

Suggested Saxophone Equipment for Middle and High School Students

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Classical Mouthpieces

Good Mouthpiece for beginners, along with the AL3 and C*:

<https://shop.weinermusic.com/Yamaha-Plastic-Alto-Sax-4C-Mouthpiece-Model-YAC1286/productinfo/MYAP4C/>

Great Classical Mouthpieces

Vandoren AL3: <https://shop.weinermusic.com/Vandoren-Optimum-Rubber-Alto-Sax-Mouthpiece/productinfo/MVAO/>

Selmer S80 C*: <https://shop.weinermusic.com/Selmer-PARIS-S-80-Series-Alto-Sax-Ebonite-Mouthpiece-S402/productinfo/MSA8/>

High School Options include the AL3, the S80C*, and the below:

Vandoren AP3: <https://shop.weinermusic.com/VANDOREN-PROFILE-SERIES-ALTO-SAXOPHONE-MOUTHPIECE-AP3/productinfo/MVAP/>

Selmer Concept: <https://shop.weinermusic.com/Selmer-Paris-Alto-Sax-Concept-Hard-Rubber-Mouthpiece-S452/productinfo/MSACT/>

Jazz mouthpieces should be addressed on a case by case basis—there is more variety and a much large range of characteristic tone qualities as determined by whom a student is trying to emulate. Contact me or the student’s teacher for more advice.

Reeds

Reed strength for beginners: 2.5. As the embouchure strengthens, switch to a 3. Most students won’t need 3.5 and above for the mouthpieces suggested on this list. Reeds that are too hard encourage tension and biting, which is bad news. My suggestion: deal with the “buzz” in 6th grade, start to refine the tone in 7th with a harder reed for SOME students.

<https://shop.weinermusic.com/Vandoren-Traditional-Alto-Saxophone-Reeds-10-Per-Box/productinfo/RVA/>

Légère is making fantastic synthetic reeds. I recommend the Signature line. You will want to select a reed that is a full or half strength LOWER than what students play on natural cane. For me, they last about a month of hard playing. If a student is careful, they could probably make it last an entire marching season, or close to it. One word of caution: when they start to die, they die fast, so be sure to have a backup cane reed or synthetic reed on hand. There is no need to rotate when using synthetic reeds.

Accessories:

Students should use mouthpiece patches to protect their mouthpieces and rotate reeds using reedguards. Most students should be fine using 4 reeds at a time—I usually have 10-20 of various strengths and ages, but I play a lot more than students.

https://shop.weinermusic.com/Rico-Reed-Guard-IV-Bb-Clarinet_Alto-Saxophone/productinfo/CZ1A40/

<https://shop.weinermusic.com/Daddario-Reserve-Mouthpiece-Patches/productinfo/XRRMP/>

Ligatures

I prefer metal ligatures for students. Leather ones, such as Rovner, were standard for many years, and offer excellent durability. But leather deadens vibrations, resulting in an overdark, “tubby” tone for many students. An exception to this rule is metal mouthpieces, that sometimes benefit from the dampening effect of these ligatures. I use string, but I don’t suggest that for students. It’s weird even for professionals!

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<https://shop.weinermusic.com/Bonade-Regular-Alto-Sax-Nickel-Ligature-2254N/productinfo/LBA000/>

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https://shop.weinermusic.com/M_O-Vandoren-Ligature-Cap-for-Alto-Sax-Ebonite-Mouthpieces/productinfo/LVAMO/

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<https://shop.weinermusic.com/Silverstein-Alto-Sax-Ligature-for-Hard-Rubber-Mouthpiece-Classic-Silver/productinfo/LSA201/>

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https://shop.weinermusic.com/Ishimori-Wood-Stone-Ligature-for-Alto-Saxophone-_-Selmer-Hard-Rubber-Size/productinfo/LIWSAS/

For students who constantly break equipment, this is indestructible and quite good. I played my whole master’s degree on this: <https://shop.weinermusic.com/Bois-Classique-Alto-Sax-Ligature-Cap-for-Rubber-Mpcs/productinfo/LBOISA/>

Neckstraps

Good neckstraps:

Not “bouncy”

Easy to adjust

Relatively comfortable

Have hooks that don’t allow the saxophone to “get loose” and fall!

