“Seating Assignments: are they necessary?” by John Findlay and Dr. Hendricks was a rather enjoyable and helpful read. Though each agreed that traditional seating needs some revamping, I was delighted to see the difference between their approaches to the topic. Findlay's reflection was more experience based, while Dr. Hen's reflection seemed to be geared more towards psychology, research, and practical approaches towards seating. John Findlay shared a couple experiences, one in which he participated in traditional seating; he ended up second chair in high school which motivated him to become section leader the following year. Unfortunately, this instilled a sense of pride that was soon humbled in orchestras outside of his high school and once he attended college. Once he reached university, seating was handled rather differently, as students were seated in randomly or rotated chairs/parts for each concert. These experiences really influenced him in his own teachings; in fact, Findlay mentions that for the first couple years of teaching he used a more traditional method of seating. As his membership grew and his time to audition students condensed, he decided to take his previous knowledge of his students and only place the concert master and section leaders while all other students chose their seats. What's interesting about this is that many students sat in similar spots week to week. Moreover, Findlay makes two arguments about this observation: "first, students tend to embrace consistency and structure; second, students may be influenced by previous knowledge of how seating is “supposed” to be done (i.e. the “best” are in the front)." He finishes off by saying that any competition that we instill in our school programs should focus on "self vs. self" rather than "self vs. everyone else."

Dr. Hendricks's reflection includes some of her own research related to competitive/traditional seating in orchestra programs. Overall, she reveals that students attitudes towards their own playing is being compromised. She makes a point that competition can be a strong motivator, but only at the short term, and it can ultimately cause "detrimental effects on students’ beliefs in their performance abilities." Rather than pitting students against each other, we should pair students together based on their strengths and weaknesses and/or providing opportunities for leadership rather than competition.

Personally, I am a rather competitive person, but I try to use it as a means of motivating myself to be a better me, rather than being better than someone else. Coming out of a high school program that was quite traditional in many ways, college was quite an eye opener for me. My sophomore year of college was especially humbling, as I had to get braces mere weeks before school and auditions started up again. Fortunately, many professors and directors at BSU have been supportive, and many encourage rotational seating. Braces set me back and discouraged me quite a bit, and my auditions for various ensembles my sophomore year didn't truly reflect what I was capable of as a musician. I believe that auditions are useful in determining the strengths and weaknesses of students, but they do not always reflect on the true potential of any particular student and should not be a determining factor in seating. Moreover, auditions should be an assessment on what the student can offer the ensemble, as well as an assessment of what skills may need developed. Rotational seating gives students of various skill levels a chance to lead, collaborate, and improve in ways that traditional seating just can't accomplish.