

University of Iowa School of Music Iowa Honor Band

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Developing a Unified, Balanced Trombone Section Sound

1. Set up

- Ideally, trombones should be 6-10 feet behind the next row of instruments.
- There should be several feet between each trombonist.
- Trombones are generally spaced out more than any other instrument.

2. Horn angles/directions

- When trombones are placed too close to the row of instruments in front of them, they will play downwards, attempting to play under the chairs and into their stands.
- Marching band effects some students more than other. Some will point “to the box” all the time. This disrupts the balance as much as pointing down.
- Trombones are often in a “corner” to one side of the band. Is the angle too tight?

3. Balance

- Typically, the strongest player gets put on first trombone.
 - Unless you have a stronger program, there is a likelihood of an instant drop off in talent.
 - Translation - strong first player, and weaker second trombone, and even weaker third trombone.

- Several of the issues above contribute to blend.
- The “strongest” player will typically play the loudest and with the most full sound.
- If the third trombone is playing on a true bass trombone, the texture difference is often enough, but this takes some time to develop.
- In a well-balanced section, the second trombone should be the loudest (about 10% louder than first or third).
- Second trombone has most of the “color” notes (3rds, 7ths, etc.)

4. Intonation

- Many intonation issue actually stem from a balance problem.
- The root of the chord should, generally, be the loudest.
- If the dominant seventh or other coloring note is in the strongest players’ part, it is possible that the chord may sound “upside down.”