Great neckstraps:

<https://shop.weinermusic.com/Rico-Black-Fabric-Strap-with-Plastic-Snap-Hook-for-Soprano-Alto-Saxophone/productinfo/SRSJA13/>

<https://shop.weinermusic.com/Rico-Padded-Strap-with-Metal-Hook-for-Soprano-Alto-Saxophone/productinfo/SRSJA12/>

For large/heavy saxophones:

<https://shop.weinermusic.com/BG-France-Harness-Female-Sax-Strap-S41MSH-Metal-Snap-Hook/productinfo/SBGS41MSH/>

<https://shop.weinermusic.com/BG-France-Saxophone-Comfort-Harness-for-Men-Snap-Hook-S40C-Sh/productinfo/SBGS40CSH/>

Instruments

Beginners (\$1000-\$1400)

The best instruments for beginners are made by Yamaha. The YAS-23 and the AD200. If you purchase them used, they will likely need work. Plan on an additional \$450 for a repad, or plan to meet the seller at a reputable instrument repair shop. Another good option are the Jupiter 500 and 700 series of alto saxophones. I do not recommend any other student model alto saxophones.

Intermediate (\$1200-\$3000)

There are not very many excellent intermediate saxophones on the market. They all require either a compromise on the quality of the metal (tone) or on the keywork. It is a better value to save an extra 1k and purchase a professional instrument. Having said that, Yamaha 62III is a solid horn that a student could take to college...though they could likely find a better used instrument for cheaper and be better off in the long run. For some students, the Yanigsawa line is a good option as well. Their sopranos in particular are quite fine. It is very important for students to try the Yani first—they are not for everyone.

Pro (\$3000+)

Not every student needs a top-of-the-line saxophone. But, if they plan to major in music, it is an important investment. The only pro instruments I recommend are made by Yamaha (the

Custom EX—NOT the custom Z) and the Selmer Super Action 80 Serie III or Selmer Supreme. Selmers Paris (NOT SELMER USA) makes the best saxophones available, but the line has an enormous variation. Students who are interested in Selmer Paris should either purchase artist select instruments, or plan to travel to a location where they can try several instruments. The variety of “personalities” is one of the things that make Selmer Paris saxophones such a good choice for professionals—they can select the one that “fits.” Yamahas are more reasonably priced, and are extremely consistent. I would feel comfortable purchasing a Yamaha Custom new without having tried it in advance.

What about P. Mauriat and Cannonball? I don’t recommend these for collegiate saxophonists. They tend to have issues with intonation and keywork that Yamaha and Selmer do not have. They are not bad instruments, but I would place them firmly in the intermediate category, and at the bottom end of that.

Vintage Instruments? It’s easiest to not recommend them. There are some excellent Selmers and Conns that are quite coveted, but students (and their private teachers) really need to try a lot of them to know what they are looking for. If a student is going to be playing classical saxophone, they will need a new instrument with a high f-sharp key. If they will be playing mostly jazz, a vintage instrument could be an ideal choice for them—but they should try them FIRST!

What about other saxophone brands not listed here? If a parent finds an unbelievable deal on an unknown brand of saxophone, they need to ask their local music store or repair technician “CAN YOU GET PARTS TO REPAIR THIS INSTRUMENT?” Many cheap brands don’t have parts available, and this question weeds out a lot of bad investments. Saxophones are like motorcycles—they have to be repaired!

School Owned Instruments

Tenor and Baritone

Yamaha intermediate line is a great choice for tenor and bari. They are reasonably priced, and built like tanks. The parts are also readily available for inevitable repairs.

Soprano

Buy the most expensive soprano you can—it makes a huge difference. I would not spend any less than \$3000 for a soprano. Consider options by Yanigisawa, Yamaha (Custom EX) or Selmer Paris (Serie III). If I were buying for myself, I’d chose the Selmer Paris. If I were buying for my high school band, I would pick Yani or Yamaha.

Repairs

Beginning saxophones are built like tanks, and mostly can withstand daily use with a single visit to the repair shop in a year. The more advanced saxophones have finer mechanisms that are susceptible to bending, compression, etc. I take my instruments in for 6 month checkups whether I think they need it or not. Generally, Selmer requires more repair attention than other brands, which is a pain, but worth it for me. My typical repair bill for a “checkup” is less than

\$100—most of the time it is less than \$50 unless I have pads replaced or it is a soprano, which are just harder to work on. If you wait too long between servicing, keys bend, and more problems arise—which leads to a more expensive repair bill!