Reading skills practice: Choosing a musical instrument



Many people would like to learn how to play a musical instrument, but they are put off by one big problem: what to play? Here are a few questions to help you decide.

What kind of music do you like?

Many instruments are versatile, but some are more suited to certain types of music. Although there is some classical repertoire for the saxophone, for example, people associate it more with jazz, and it is not a permanent feature of many orchestras. Some instruments may lend themselves better than others to the music you like, so consider this before you start.

Do you want to play with other people?

Think about your long-term future as a musician. If you want to play with other people, what sort of instrument would be most practical? The initial attraction of playing a dazzling solo instrument like trumpet, violin, flute or lead guitar might fade when you realise how many other people are competing with you to get the main part with the same instrument! If you want to play rock music, there will always be a demand for bass players or drummers, and if you fancy being part of an orchestra, the bassoon is a great bet to make sure you are always needed.

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Where are you going to practise?

Many people live in flats and practising the drums, for example, will drive your neighbours crazy. Think about where and when you are going to practise, as well as the patience of the people you live with or near. Electric versions of instruments like the piano, drums, guitar and even violin give you the option of playing into the night using headphones, while your housemates sleep in peace. Alternatively, you may need to consider going to a school or a community centre to practise.



How much money can you spend?

This is quite a big factor. A lot of instruments can be purchased in different price ranges, for example, guitars. But this doesn't alter the fact that many, such as the piano, are always pretty expensive. If you can't afford your chosen instrument, will you be able to borrow someone else's or hire one?

Are there any physical limitations?

If you're small and don't like lifting heavy objects, you won't want to carry around a double bass. Apart from that, use your common sense, and don't let your perceived physical shortcomings put you off. Who says small skinny people can't play the tuba? It's true that some wind instruments require a lot of lung power but with the right coaching, everyone can develop the right technique.

Still not sure?

Talk to people you know who already play instruments. They might even let you try theirs. It's also a good idea to find an experienced music teacher, preferably one who plays a few different instruments, who can give you some advice and push you in the right direction.

If you find an instrument you love and that suits your needs, you'll find the time spent choosing was well worth it. Good luck with making your choice!

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Reading skills practice: Choosing a musical instrument – exercises

1. Check your understanding: multiple choice

Circle the best option to complete these sentences.

1. Many people think about learning a musical instrument but don't because …
   a. they haven't got enough time to practise.
   b. they don't know which instrument to choose.
   c. they can't afford a musical instrument.
   d. they think it will be too difficult.

2. If you play the saxophone, …
   a. you can't play classical music.
   b. there might be fewer opportunities to play classical music.
   c. you can easily play in an orchestra.
   d. you should only play jazz.

3. Playing a popular solo instrument …
   a. is the best way to get into a band.
   b. is only for people who are really confident.
   c. means you will always perform on your own.
   d. can be a drawback if you want to play with others.

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5. Guitars ...

a. are normally relatively cheap.
b. are only for buyers with big budgets.
c. start quite cheap and go up to very expensive.
d. are worth paying more money for.

6. Before choosing an instrument you should ...

a. consider the size and weight of the instrument.
b. avoid wind instruments if you are small and slim.
c. reflect on your physical limitations.
d. make sure you have the correct technique.

7. An experienced music teacher can ...

a. tell you if you have the ability to learn a particular instrument.
b. lend you their instruments to try.
c. give you valuable guidance.
d. demonstrate the different instruments for you.

8. The best summary of the author's attitude is ...

a. don't worry, just go for it!
b. playing an instrument is not for everyone.
c. you can always change your mind.
d. considering your choice of instrument will pay off in the future.

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2. Check your vocabulary: gap fill

Complete the gaps with a word from the box.

can't afford	a good bet	the right coaching	lends itself to
dazzling	physical shortcomings	put off by	drive your neighbours crazy

1. Many people are _____ (*discouraged by*) not knowing which instrument to learn.
2. The saxophone _____ (*is suitable for*) jazz.
3. The initial attraction of playing a _____ (*amazing, brilliant*) solo instrument might fade when you realise how many other people play it as well.
4. Playing the drums is _____ (*a clever choice*) if you want to play in a band.
5. Practising a loud instrument late at night will _____ (*make your neighbours extremely irritated or exasperated*).
6. You can borrow or hire an instrument if you _____ (*don't have enough money to buy*) one.
7. Even small, slim people can play the tuba, so don't let your perceived _____ (*problems or limitations with your body*) put you off.
8. Everyone can develop the right technique with _____ (*someone teaching them to do it well*).

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