



Getting After It

Studying for ABC
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As the years pass by since the ABC concept emerged as Band Director Prep (in 1983 as a course for undergrads in my program at Southern Oregon University), we continually look at ways to help our master's candidates really "fill the toolbox" with a lot of essential information.

Those who decide to do a traditional master's program, go through all the necessary steps to enhance their music history background, music theory-arranging-compositional background and proper use of biographical resources, etc. For the ABC program, we ask for high-quality work creating lots of useful projects while learning the literature of our profession coupled with excellent knowledge in **28 areas** that impact daily teaching.

So, to get our candidates to the point that we know will make a big difference in concert preparation and other vital aspects of any band program, we require very specific command of very specific areas. Here are some thoughts, based on 35 years of observation of ABC students, how undergrads and now graduate students approach mastering what they don't know.

USING ULTIMATE PURSUIT: Most of the areas listed below are well-served by the UP platform. So many of the areas are finite, you can simply do dozens of questions on trumpet fingerings and totally master them through repetition. And, if you take time to learn the overtone series, you don't have to even worry about repetition. You simply don't need to know brass fingerings if you know the theory behind them stone cold.

Reference: Overtone Series: The Partial Worker <https://www.ultimatepursuit.org/partialworker.aspx>

When you create a Practice Test in UP, make it a point to do the following:

1. Create tests you can complete. If you do a test with 10 questions and answer only 2, your results will not help you in the least to understand whether or not you are mastering an area. If you don't answer a question, it is the same as not knowing it, so we are not going to try to figure out which. We use the new ABC Test Summary & UP Practice Tests sheet to observe how UP is helping you get better. We know for a fact that, if you do 100 questions and consistently start scoring well above 80%, you will have no problem doing the same on the July 5th exam. (We had two students who did over 5000 questions over the course of the year and who then passed with flying colors. Each said they now feel they have command of all that useful information.)
2. When you are less busy (as January often is, for example), work on the more complex areas of UP that are on your study list. When you are (typically) crazy-busy with concerts, rehearsal, travel, etc. choose one or two areas and do only those for a week or so. You'll master the info more quickly through planned isolation that makes sense to you.
3. Don't create tests in your strong areas. If you are already "blue" on the ABC Test Summary page in trumpet fingerings, skip it. It just wastes your time. The same is true for areas that are not on your weak areas list. You will never be tested on those again, so get with the areas in which you need work.
4. If you can figure out a way to study with another ABC candidate or any other director, meet over coffee to hash out things you don't understand about an area. Nearly always, the other person knows some things you don't and vice versa. (When I was student teaching...in a different century actually...another student from another university was student teaching at the same high school with me. We met for 45 minutes every day to talk about "ABC stuff" long before ABC existed. By the end of 9 weeks we had totally mastered everything about the overtone series and started using it daily as we conducted the second band at that school. We then actually understood why the trombones who were supposed to play A naturals weren't cutting it in 3rd position!)

Reference: Ultimate Pursuit (UP) <https://www.ultimatepursuit.org>

THE LOGICAL APPROACH: If you have a lot of weak areas on your list and have not been consistently scoring higher and higher, then immediately take a close look at the list of study areas and see what you discover.

For example, in **BRASS** there is one area for each instrument in the fingering area. That's 5 areas plus brass pitch. Now consider this: If you take the time to master the overtone series through its set of rules, you INSTANTLY master every fingering and every pitch problem in all 6 of those areas. Getting 100% is just around the corner with only a few days of study of the overtone system. With it you also gain mastery of the Overtone Series and a ton of useful information leading into woodwind fingerings. **Total: 6 areas**

Reference: Partial to the Winds brochure (See ABC Study Materials <https://www.bandworld.org/ABC/Study.aspx>)
Overtone Series (PDF) <https://www.bandworld.org/pdfs/PartialToTheWinds.pdf>
Overtone Series: The Partial Worker <https://www.ultimatepursuit.org/partialworker.aspx>

In **EMBOUCHURE** the list of possible problems is finite and easily mastered by really concentrating on the sound examples accompanying each Embou-Sure article (See ABC Study Materials <https://www.bandworld.org/ABC/Study.aspx>). **Total: 9 areas.**

Reference: The Embou-Sure book and recordings (See ABC Study Materials <https://www.bandworld.org/ABC/Study.aspx>)

WOODWIND FINGERING. If you have no real woodwind background, then go after clarinet first and really learn the 3 registers (nothing more than fundamentals, 3rd and 5th partials...7th and 9th are usable but unnecessary for most daily teaching). Once again we're back to the Overtone Series. Once you really understand the 19 notes of the chalumeau register (fundamentals) on clarinet, you instantly know all 3rd partial fingerings (clarion register) and 5th partial fingerings in the altissimo register. Using the fundamentals by note name, you get about 65% of the bassoon fingerings from clarinet. The 3rd partial knowledge from clarinet gives you about 80% of the flute, oboe and saxophone fingerings. Yes, you have to learn some special fingerings, but using the overtone approach eliminates a lot of study time AND a more far-reaching appreciation of how easy it can be to transfer students on the woodwinds. **Total: 5 areas.**

References: Woodwind Fingering chart (See ABC Study Materials <https://www.bandworld.org/ABC/Study.aspx>)
Oboe Fingering Trainer <http://www.oboetrainer.com/>
Bassoon Fingering Trainer <http://www.bassoontrainer.com/>

MUSIC GRADING: While this area has 5 divisions that you need to master to quickly determine the grade level of any piece, EVERYTHING you need to know is on a single page. **Total: 1 area.**

Reference: Music Grading and Selection Chart (See ABC Study Materials <https://www.bandworld.org/ABC/Study.aspx>)

SUB-TOTAL: Note that in going after all of these very finite areas, you will have covered 21 of the 28 assessment areas. Go after the above immediately and you will have mastered 75% of ABC study areas.

