BALANCE, BLEND and INTONATION:
It’s a Package Deal
Presented by Dennis Granlie
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It’s the SOUND! Balance, blend and intonation are the greatest determiners of the band’s sonority. Like a three-legged stool, if one is weak, the others are directly affected.

Too much eye/technical training vs. ear training typically happens. Balance, blend and intonation are ensemble skills requiring ear training in the ensemble.

Webster: Sonorous: producing or capable of producing sound, especially sound of full, deep, or rich quality; resonant. (Consider the string quartet)

**BALANCE**

- Poor balance (too loud) is the root cause of most poor festival/contest ratings
- Easiest concept to teach, because it is just dynamics, but...
- Dynamic markings are like speed limits; you must adjust for conditions
- Listen for two kinds of balance, melodic and harmonic (also melody and accompaniment)
- Melody rules; if you can’t hear the melody, you’re too loud (including percussion)
- Have just the melody play
- Rule of thumb: cut 30% off the marked dynamic if you don’t have the melody
- Thickness of scoring has a big effect on melodic balance; adjust for conditions

How to establish simple pyramid harmonic balance (remember, melody rules):
1. Determine who is sop., alto, tenor, bass
3. Play unisons keeping the pyramid “fat” at the bottom
4. Apply to scales, rounds, chorales
5. Crescendo 100% bass, 75% tenor, 50% alto, 25% soprano

More complex pyramid balance requires more 3rd than 2nd, more 2nd than 1st within each section.

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BLEND

• Blend is a more complex concept, but visual analogies abound
• Combination of good tone, good balance, good pitch
• In good blend, the many become one, individual sound disappears

Ed Lisk’s 3-point check:
1. If you can hear yourself, play softer
2. If you can still hear yourself, adjust your intonation
3. If you can still hear yourself, adjust your tone

Things to think or do to help blend:
• Make your sound disappear into the ____________.
• Dump the entire band inside the tuba. Make your sound part of the tuba sound.
• Be a chameleon, not a zit!
• Make one sound; the band
• Keep sound focused above staff and reduce volume in upper woodwinds.
  (often the register with the most technical challenge)
• Clarinets think “ooh” to sweeten tone (corners in).
• Saxophone is seldom heard as its own voice in the best professional concert bands.
• Percussion, be aware of tone, not just rhythm.

INTONATION

(assumes correct posture, support, embouchure, reed, etc.)

• Most complex concept in the package, and often least addressed
• Must be addressed daily (constantly)
• Tuning to a meter is EYE training
• Start simple, but invest time daily to tune:
  - unisons on like instruments
  - unisons on different instruments
  - octaves on like instruments
  - octaves on different instruments
  - 4ths/5ths
  - chords
• Concert F good tuning note except for Eb instruments (use A or Bb)
• Sing/hum
• Talk about/adjust pitch every rehearsal
• Be sure student know tuning is a process, not an event
• Listen to your band when you are not conducting and focus on pitch
• Beware of Ear Warp