

Saxophone Shopping Guide

It is time to start looking for a saxophone. This document is here to help you. Cut through the noise, understand what is important, and make the investment that is most appropriate for your child.

Levels

Instruments are marketed as being in “levels” based on the demands of the musician. They are manufactured and priced with those levels in mind.

Student. Student saxophones are made with the most durable and affordable materials. Some also have features that appeal to students. This is appropriate for our school band. The [Yamaha Alto Sax model 26 \(YAS-26\)](#) is a favorite of mine. Another option is from [Cannonball](#).

Intermediate or “step-up”. Intermediate saxophones are made of finer materials and facilitate more advanced playing. For many players, the intermediate instrument is enough to last a lifetime. Oftentimes, students will upgrade from a student to intermediate instrument in middle school or early high school. Examples: [Yamaha YAS-480](#), [Selmer](#).

Professional. Full-featured instruments made to the highest quality. Examples: [Yamaha YAS-62](#), [Selmer 52JU](#)

Artist. When you make your living with tools, you need the best tools. Artist-level instruments are often specialized and custom-made to fit the specific needs of the player. Examples: [Yamaha YAS-875EXII](#), [Selmer Paris 62JS](#), [Selmer Mark VI](#)

About the Materials

Case. All saxophones require a case for safe transport. Most of them come with a case. It is possible that you will find a used instrument that is in good shape, but the case is falling apart. You can buy a replacement case.

Mouthpiece. Most saxophones will come with an acceptable mouthpiece. If you purchase a used saxophone, you may wish to buy a new mouthpiece depending on its condition. The [Yamaha 5C](#) is commonly considered a step up in mouthpieces. The [Selmer C*](#) (“C-Star”) mouthpiece is standard equipment for advanced players.

Neck strap. All alto saxophones are played with a neck strap. Saxophone neck straps come in many shapes, sizes, and colors. Most saxophones come with a neck strap, which is usually fine. For more padding, [Neotech makes a very popular neck strap](#). [More examples](#). [Backpack-Style example](#) for Baritone Saxophone. [More information](#) about neck straps.

Pads. Any time you press a key on the saxophone, a hole opens or closes somewhere. If the pads closing those holes are old or damaged, the instrument will not function properly. Pads last for years. If buying privately, assume that you will need to get your pads checked at a music shop. Complete re-pads are a somewhat costly repair, often over \$100-200.

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Reeds. See the [linked document](#) for all you need to know about reeds. I have seen student success sabotaged by reeds that are poorly made. If it's less than \$1/reed, it isn't worth it. Link to a list of [reputable reeds](#). Article: [All about saxophone reeds](#).

Ligature. Your saxophone should come with a ligature. This is the part that attached the reed to the mouthpiece. Often made of metal or leather, either is fine. I prefer a Rovner Dark ligature as it is durable and can be used for decades with proper care.

Types of Saxophone

The saxophone family is one of the youngest in the band. The saxophone was only invented in the 1840's, making it a much more recent invention than some of our other instruments.

The pitches listed refer to the transposition of each instrument. They're pronounced "B-flat" or E-flat", and refer to the sound that comes out when playing a written C.

B ♭ Soprano Saxophone. This is about the size of a clarinet. Used mostly in Jazz Ensembles.

E ♭ Alto Saxophone. This is the saxophone you start on in 5th Grade.

B ♭ Tenor Saxophone. This is the next most common saxophone after the alto. We start using them in school in 6th grade.

E ♭ Baritone Saxophone, nicknamed "Bari Sax". The lowest and largest saxophone that we commonly see. There are some more unusual saxophones that are bigger.

C Melody Saxophone. At this point, more a museum piece than a practical instrument. These look from a distance like an alto saxophone, but they are not practical for use in school.

Where to Shop for a Saxophone - Online

[SaxQuest](#). A specialty shop. Instruments available at all levels, often with new pads. Student instruments in great shape under \$500.

[Schmidt Music](#). Another shop with a good mix of new and used inventory.

[Woodwind-Brasswind](#). An online music mega-store. They carry many high-quality instruments but have also started to carry some lower-quality instruments. Please check with me if the instrument you're looking at is not on the list below of acceptable brands.

[Boston Sax Shop](#). A reputable online dealer with new and used instruments.

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Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist. These are buyer-beware markets, but often have good deals. Any instrument you buy from Facebook, Craigslist, pawn shops, garage sales, or any other private dealer will require a thorough cleaning and may also need repairs. The typical cleaning often costs \$50-100 at a local music shop plus any additional repairs to bring the instrument up to playing condition.

Where to Shop for a Saxophone- In Person

I recommend checking out websites and calling before visiting. Some of these stores will set time, space, and instruments aside for you before you get there.

Triads Music Center 219 Main Street, Hudson Falls, NY 12839

[John Keal Music](#) 819 Livingston Ave, Albany, NY 12206

Mrs. Schultz's Trusted Brands

Yamaha. Almost all of their products are exceptional. Their "advantage" line is a step down, but everything else is highly recommended.

Cannonball. Have great student model instruments.

Selmer/Vito/Leblanc/Conn/Yanagisawa. [All of these](#) are sold under the Conn-Selmer umbrella. They were all separate companies at one time, and have maintained quality throughout. Selmer has started a "prelude" line which does not meet the same quality standard as the others.

Buffet-Crampon. Pronounced like the all-you-can-eat restaurant, not the singer from the 70's. Super high quality. [Buffet-Crampon](#), [Keilwerth](#)

Other reputable clarinet brands include Gemeinhardt / [LA Sax](#), [Cannonball](#), Armstrong, Artley.