, recording capabilities, and more.

### [Perfect Ear](#)

Perfect Ear is an ear training application. It is similar to [Toned Ear](#), but with progressive lessons.

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## *Private Instructors*

The best way to keep yourself on track with learning to play a new instrument is to find a private instructor to teach you. Your learning may be accelerated with the individual attention a specialist could give you, and you may be able to test instruments before purchasing them if you can find a private instructor that will let you try out with them.

Find private instructors by looking for one nearby online or through inquiring at your local music store.

Before contacting an instructor, be ready to share about your age and current musical experience, your goals and motives for learning an instrument, and your availability.

Be aware that a private instructor will likely have you sign a contract with them that includes all of the logistical details of the service that they are providing. You will likely be expected to pay for your lessons for the duration specified in the contract even if you fail to arrive to your lessons, so make certain that you are available to attend them whenever you say you can, and communicate any necessary absences in advance time.

Private instructors are most likely providing their service as an additional obligation separate from their primary work, so the time that they are using to teach lessons should be respected.

## Inspiration and Experimentation

### *Websites*

#### [Chrome Music Lab](#)

Chrome Music Lab is a collection of visually appealing, intuitively designed musical experiences. There is a large variety of interactive experiences offered on the website, and it can introduce you to different musical concepts in an entertaining way that hardly includes any reading.

#### [Hookpad](#)

Hookpad is a web-based music-making interface that you can use without knowing how to read sheet music. It can introduce you to different musical concepts just by exploring its features.

#### [Groove Pizza](#)

Groove Pizza is a web-based music-making interface that lets you create drum kit music. Simply experiment with the features and you can learn about all sorts of rhythmic musical concepts.

#### [BandLab](#)

BandLab is a web-based music-making interface and digital audio workstation. After creating an account, you can create music using its large library of sounds in a format that doesn't require reading sheet music.

#### [Incredibox](#)

Incredibox is an interactive musical sandbox. You can experiment with it to learn about textures in music and how different musical parts come together to create a whole.

### *Application*

#### [Specdrums MIX](#)

Specdrums MIX is an app that allows you to quickly experiment and create music using loops and a keyboard input. It has accompanying hardware with additional features, but it is extraneous.

### *YouTube Channels*

For your listening and viewing pleasure and inspiration, I recommend the following YouTube channels, which create accessible content for classically trained individuals and non-classically trained people alike.

#### [George Collier](#)

Features short videos of mostly soloists performing on classical instruments, highlighting their skills and the capabilities of their instruments of choice. Collier creates transcriptions of these musical moments in sheet music displayed during the videos, and the transcriptions are freely downloadable on [his website](#).

#### [TwoSetViolin](#)

Two professional violinists that post entertainment related to classical music.

## Music Reading

### Websites

[How To Read Sheet Music: A Step-by-Step Guide - Musicnotes](#)

[How to Read Music : A Step by Step Guide to Reading Music by Michael Hahn](#)

## Music Theory

### Websites

[Music Theory for the 21st-Century Classroom by Robert Hutchinson](#)

A full text on music theory uploaded for free reading online by its author.

[MusicTheory.net](#)

A popular and organized resource for learning music theory.

### YouTube Channels

Many resources for learning music theory are available on YouTube. Included below are some examples of the information available on the platform in the form of channels, playlists, and videos.

[Cadence Hira](#)

[Woochia - Charly Sauret](#)

[Gracie Terzian](#)

[Music Matters](#)

[Classical Nerd](#)

[Yale Courses](#)

## Composition

### Websites

[How to Compose Music 101 - Art of Composing](#)

[A Beginner's Guide to Composing by Yvonne Troxler](#)

### YouTube Channels

- [Ryan Leach](#)
- [David Bruce](#)
- [Carlos Lalonde](#)
- [Cinematic Composing](#)
- [Inside the Score](#)
- [Composing Academy](#)

### Sheet Music Composing Work Stations

[MuseScore](#)

MuseScore is a free sheet music composing work station with premium-level sounds and a large amount of capabilities that are expandable with plug-ins.

[Flat](#)

Flat is a web-based sheet music composing work station that allows for multiple users to simultaneously work on one project.

[Finale](#) and [Sibelius](#) are also notable composition software for composing sheet music.

