

Instrument comparison:

Instrument	Type (Family)	Minimum age to start	Groups in which they can be played	Comments	Practicalities
Singing	Vocal	2 or 3	All sorts of choirs and countless other contexts.	All children should be encouraged to sing, as often as possible, throughout their lives!	Free! Try to learn to read music along the way!
Violin	String	4 or 5	Orchestras, various ensembles, folk, jazz etc.	Ideal for a musical child. Best to start young!	Easily portable.
Viola	String	(later)	Orchestras, various ensembles.	Ideal for a musical child. Best to start young on violin and change later.	Fairly easily portable.
Cello	String	5 or 6	Orchestras, various ensembles.	Ideal for a musical child. Best to start young. Small instruments are available.	Fits in medium sized car boot or on passenger seat.
Double Bass	String	8 or 9	Orchestras, various ensembles, folk, jazz etc.	Shortage instrument so players in demand. Small instruments are available.	Transport is an issue. Requires folded down seats.
Flute	Woodwind	8	Orchestras, various ensembles, bands, folk, jazz etc.	Very popular so competitive at higher levels. Sound production difficult to start with but progress can be rapid.	Small, easily portable and relatively quiet.
Piccolo	Woodwind	-	Orchestras, various ensembles, bands, folk, jazz etc.	Specialist – follows on from learning Flute.	ditto
Oboe	Woodwind	8 or 9	Orchestras, various ensembles, bands etc.	Shortage instrument so players in demand. Difficult to begin with, so players need determination!	Easily portable. Reeds required regularly – good instruments can be expensive.
Cor Anglais	Woodwind	-	Orchestras, various ensembles.	Specialist – follows on from learning Oboe. In great demand!	Fairly easily portable. Reeds required regularly – good instruments can be expensive.
Clarinet	Woodwind	8	Orchestras, various ensembles, bands, jazz etc.	Very popular so competitive at higher levels. Advanced players will require 2 instruments (Bb & A)	Easily portable. Reeds required regularly.
Bass Clarinet	Woodwind	-	Orchestras, various ensembles, bands, etc.	Specialist – follows on from learning Clarinet	Fairly portable. Reeds required regularly.
Bassoon	Woodwind	10	Orchestras, various ensembles, bands, etc.	Shortage instrument so players in demand. Great fun and not as difficult as it looks!	Reeds required regularly – good instruments can be expensive.
Recorder	Woodwind	6	recorder groups and ensembles, early music.	A good starter instrument. Progress rapid. Skills transfer easily to all woodwind instruments.	Easily portable and quiet
Saxophone	Woodwind	11 or 12	Bands, jazz, occasionally orchestras.	Progress rapid. Loud. Very popular so competitive at higher levels.	Portable. Much better to start on clarinet and add saxophone later!
Horn (Often called French Horn)	Brass	9 or 10	Orchestras, various ensembles, bands, etc.	Shortage instrument so players in great demand. Not as difficult as people say! A great choice.	Fairly portable. Often better to start on trumpet or cornet and transfer later!
Trumpet	Brass	7 or 8	Orchestras, various ensembles, bands, jazz etc.	Good beginner instrument. Skills easily transfers to all other brass.	Portable. Loud – but can be practised with a mute!
Cornet	Brass	7 or 8	Bands, jazz, occasionally orchestras.	Almost identical to the Trumpet but slightly lighter and easier to blow. Many players continue to play both. Good starter instrument.	Portable
Trombone	Brass	9 or 10	Orchestras, various ensembles, bands, jazz etc.	Longer arm reach than other brass instruments. Strongly advise learning bass clef notation!	Often better to start on trumpet, cornet or euphonium and transfer later!
Tuba	Brass	12	Orchestras, various ensembles, bands, etc.	Shortage instrument. Needs a fair degree of strength and lots of wind!	Heavy but fits in car boot. Usually better to start on a smaller brass instrument!

Euphonium	Brass	8 or 9	Mainly brass and wind bands.	Shortage instrument. Basically, a small tuba – but often has a solo or more prominent role.	Players often start on euphonium, progress to tuba and carry on with both.
Flugel Horn, Tenor Horn, Baritone etc.	Brass	8 or 9	Mainly brass bands.	We really do not recommend starting on any of these instruments. Skills transfer easily from any other brass instrument.	
Piano	Keyboard	4	Various ensembles (when advanced)	The perfect starter instrument for a youngster. Skills transfer easily to all other keyboard instruments	Instrument takes up space. Occasional tuning required.
Electric Piano	Keyboard	4	Various ensembles (when advanced)	Skills transfer easily to/from piano and can be used to imitate other instruments.	Just a cheaper and smaller option. Does not require tuning.
Organ	Keyboard	10 or 11	Mainly church use but also light music and theatres.	Nobody starts on the organ. Learn the piano first. Accomplished players are in demand.	Access to an instrument can be problematic. (Uses hands and feet!)
Harp		8 or 9	Mainly solo but occasionally in orchestras and folk music.	Shortage instrument (except in Wales!). A great choice if you like the sound. Good players in great demand.	Instruments expensive and portability can be a problem.
Percussion		8	Orchestras, various ensembles, bands, folk, jazz etc.	We strongly recommend that children do not learn <u>only</u> drum kit! Percussion involves a vast range of skills and techniques and good players are in great demand! Must also learn to read music.	Access to and transport of instruments can be a problem.
Guitar (Classical) (Acoustic) (Electric) (Bass) (Ukulele etc.)		8	Various	Of course, kids who are into pop music will want to play the guitar! Try to persuade them to learn Classical Guitar instead. The skills acquired are easily transferable to all other types of guitar – but this is not the case in reverse. (The Ukulele is a good starter instrument for small children.)	We strongly recommend that all guitar players learn to read music too (Any fairly accomplished musician will be able to teach themselves well enough to play most pop and folk music.)