NOMENCLATURE: If you have this on your study list, get out one-page charts that deal with tempo and style plus instrument names in foreign languages. That alone will cover about 80% of what you need to know. **Total: 1 area.**

TRANSPOSITION: Here's an area (like overtone series) that relies on your music theory background. Make it a point to instantly and completely master the names and transpositions of all common band instruments. Once you categorize them by keys, you will progress very quickly when you realize that C, Bb, Eb and F transpositions cover 95% of what you need on a daily basis. Then when you take a few minutes to realize that clarinet and sax families alternate back and forth from Eb to Bb (i.e: Eb soprano clarinet, Bb clarinet, Eb alto clarinet, etc. Same with saxes). If you are one of those who gets transpositions backwards (I did!), I can tell you a story in about 5 minutes that will cure you forever. **Total: 1 area.**

WOODWIND PITCH. This area requires studying each instrument's list of out-of-tune notes. Start out by going after the moderately to very sharp and flat notes. It's a short list and will instantly help your in-class problem-solving with your band. **Total: 1 area** (but covers 5 instruments).

Reference: Pitch Tendency Sheets (See ABC Study Materials <https://www.bandworld.org/ABC/Study.aspx>)

PERCUSSION. Here you definitely have to deal with rudiments, sticking, tuning, etc. to get after snare technique and timpani technique. Go for rudiments (all on one page) and sticking, then tuning. **Total: 2 areas** (but many instruments that have a lot of related info).

Reference: Percussion Rudiments Sheet (See ABC Study Materials <https://www.bandworld.org/ABC/Study.aspx>)

REHEARSAL DIAGNOSTICS: This area has the greatest depth and covers many, many aspects of the business. However, much of it ties in directly with your knowledge of embouchure development, brass and woodwind pitch, overtone series, transposition and percussion. Lots of areas are also connected with areas such as style and phrasing, etc. These have to come from your development as a musician on your instrument of choice. **Total: 1 area** (with lots of cross-relationships to all areas on the study list).

Reference: Diagnostic Example Recordings (See ABC Study Materials <https://www.bandworld.org/ABC/Study.aspx>)

LITERATURE: Admittedly, there are many high-quality pieces in the band literature that you need to know. Sometimes we hear statements like: "I only teach elementary, so why do I need to learn advanced band literature?" For one thing, it's your profession and talking knowledgeably with other directors instantly proves useful to discuss the style of the various composers. Many of them compose from Grade 1 through Grade 5. It also gives you a tremendous foundation in the important music written for our medium. Our ABC Lit recordings are not all-inclusive, of course, but they do have a great sampling of accessible pieces as well as many masterworks that you need to know. Use it as your foundation to learn all of that literature. How? Like this:

It is highly unlikely that you can learn literature only from just taking UP Practice Tests. So, you need to listen to at least 3 pieces 6 days a week starting now. In 4 months you will get through the entire 270 pieces. Some you know, so skip those. On day 2 listen to a little of the 3 pieces again and see if you can remember them. If not take note and review the one or two that you can't recall the next day with 3 new ones. Start making mental notes why Van der Roost sounds like Van der Roost, Alfred Reed sounds like Alfred Reed, etc. It will really help.

Listen while you are driving to and from school (or similar routine you have to do every day). You may want to grab the entire list of titles so you can keep track of what you need to do. Definitely plan to use the computer game called LitUP. It has hundreds of short examples that can keep track of what you have missed AND can be played with 2 to 4 people.

The important thing is to listen every day and concentrate on main themes you hear. (We did this with undergrad ABC classes and had weekly "drop-the-needle" tests. It got so that many of the students could name a piece listening to just 2 or 3 chords. Angel McDonald (ABC Center Curator) could/can still name almost any band piece in one or two notes!

Here's the most important thing to do if you just can't remember composers and titles: Play the main theme area of the music several times. As you get so you can sing along, Make up words. This was done in a big way for orchestral literature by one Sigmund Spaeth (Google him). So, if you were listening to the Unfinished Symphony of Schubert, we'd sing: "This is the sym-pho-ny that Mis-ter Schu-bert nev-er fin-ished." (That was over 60 years ago and I still remember dozens of them!) Match the rhythm to the words in which you include at least part of the title and at least the last name of the composer. It REALLY works. **Total: 1 area**

Reference: ABC Literature List of mp3 recordings (See ABC Study Materials <https://www.bandworld.org/ABC/Study.aspx>)
Computer band title listening game: LitUP can be accessed from the same ABC Study Materials location.