



TRANSPOSITION¹

Not all instruments sound alike. Because of this, not all instruments in the band can play the same notes at the same time and still sound good! Sometimes you will hear the conductor tell the band to play a note with the word “concert” in front of it. Some instruments can play the note that the conductor says, while others have to go through what is called “transposition.” Here are some important facts:

Transposition is the process of playing or writing music in a different key from the concert key.

- **Concert Pitch** (or concert key/scale) refers to the sounding pitch (or key/scale).
- **Transposed Pitch** (or transposed key/scale) refers to the written pitch (or key/scale) that appears in the part.

Interval of transposition is the distance between the transposed (written) pitch and the actual sounding pitch. *Consult the Transposition Reference Chart to find the interval (distance) of transposition for your instrument.*

Concert Pitch Instruments do not have to transpose. *These instruments play the note that the conductor says to play.* Concert Pitch Instruments include: flute, oboe, bassoon, trombone, euphonium, tuba and the mallet percussion instruments.

Transposing Instruments sound different from the notes in concert pitch. In order to sound the same as the Concert Pitch Instruments, they must play a certain distance of notes away from what the conductor says to play. The distance depends on the instrument. *Consult the Transposition Reference Chart to find the interval (distance) of transposition for your instrument.*

ISN'T THIS MAKING THINGS TOO COMPLICATED?



No. Actually, transposing makes things easier for the musician:

1. Extremely high pitched instruments or extremely low pitched instruments transpose to make it easier to read their parts. *Transposition eliminates ledger lines way above or way below the staff.*
2. Many wind instruments transpose to make it easier for musicians to switch from one instrument to another with few fingering and note reading problems. For example, all clarinets use the same fingerings, and all saxophones use the same fingerings.
3. Before valves were invented, many musicians could not play all of the notes in a scale. They had to add or take away short lengths of tubing (called “crooks) in order to play certain notes. Imagine having to do this when the music is really fast!

¹ Garofalo, Robert. Rehearsal Handbook for Band and Orchestra Students. Meredith Music Publications, 1983.

TRANSPPOSITION REFERENCE CHART²

Locate your instrument in one of the vertical columns, then move horizontally across the page to the right-hand column to find the interval of transposition for that instrument.



WOODWINDS			
Flute/Piccolo Double Reeds	Clarinets	Saxophones	Interval of Transposition
piccolo			down 1 octave
flute, oboe, bassoon			NONTRANSPOSING (They play the note the conductor says.)
	Bb Clarinet		up Major 2 nd (1 whole step)
		Eb Alto Saxophone	up Major 6 th (6 notes) Be sure to count the first note as one and the sixth note as six.
	Bb Bass Clarinet	Bb Tenor Saxophone	up Major 2 nd plus an octave (1 whole step + octave)
		Eb Baritone Saxophone	up Major 6 th plus an octave (6 notes + octave) Be sure to count the first note as one and the sixth note as six.



BRASS & PERCUSSION		
Brass	Percussion	Interval of Transposition
	bells	down 2 octaves
	xylophone	down 1 octave
trombone, euphonium, tuba Bb trumpet	marimba, vibraphone, chimes, timpani	NONTRANSPOSING (They play the note the conductor says.)
French Horn in F		up Major 2 nd (1 whole step)
		up Perfect 5 th (five notes) Be sure to count the first note as one and the fifth note as five.

² Ibid.

TRANSPOSITION GUIDE³



To determine which key to play in when given the concert pitch:



1. Find the concert key in the left-hand column.
2. If your instrument transposes, move to the right until you come to the column for your instrument; this is your transposed pitch.
3. Find that pitch back in the first column and you can play the major scale by reading the notes from left to right.

	Concert Pitch	Bb Clarinets, Trumpets, Tenor Saxophones			French Horns in F	Eb Alto Saxophones, Baritone Saxophones		
Scale Degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Bb	C	D	Eb	F	G	A	Bb
	B	C#	D#	E	F#	G#	A#	B
	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
	Db	Eb	F	Gb	Ab	Bb	C	Db
	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
	Eb	F	G	Ab	Bb	C	D	Eb
	E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E
	F	G	A	Bb	C	D	E	F
	Gb	Ab	Bb	Cb (B nat.)	Db	Eb	F	Gb
	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
	Ab	Bb	C	Db	Eb	F	G	Ab
	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A

³ Ibid.