



# Class Groups and Descriptions

## (For AFTMD Faculty)

At AFTMD, class groups are defined not by “how advanced is this student?” but by what sort of learning experience - and, therefore, what kind of instruction - they can expect in each group. Classes are self-selecting, and students are welcome to switch freely between the different groups during the camp - though they are encouraged to choose the track that is best for them as close to the outset as possible.

In general, the biggest differences between the groups comes down to three things. Please consider these as you plan your classes:

- Pacing - in particular, how many repetitions will be given to learn new material and what tempo will those repetitions be at.
- Intensity - how detailed the material is and how demanding the instructor is in asking students to strive to make the desired sound/feel “now” in class, as opposed to “figure it out later on your own time”.
- Area of Primary Focus - “From the Ground Up”, “Skill Building”, etc. listed below and described in detail for each group.

## CLASS GROUPS

### **Moose (“From the Ground Up”)**

For students who are relatively new to their discipline, returning from a hiatus, or simply wanting to focus on strengthening their foundations in their craft. Teaching should focus on learning the basics through playing tunes/learning steps, and include building foundational technique, learning how to learn by ear, basic ensemble skills, musical vocabulary, etc. There should be plenty of repetition and breaking down of phrases/steps, and the focus should be on creating a fun, supportive, joyful learning environment! We highly encourage the Moose Fiddle and Guitar classes to collaborate, learning tunes in common and getting together to play them periodically throughout the week. If you like, the Moose classes are also welcome to perform as a joint ensemble on the Friday night student concert (not required, only if you want to!)

### **Seal (“Skill Building”)**

Designed to be a full-immersion experience where students can develop their core technique, all while learning some of the best repertoire each style has to offer. You can assume that Seal students have a basic command of their instruments/dancing, with plenty of room for development. Teaching should focus on learning both what to do and how to do it. Instruction should include a focus on helping students develop comfort and fluency with learning by ear. Assume you’ll teach 1-2 tunes/chord progressions/stepping patterns per class period (2-4 for a Fiddlers’ Shuffle double period) at a reasonable pace, with plenty of guidance and repetition to get things feeling comfortable.

## **Fiddle teachers:**

Please note that you will have three different Seal groups in the Fiddlers' Shuffle, distinguished as follows:

- “Relaxed” Seals – A fun and supportive learning environment, with emphasis on developing foundational skills through tune-playing. You can assume that these are passionate but less experienced players who want to build comfort and confidence on their instrument. Please plan to teach 2-3 tunes each morning (a double period), with many repetitions of each tune or skill, and clear guidance on exactly how to produce specific kinds of sound, bowing, ornamentation, etc. Being upbeat, encouraging, and supportive is key with this group!
- “Fast-Paced” Seals – Also focused on building foundational stylistic bowing/ornamentation/sound production, but will move at a notably faster, more intensive pace than the Relaxed Seals. Please plan to teach 3-4 (maybe more?) tunes each morning, often with fewer repetitions of each part since these students should be much more comfortable learning by ear. This will give you time to dive further into things like finding an “authentic traditional accent” in the genre you’re teaching, and grooving at the full tempo needed for a dance or jam session. These students will greatly appreciate being pushed – in a positive, supportive way, but definitely give them lots to work on and clear steps for how to accomplish what you’re asking them to do. These seals are *hungry* for knowledge!
- “New-to-Trad” Seals – Designed for “Classical” or note-reading players who want to explore the world of fiddling and learning by ear. You can expect that these players have comfortable technical facility on their instrument, but little or no experience with traditional music or learning by ear. Therefore, plan to focus on learning HOW to learn by ear, and start finding a “traditional fiddle sound” through stylistic bowing, ornamentation, etc. Teaching approximately 2-4 tunes each morning is appropriate, and teaching tunes from the core repertoire (i.e. tunes that you might avoid in another class because they are “too common”) that students can immediately use in a jam session *that day* is a huge plus!

NOTE: The New-to-Trad Seals may include experienced viola or 'cello players, but you aren't responsible for knowing how to play those instruments! Just treat them like “fiddlers” in their own right, though any suggestions for fingerings that you feel comfortable making (i.e. shifting, playing down an octave, etc.) are always welcome.

## **Bear (“Nuance and Detail”)**

This group is an intensive, fast-paced experience that will cover a LOT of material and delve into the essence of what makes each style of traditional music or dance distinct and unique in its own right. Designed for experienced students who want to develop their stylistic fluency in different genres of traditional music/dance, and polish their playing to the highest level. You should assume that students have the technical facility to navigate their instruments/feet easily on their own, and are comfortable both learning quickly by ear and playing/dancing fluently at tempo. This means your teaching can focus on exploring the nuances and artistic details of your genre. For example: “Sligo jigs use a lot of 5-note rolls – here are four different ways you could play that ornament, okay now let's put

a bunch of them in this tune!”. Assume you’ll teach 2-3 tunes – or equivalent – per class period (3-4 or more for a Fiddlers’ Shuffle double period) at a rapid, fluent pace, and focus on giving a deep dive into the essence of your genre. If you wish, it is totally appropriate at this level to set some time aside for short “masterclass” performances to give individual feedback to students who want it. Bear classes should be CHALLENGING! These students want not just new tunes “for today”, but plenty of material and ideas to take home to work on in their playing over the whole year.

NOTE: Even though some students may over-place themselves into this group, please plan to teach a truly “advanced” class when working with Bear groups! We want this group to foster development for really experienced players, and be something to work towards for students who aren’t quite in this space yet.

### **Eagle (“Intensive Artistic Development”)**

A multi-instrumental cohort, focused on helping experienced players and dancers deepen their artistry at the very highest level and develop the skills they will need to become the next generation of “musical ambassadors” in traditional music. This group is about building an intensive, close-knit cohort of colleagues, who will together explore big artistic ideas under your guidance. This is not a class simply for learning repertoire. Eagle students appreciate you treating them like colleagues, opening their eyes to new possibilities, engaging in big questions like “how do I really engage an audience with my playing?”, “how do I create a signature version/arrangement of this tune?”, “how do I feel more confident while performing?”, “how do I foster community and encourage others in a jam session?”, etc. If you wish, it is totally appropriate to set some time aside for short “masterclass” performances to give individual feedback to students who want it. This class is open to students on any instrument, including singers and percussive dancers, so please plan to teach a “non-instrument-specific” class that is inclusive, engaging, challenging, and inspiring for everyone!

IMPORTANT NOTE: The difference between the Bears and the Eagles is not about the capability of the students, but about the *focus* of the class. The Bears are focused on developing their individual playing to the highest level (and learning tunes/material) while the Eagles are focused on exploring the outward-facing ensemble/performance/outreach skills needed to become a “musical ambassador” or tradition bearer. This means, for instance, that you may have, for example, a “less advanced” player in the Eagles who is working on starting a band/playing concerts/teaching others/etc., or a “more advanced” player in the Bears who is trying to learn more tunes in new styles - both are totally fine!