

# Instrumentation and Changing Arrangements

“We encourage everyone to reinvent this material. We do not view these scores as sacred, untouchable manuscripts.

Duke Ellington conceived his music as vehicles for improvisation and celebration of the freedom of expression. We encourage students to play their own solos.”

**Wynton Marsalis**

## Instrumentation

Ellington’s special combination of instruments was a significant part of what made his music unique. We encourage you to have students learn doubling to complete the instrumentation. Substitution of instruments is acceptable as long as parts are not transposed and ensemble parts are played as written. Refer to each chart for exact instrumentation, as it varies from score to score. The number of students listed on your application cannot exceed 25.

## Improvisation and Soloing

Improvisation is an essential part of performing these scores. We encourage students to learn solos from the original recordings first, which are included note for note in the scores. This is a starting point, not the ending point. Once students understand improvisation in this style they should always add their own personalities. Find other recordings of these pieces with different solos, and introduce them to your students. See Wynton Marsalis’ advice online at [www.jalc.org/EssentiallyEllington](http://www.jalc.org/EssentiallyEllington) under Resources.

*Please note:* You may choose soloists other than those indicated and extend solo sections as is appropriate to this style of music.

## Changing Arrangements

Advice from the Jazz  
at Lincoln Center Clinicians

We asked the *Essentially Ellington* team of clinicians and judges to answer a few questions on making tasteful changes to these arrangements. Use their knowledge to make informed choices when changing solos or adding introductions, and don’t hesitate to call us if you have questions.

Ask yourself (or us) the following questions about any potential adjustments to an arrangement.

- How does the adjustment change the balance of the arrangement?
- How can parts of the arrangement be reused to maintain an orchestral presence instead of just some orchestral music in a sea of solos?
- Are the adjustments in the same style as the arrangement? Important: An adjustment should not sound like another tune.

What are the crucial elements needed to maintain the integrity of an arrangement?

In order to perform any music, the better you understand that music, the better your interpretation. When you are dealing with the music of geniuses like Ellington, Beethoven, or Mozart, you can assume that they know quite a bit. So to alter their music, you need to do your homework:

- Understand the form, rhythms, melodies, harmonies and orchestration being dealt with, both in the piece and in the writing in general. There is already a perfect balance in virtually all of these charts, and when a change is made, that balance is upset. Make sure that an equally appealing new balance can be found.
- All of this music is motivically tight. If material is added, and if it is not generated from the motive that the composer is exploring and/or doesn’t produce the same spirit and intent as the writing, the power of the music is weakened. *More is not necessarily better.* This music relies heavily on understatement and brevity. Don’t overextend solos or introductions.