## Poster Information

The following paragraphs are taken from the original *Instrumental Music and You* poster presentation. A reduced version was used in the UAFS Student Research Symposium of Spring 2024 for the sake of space and clarity.

### Problems

Many systems exist that make engaging with classical instrumental music appear complex and intimidating for someone that did not grow up learning about it, making it difficult to know where to start.

#### **Culture of Classical Instrumental Music**

*The enjoyers of classical instrumental music are often viewed as members of a gated community that resists those that try to enter it untrained.*

Listening to classical instrumental music used to be a privilege of the wealthy, and its exclusive origins persisted into the notion today that classical instrumental music is just for those that “understand it.” Like any other community, there is a relatively small sub-set of people that discourage newcomers from entering the community; however, the truth is that most enjoyers of classical instrumental music are eager to share their passion of the subject to newcomers that show interest.

The view that it is unfit for newcomers persists because the concert experience does not often feel welcoming or informative to the newcomers that attend them.

#### **Monetary Commitments**

*Classical instruments are often large purchases, which are hard to commit to whenever little is known about the expectations that one should have for a particular price-point.*

Prices for many classical instruments can be intimidating and prevent newcomers from committing to learning one. A newcomer may not know where a good starting place is to achieve what they want to.

#### **Time Commitments**

*Intentionally developing a new skill-set as an adult is a large time commitment; meanwhile, being an accomplished classically trained musician famously takes innumerable hours sustained over many years.*

Depending on expectations, investing in classical instrumental music costs time to learn notation, jargon, and instrumental fundamentals. Time must also be used on upkeep.

#### **Misaligned Priorities**

*One may aspire to be a classically trained musician without precisely understanding how it will lead one to greater happiness.*

Ultimately, new skills should be learned in pursuit of greater happiness in one’s life. Thus, one who aspires should be able to define how becoming a classically trained musician will bring one happiness.

If it is something else that one is after, then goals may need to be revised.

Furthermore, one’s expectations might shift depending on if they plan to be a hobbyist or a professional.

One should consider the mastery that they desire for the purposes that they desire them for to determine the appropriate commitments.

## Solutions

Presentations of classical instrumental music must be designed for all audiences; meanwhile, adults striving for classical training must understand what their goals are and plan to develop habits steadily.

### **Improving the Presentation of Classical Instrumental Music**

*Without compromising the base experience, classical instrumental music must be presented in a way that invites newcomers to the next presentation.*

Newcomers are shown to be willing to give classical instrumental music a chance; however, due to a poor experience, these individuals do not often return. In some cases, the music was not suited to the tastes of those individuals, but in other cases, it is a matter of lost context and a misunderstanding of concert etiquette.

Experienced enjoyers of classical instrumental music have formed connections to the history of composers and their works. They have been trained to appreciate the efforts of composers and performers, recognizing the art for all its intricacies. A new audience must be afforded at least the most interesting details by the presenters of a classical instrumental music performance. It should be information accessible before the purchase of tickets and during the performance itself. Ideally, the context is delivered in a way that entertainingly ties the presentation together rather than in a way that disrupts the immersion of the audience.

Audiences must be made aware of basic concert etiquette as well to prevent negative experiences that can be caused by misunderstandings of appropriate audience participation.

### **Understanding One's Goals**

*One must consider their priorities whenever learning a new skill, as having a detailed and realistic goal is highly important when making long-lasting commitments.*

Time and money commitments depend on one's goals. Someone who intends to be a hobbyist can expect to pay and practice less than someone who intends to be a professional. The instrument(s), brands, auxiliary equipment, and repertoire that one might choose are also dependent on the expectations one has for what they want to achieve.

### **Beginning to Learn a New Skill**

*One must exercise patience and set persistent short-term goals to maintain practice.*

Learning a new skill takes persistence, which is best built up slowly and patiently. After some time steadily introducing practice into one's routine, it becomes a strong habit.

One may be able to hold oneself accountable by starting to learn at the same time as a partner while following the same plan as one another.

### **Avenues to Begin**

*One should choose an avenue to begin that is suited to one's goals and interests.*

Different options exist for those who want to be professionals, hobbyists, or composers. Beginning towards any aspiration is best done while making use of the tools and information available to oneself.

