



PRE-DRILL CAMP 2026 · LEADERSHIP SEMINARS · DAY 1

# The Sectional Standard

*"SOP and the Minimum Skills Audition"*

**Led by the Section Leaders**

Instrumentalist Breakout · Saturday, August 1, 2026

The Hampton University Marching Force

**HAMPTON'S HEARTBEAT**

# Icebreaker

In a sectional, you are not just a player—you are the teacher. Hear how a master approaches teaching: a high standard and real care for every student.

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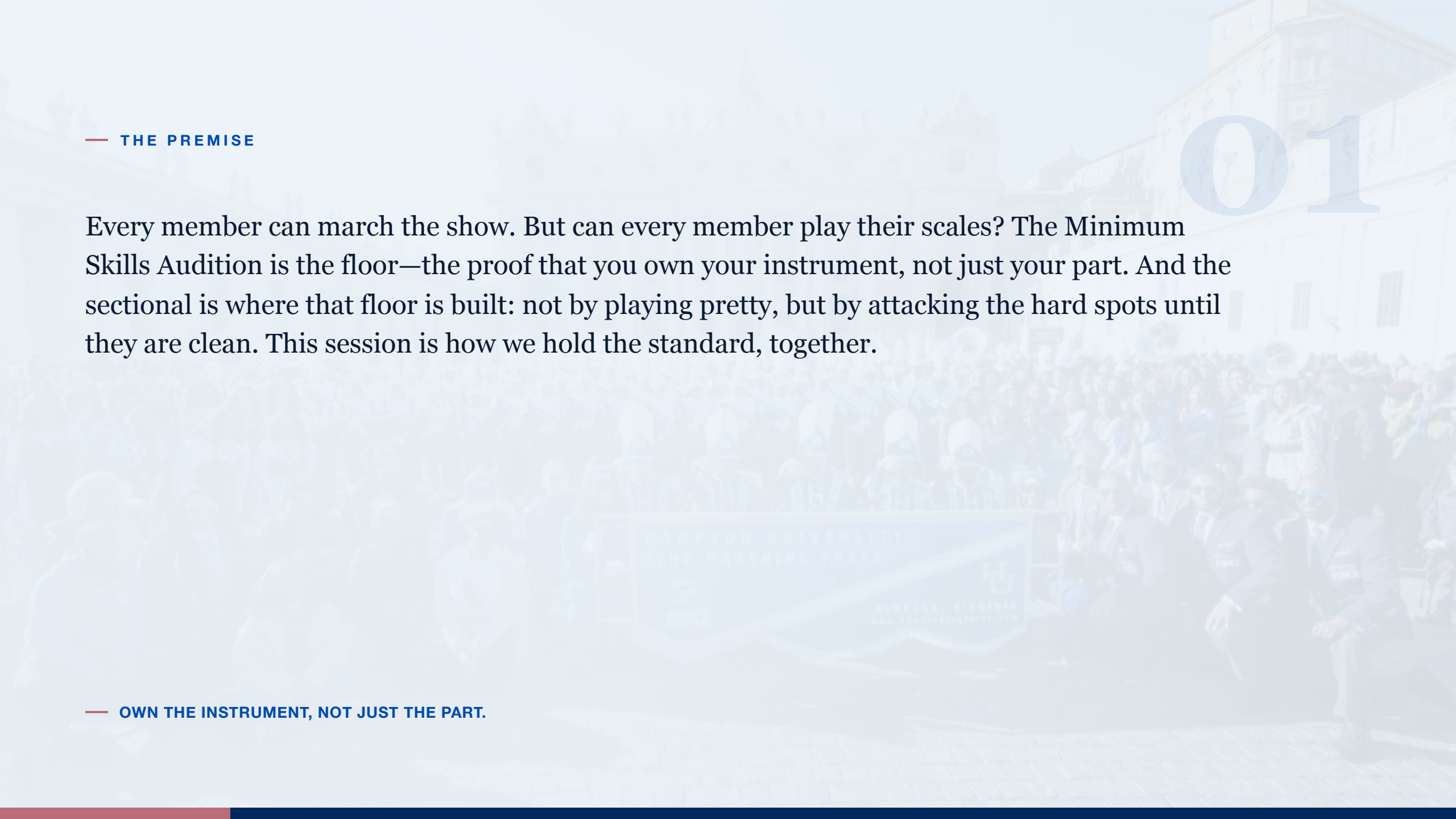


**Wynton Marsalis — “On Teaching”**

**[youtu.be/sSUhfUyI1bg](https://youtu.be/sSUhfUyI1bg)**

WATCH · 1:20

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## — THE PREMISE

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Every member can march the show. But can every member play their scales? The Minimum Skills Audition is the floor—the proof that you own your instrument, not just your part. And the sectional is where that floor is built: not by playing pretty, but by attacking the hard spots until they are clean. This session is how we hold the standard, together.

— OWN THE INSTRUMENT, NOT JUST THE PART.

