

WSU Low Brass Class 2020 Types and Buying Guide

Types of Trombones **(stolen from Dr. Micah Everett)**

Tenor trombone in Bb.

This is the most common trombone in use today. The small-bore straight tenor (no Fattachment) is preferred for beginning students, and professional versions of this instrument are preferred by most jazz/commercial players. Large-bore straight tenor trombones are sometimes used by principal players in bands and orchestras, although the large-bore tenor with F-attachment is usually preferred for all forms of classical music.

Bass trombone in Bb.

Really an extra-large-bore tenor trombone, this instrument most often uses two valves in order to provide a fully chromatic lower register, and the large bore and mouthpiece helps this instrument to effectively reproduce the sound of “true” bass trombones in F, Eb, or G. These instruments come in two varieties: “independent,” with the two valves in F and Gb or G (D or Eb combined) on the main body of the instrument, so that both valves can be used individually, or “dependent,” with the second valve in D or Eb mounted on the F-attachment tubing, making it where the second valve can be used only when the first valve is depressed. Other valve tunings are occasionally encountered, but only as rare, custom modifications. Once rare in high school settings, they are now common in the most advanced ensembles; skilled students who excel in or prefer the lower register could enjoy great success by specializing in the bass trombone.

Alto trombone in Eb.

This is believed by most to have been the preferred solo instrument in the trombone family during the eighteenth century; thus all solo literature for trombone written before 1800 would most likely be best played on this instrument. (A “minority report” of scholars believes that a small-bore Bb tenor trombone with a small mouthpiece was the “alto trombone” in use at the time, but modern players still tend to prefer the sound and response of the Eb instrument for period works.) In the orchestra the alto trombone should be used for the first trombone parts in most eighteenth century and many nineteenth century works, at the discretion of the conductor and performer.

Tenor valve trombone in Bb.

Instrument makers began replacing the handslide on trombones with three or four valves not long after the valve was invented, but by the early twentieth century a decided preference for the slide trombone was apparent because of that instrument's superior sound and intonation. Valve trombones are comparatively rare today, except as used by a few jazz players and in specialized contexts where the valve instrument's timbre and articulation are desired. Valve trombones are sometimes used by euphonium players who want to participate in jazz bands but have not developed their handslide technique; this is permissible but usually not ideal. Those who want to double on trombone should learn to use the slide instrument.

Soprano trombone in Bb.

This rather small instrument uses a similar mouthpiece to and plays in the same register as the trumpet. A few makers do produce these now, but they are little more than novelties. Due to the extremely short slide, intonation is very difficult on these instruments and is likely a reason that they were never widely used.

Equipment Buying Guide

Dr. Kristoffer Danielsen

Small Bore:

- .500 bore or smaller, no valve.
- This is the instrument of choice for beginning trombonists. Many advanced Jazz/Commercial players choose horns this size as well.
- Uses a small shank mouthpiece
 - Bach 12C, 7C, 6 ½ A, 6 ½ AL
 - Yamaha 48
 - Schilke 47
- Preferred Student Models:
 - Yamaha YSL-354 (the “gold standard” student horn).
 - King 606
- Pro Models:
 - King 2B
 - Bach 12, 16
 - Yamaha YSL-891Z, YSL-897Z
 - Shires/Edwards Custom

Medium Bore:

- Between .500 bore and .547 bore. Usually 0.525 bore.
- These horns can be a good upgrade from beginner horns.
- Some Jazz/Commercial players choose horns this size.
- Some models have an F-attachment.
- Can be very versatile and easy to play, but can also be too big for advanced jazz players and too small for advanced classical players.
- Uses a small shank mouthpiece
 - Bach 7C, 6 ½ A, 6 ½ AL, 5GS, 5G
 - Yamaha 48
- Common Models:
 - Yamaha YSL-446G, YSL-640
 - King 3B (with or without valve)
 - Bach 36 (with or without valve)
 - Conn 78h, 79h.
 - Shires Custom

Large Bore:

- .547 bore
- The size that classical trombonists generally use. Nearly all college music majors play this size.
- Almost all models have an F-attachment.
- Can be challenging to adjust to when moving up from a small bore, but many do it.
- Uses a large shank mouthpiece
 - Bach 6 ½ AL, 5GS, 5G, 4G
 - Denis Wick 5BS, 5AL, 4AL, 4BL
 - Schilke 47, 51, 51C4, 52 (NOT the 51D. This is a euphonium mouthpiece. Don't listen to anyone who says otherwise)
 - Yamaha 48L
- Common Models:
 - Shires Q30
 - Yamaha YSL-882 and others
 - Bach 42
 - Conn 88H
 - Shires/Edwards Custom.

Bass Trombone:

- .562 bore
- A specialized trombone for playing in the low range.
- All models have at least one valve (two being the norm. Don't bother buying one with only one valve).
- People generally specialize in either bass or tenor trombone. Just because you are good at one does not mean the other will be easy. That being said, many professionals are proficient on both.
- Uses a large shank mouthpiece
 - Bach 3G, 2G, 1½ G, 1¼ G, 1G
 - Schilke 58, 59, and 60
 - Yamaha Yeo
- Common Models
 - Shires Q36
 - Yamaha YBL-830, YBL-822
 - Bach 50
 - Conn 62H, 112H
 - Getzen 1052, 3062
 - Shires/Edwards Custom

“Budget Horns”

There are a few manufacturers, such as Wessex and Mack Brass, that import well made Chinese instruments. These two companies take special care to sell products that have gone through testing, development, and strict quality control. Some of their products are outstanding. Under no circumstances should you buy cheap instruments from ebay for your band program. If the price is too good to be true, it's too good to be true.

Plastic Instruments

Plastic instruments are generally not a substitute for a well made brass instrument. They offer a few advantages (weight, low price , and novelty), but play so poorly that they are a detriment to the development of good technique and tone. They also cannot be repaired in the event of damage. A used yamaha student level trombone can usually be found on ebay for only slightly more than the cost of a plastic trombone.