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# Instruments of the Orchestra

## Year 7 Music Reading homework



KING JAMES'S SCHOOL  
KNARESBOROUGH

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### All About Orchestral Instruments

#### What is an orchestra?

An orchestra is a group of musicians (specifically instrumentalists) who use a range of string, woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments to play **classical music** together. They are led by a conductor who stands at the front, setting the tempo and guiding the players.

A typical Western orchestra is sometimes called a symphony orchestra. These can be made up of any number of musicians, depending on what piece of music is being played or the size of the venue. Orchestras can be made up of over one hundred musicians playing a single work!

#### What sorts of instruments make up an orchestra?

A large range of instruments make up an orchestra. These include violins, trumpets, trombones, flutes, cellos, oboes, drums, and so many other instruments from across the world.

The instruments are grouped into 4 distinct families based on the characteristics of the instrument, such as how musicians play them to make sound, their volume or loudness, and what kind of sounds they produce.

### The four Families of the Orchestra

The four families of the orchestra are:

1. String
2. Woodwind
3. Brass
4. Percussion

### String Instruments in the Orchestra

#### Characteristics of String Instruments

When people think of what instruments make up an orchestra, string instruments like the violin are often the first example that springs to mind. But there are other instruments in this family, and all of them have the following characteristics:

- Like their name suggests, string instruments must have strings that cause them to create noise through vibrations. It doesn't matter what material that these strings are made out of or how thick they are as long as this is the case.
- The instruments create their sound by being strummed, plucked by hand, or bowed

### Woodwind Instruments in the Orchestra

#### Characteristics of Woodwind Instruments

Sometimes referred to as the 'wind instruments', the woodwind section of an orchestra refers to a few instruments which have these two things in common:

- Woodwind instruments create sound when the player blows air into them through the mouthpiece.
- Different pitches are made by covering different holes on the instrument, which takes a lot of practise.

# Brass Instruments in the Orchestra

## Characteristics of Brass Instruments

Brass instruments have a few defining characteristics that have to do with how they make sounds and play different notes:

- They make sound through the vibrations that come from the player’s lips into the mouthpiece of the instrument.
- You can play different notes by adjusting your lips, as well as using the valves, slides, or keys on the instruments.
- They’re essentially very long pipes that have been twisted into a variety of shapes.

# Percussion Instruments in the Orchestra

## Characteristics of Percussion Instruments

There are a lot of percussion instruments, and no two of them share all the same characteristics. Still, there are a few reasons why they can be grouped together:

- Most percussion instruments make sounds when they are hit. If they don’t, chances are that they instead make sounds when they’re shaken, rubbed, or scratched (like maracas).
- Percussion instruments can be loud. Even though percussionists must be careful to control their volume and tempo in an orchestra, there’s no denying that basic fact.
- They’re responsible for maintaining the rhythm of a piece of music.