# Two Standards Today

One measures the player. One runs the room.

- ◆ The **MSA**—the **Minimum Skills Audition**—is the individual proficiency floor every instrumentalist must clear.
- ◆ The **SOP**—our **Standard Operating Procedure** for sectionals—is how a leader builds that proficiency in the room.
- ◆ The MSA sets the bar. The SOP is how you get everyone over it.

# The MSA: Minimum Skills Audition

The proficiency floor for every instrumentalist.

|                                                               |                                                               |                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div>12</div> <div>major scales, each with its arpeggio</div> | <div>2-Octave</div> <div>chromatic scale, top to bottom</div> | <div>70%</div> <div>to pass and remain in good standing</div> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|

This is the **floor, not the ceiling**—the minimum every member owes the band. Anything below 70% is not good standing.

# Why Scales Are the Whole Game

The fundamentals are not separate from the music—they are the music.

- ◆ Every phrase you will ever play is built from **scales and arpeggios**. Own them, and the music comes faster and cleaner.
- ◆ The **chromatic scale** is your fingers' and your ear's road map to every note on the horn.
- ◆ When every member clears the floor, **no one is carried**, and the whole section starts to sound like one player.
- ◆ The MSA is not busywork. It is the shortest path to The Hampton Sound.

# Helping Your Section Pass

Your job is not to judge them once—it is to get them there.

- ◆ **Know it cold yourself first.** You cannot check off what you have not mastered.
- ◆ **Hold regular check-offs**—small, frequent, and honest—so no one is surprised at audition time.
- ◆ **Diagnose the sticking point:** is it the fingering, the tempo, or the reps? Fix the cause, not the symptom.
- ◆ **Drill it and re-check.** A failed scale is a to-do list, not a verdict.

# Running a Sectional: The SOP

A sectional is a repair shop, not a concert.

- ◆ **Attack the tough spots.** Spend your time on the four bars that are broken, not the ones already clean.
- ◆ **Repeat for proficiency.** Run the hard passage slowly and correctly, again and again, until it cannot fall apart.
- ◆ **Do not run entire songs.** Full run-throughs feel productive but fix nothing—reserve them for **memorization only**.
- ◆ Leave every sectional with something measurably better than when you walked in.

# Attack the Tough Spots

This is not just our opinion—it is how mastery is actually built.

- ◆ The research on expert performance calls it **deliberate practice**: you improve by working at the edge of what you cannot yet do, not by repeating what you already can.
- ◆ Studies of musicians in the practice room found the same thing—the best players **target their errors**, isolate the passage, and repeat it in context until it is reliable.
- ◆ The method: **isolate the hard spot, slow it down, repeat it clean, then bring the tempo back up.**
- ◆ Slow and correct beats fast and sloppy, every time.

**Sources:** Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Römer, "The Role of Deliberate Practice," *Psychological Review* (1993); Ericsson and Pool, *Peak* (2016); Duke, Simmons, and Cash, "It's Not How Much; It's How," *Journal of Research in Music Education* (2009).

# Playing Through Is Not Practicing

The most common way to waste a sectional.

- ◆ Running the whole song from the top **feels** productive—but you spend most of it playing what you already know.
- ◆ Playing through is **performing**, not practicing. It rehearses the mistakes right alongside the good parts.
- ◆ The only reason to run a full piece in a sectional is **memorization**—locking the map into your head and hands.
- ◆ If you are not fixing something, you are not practicing. Go back to the tough spot.

# A Sectional Blueprint

A simple order that works every time.

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## 1 Warm Up on Fundamentals

Open with long tones and the MSA scales. The warmup is the standard, every single time.

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## 3 Attack the Tough Spots

Spend the bulk of the time isolating and drilling the hardest passages to proficiency.

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## 2 Check Off

Run quick MSA check-offs so you know exactly where every player stands.

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## 4 Lock It In

End with a short, focused run for memory only—then release. Leave it better than you found it.

# Demand, Don't Demean

Hold the bar high—and hold it the right way.

- ◆ A hard sectional is not a cruel one. **Rigor is not hazing:** you push the standard, never the person's dignity.
- ◆ Practice **Intellectual Hesitation:** before you correct, ask whether the gap is a resource, an understanding, or an effort problem—then fix that.
- ◆ Be **demanding and encouraging at once.** People run through walls for the leader who believes they can clear the bar.
- ◆ The goal is not to expose who cannot play. It is to make sure everyone can.

**Sources:** Jones, doctoral dissertation, North Carolina A&T State University (2014); see the Servant-Leadership and Why Hazing Happens seminars.

YOUR CHARGE

# Own the Scales. Fix the Spots.

The MSA is the floor, and the sectional is where you build to it. Know your scales cold, hold honest check-offs, and spend your reps on the four bars that are broken—not the ones already clean. Demand the standard, encourage the person, and leave every sectional better than you found it. That is how a section becomes one sound.

*Serve First. Lead Always.* — **Drive the Legacy.**

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