



WARNER ROBINS HIGH SCHOOL BAND

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Grades in Band Class

Greetings from the WRHS Band room. This letter has been written and sent home by way of your child in an effort to explain how a student earns a grade in the WRHS Band class room. Several parents have expressed concern with their child's grade on the current progress report. It is our hope that this letter will assist in your understanding of how a student in the band at our school earns his/her grade.

The band classes at WRHS are set up in a year round concert band setting and organized by performance ability and instrumentation. Since this is the case, the marching band students are in the same classes with students who are not involved with the marching band. All students in a given class must be graded on the same material. That being said, there must be a way for all students to earn a grade in the band class.

It is the mission of the WRHS Band Directors to provide the best possible music education to our high school performers. This means giving them the needed skills to improve on their selected instruments. The more skills the students develop, the better they get on their instrument and the more enjoyment they will get out of being able to play more music.

The most fundamental of these required skills is the learning (memorization) of the 12 major scales. Please allow me to equate these to the multiplication tables that you learned in your mid-level math classes. These simple multiplication tables unlocked the worlds of high school math subjects and beyond. In the same way, the major scales and arpeggios are essential for musicians of any age to understand the 12 key signatures that the world of music uses. Everything is built off of this foundation.

We have recently tested the students on the 1st 2 scales according to the Circle of 4ths as well as the F concert Chromatic scale (2 octaves) & the Bb Concert Chromatic scale (1 octave). The overwhelming majority of these scales should be a review of scales that the kids should have already known. We spent time in class reviewing the old and working on the new in order to insure that the student is working on the needed skill. Each scale is composed of only 8 notes. Each arpeggio is composed of only 3 of those 4 notes. When the scale is played in 2 octaves, those same 8 notes are simply repeated higher than the original notes. All of the scales that we use can be found on pages 44 & 45 of the *Foundations for Superior Performance* (the text listed in the syllabus.) Please refer to your copy of the syllabus for grade calculations.

In order to make sure that the students learn the multiplication tables, math teachers assess the student by evaluating their performance on a test or quiz. Without such assessment, the teaching of the skill is meaningless to the student. In the exact same manner, the band student is assessed on his or her knowledge of the required scales that have been taught in class. That is what is currently reflected on your student's progress report and on *Smart Web*.

The scales that have been tested so far amount to less than 2 scales a year for students who only have 3 years of playing experience. During the course of a school week, a student can master a scale by only learning 2 or 4 notes a day depending on the number of octaves required for each scale. (That varies according to the instruments' range of notes.)

The band student can practice these 2-4 notes in less than 10 minutes a day even after marching band practice. When is there time in their already busy schedule? Students can be creative with their use of time. If it takes 10 minutes to get to the practice field, and most kids get their early after having changed clothes, then playing those 2-4 notes several times is not a problem. In addition, the band room is open every morning by 7:15am. This leaves 30 minutes every morning for students to come in and work on those couple of notes.

(Please turn over for information on grade calculations.)



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How are the scales graded? We have explained this thoroughly to the students in each band class on numerous occasions. The WRHS band students' scales are graded in accordance with the Georgia Music Educators Association's method for judging the performance of scales. Here is an explanation of how it works: The student is rewarded 1 point for every octave of the scale correctly played ascending and 1 point for every octave of the scale played correctly descending. The student is then awarded 1 point for each arpeggio played correctly for the given scale. A one octave scale is then worth a total of 3 points. A two octave scale is worth a maximum of 5 points. If a scale is supposed to be played in 2 octaves, its corresponding arpeggio must also be played in 2 octaves in order to receive the 1 point credit. Conversion to grades then is based on a percentage format where each point earned in a 1 octave scale is the equivalent to 33.33% and each point earned in a 2 octave scale is worth 20% in order to arrive at a possible 100 points available per scale.

What if a student plays all but 1 or 2 notes correctly? If that is the case, the student has not performed a major scale which is constructed on a set organization of half steps and whole steps. Furthermore, they miss the entire point of playing the scale that corresponds to a given major key signature. (That is part of why we are learning scales in the first place.) Therefore, the scale is either played correctly or it is not.

Are students allowed to make up the scales on which they either failed or may not be happy with the grade they have earned? ABSOLUTELY! It is not our desire to penalize the students for not learning their scales but rather to help them build the skills that they need to be the best young musicians that they can be and enjoy the ability to perform as much music as possible. Accordingly, it IS important to us that they learn their scales. Students may come in at any time (other than during the instructional time of class) and play 1 or more scales as a make-up. We will take the higher of the 2 grades for that (or those) scale(s).

How many times may a student retake their scale test? Students are allowed to make up their scale tests any time within 5 days of the played exercise. **It is possible for each and every band student to earn a 100 in band!** This can be done with a minimal effort by each student.

As the semester continues, we will continue to add major scales and test the students on the scales that they have just learned. There are 10 more major scale tests to go. This will provide each student an ample opportunity to learn and grow as well as earn a fantastic grade.

What about all of the time the kids spend in marching band? That time allows them to perform with one of the best marching bands in the state of Georgia. In addition, it allows them to perform incredibly well. The football players who are enrolled in Lifetime Sports or Weight Training classes are still expected to meet the graded criteria of each class as well as give their time and best effort after school and on weekends.

All in all, the band students are not being asked to learn more than the absolute basic essential techniques required to play their selected instruments. Each scale is broken down into the smallest parts possible in the interest of helping our fine young musicians to learn, grow and develop all while mastering the performance skills needed to be the best band in the land!

These kids are amazing! They will rise to your expectations no matter how high or how low. In order for kids to receive the benefits of an education, they must apply the knowledge that they learn. The band kids at WRHS are, in my humble opinion, the best students on campus! Don't sell them short!

Thanks for having your student in the WRHS band program. I know that they are developing skills that will give them a life-long enjoyment of music as well as skills that will benefit them in whatever they choose to do as a career long after high school is over!