

It Takes Two: the Clarinet and the Saxophone

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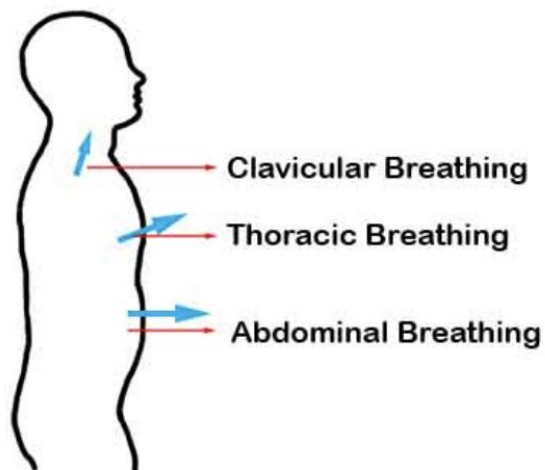
Goals

- Learn how to set students up for success from day one
- Avoid common pitfalls
- Choose equipment that promotes solid fundamentals

Section 1: Sound and Air Support

Process

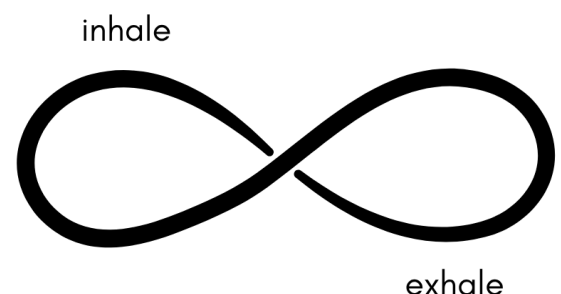
- Relaxed shoulders and throat
- Air from stomach/diaphragm (filling from bottom up)
- No sound when Breathing
 - Never say "Open your Throat"
 - Why? Changes Air seal around mouthpiece/ embouchure as well as spreads tone color and flattens pitch



- No breathing through instrument
 - This limits/inhibits the amount of air a player can use on their inhale
- Use mirror to focus airstream by directing air to its center (at students' nose)
 - Blowing air into the clarinet or saxophone should be aimed directly forward (unlike flute, which is down)
 - Using a mirror prevents pitfall of exhale changing the face shape (e.g. cheeks blowing out or chin bunching)

Best Practices

- Breathing Tubes, Lung Trainers, Balloons and Straws
 - [Breathing Tube](#)
 - [Breath Builder](#)
 - [Lung Trainer](#)
 - Straws: Regular size straws for embouchure, air and articulation exercises.
 - Balloon Exercise
 - Use standard size bags of 12- inch balloons
 - Stretch them out (students can also be goofy with them!)
 - Blow up the balloon in specific counting structures at J= 108-112
 - 12 count air = *mf*
 - 16 count air = *mp*
 - 20 count air = *p*
 - 24 count air = *pp*
 - 8 count air = *f*
 - 6 count air = *ff*
 - 4 count air = *fff*
 - "Use all the air in all the counts"
- Breathing Exercises before you play ALWAYS
 - Lessons, sectionals, and rehearsals
- Infinity Breaths
 - Inhale and exhale bleed into each other
 - Prevents glottal stops (exhale stops or cuts abruptly at the end)
- Long Tones with Varied Tempi and Dynamics



Section 2: Setup, Embouchure, and Intonation

Mini Instrument Setup

Tips

- Avoid touching octave key (saxophone) and bridge key (clarinet)
 - This can bend these mechanisms, making them less effective
- Use cork grease
 - Apply a thin layer covering the cork (to ease mouthpiece onto)
 - Note: using too much cork grease, especially with clarinet, can cause glue adhering cork to barrel/neck to wear down faster
- Placement of reed makes HUGE difference in sound
 - Reed too high = stuffy tone
 - Reed too low = unfocused sound and thud-y articulation
 - Reed off-center = slow response



Reed and ligature placement

Reed:

- Tip to tip (see eyelash of black mouthpiece behind reed)
- Fat to flat (fat part of reed is in center of flat part of mouthpiece - called the table)

Ligature:

- At file mark (or a touch under)
- Screws snug but not forced too tight

Location on saxophone cork

- Depends on length of cork and mouthpiece design
- Rule of thumb = $\frac{2}{3}$ length
- Mark the cork to show where the mouthpiece should be to produce a concert A-flat

Best Practices

- For at least 2–3 weeks, double-check students' mini instruments to ensure they learn perfect setup
 - Ask, 'What's not perfect to you?' to help them understand correct reed and ligature placement on the barrel (clarinet) or neck (saxophone)
- Magnetic mirror on stand ALWAYS

Question: How Much Mouthpiece Should a Student Take In?

Paper trick or Business Card: shows student how much reed to take in

- Using a pencil, carefully draw a line where the fulcrum is
- Have student place thumb on line for reference point when forming embouchure



Use clear and black mouthpiece patches

- Clear = protect mouthpiece
- Black = (when cut in half) “bumper”
 - Because black patches are thicker than clear, students can feel where their top teeth need to stop
- This promotes comfort with teeth on the mouthpiece (especially for students with oral sensitivity), and prevents students from taking in too little mouthpiece (biting/chirp) or too much mouthpiece (honk)



Embouchure - “it has to look right to sound right”

What it looks like:

Sliver of pink from bottom lip (students with fuller lips will have more showing than students with thinner lips)

Valley of the chin (peach pit bunch = problems with articulation and pitch down the line)

What it feels like:

“Ee” tongue syllable

- Syllables like “ah” or “uh” put the tongue too low, leading to flat intonation and lackluster tone quality

Top teeth bumps against black mouthpiece patch

- Taking in too little mouthpiece results in pitch being too high

Cheeks “velcroed” to skeleton

- Cheeks puffed out leads to unfocused/fuzzy sound quality

Space between top and bottom jaw

- Students may not have a ton of awareness for this yet, hence the analogy: no crushing blueberries
 - Imagine you have two blueberries between the molars in the back of your mouth. Your job is not crush the blueberries when playing
 - Can insert pinky finger while opening and closing jaw for physical reference

Steps for Teaching Embouchure

1. Ski slope “ee” (clarinet); “Whistle face” (saxophone)
 2. Thumb guides reed to roll over the bottom lip
 3. Top teeth anchor
 4. Blow
- Once students can consistently hold pitch steady, implement rhythm (4-8 counts on metronome)

Clarinet Embouchure (instrument-specific)

What it looks like:

Drawstring corners

Body of clarinet at 35-40° angle

What it feels like:

Firm bottom lip

- If bottom lip is too loose, have student blow through (coffee) straw, or isolate playing on mouthpiece and barrel only instead of the full body

Goal pitch of mouthpiece and barrel = concert F#

If pitch is too high....

- Jaw tension
- Throat column is too tight

If pitch is too low...

Tongue too low (should be ee)
Teeth not on top of mouthpiece



Saxophone Embouchure (instrument-specific)

What it looks like:

Whistle face = corners “in” and “forward”

Neck of saxophone parallel to floor

What it feels like:

“Soft” bottom lip

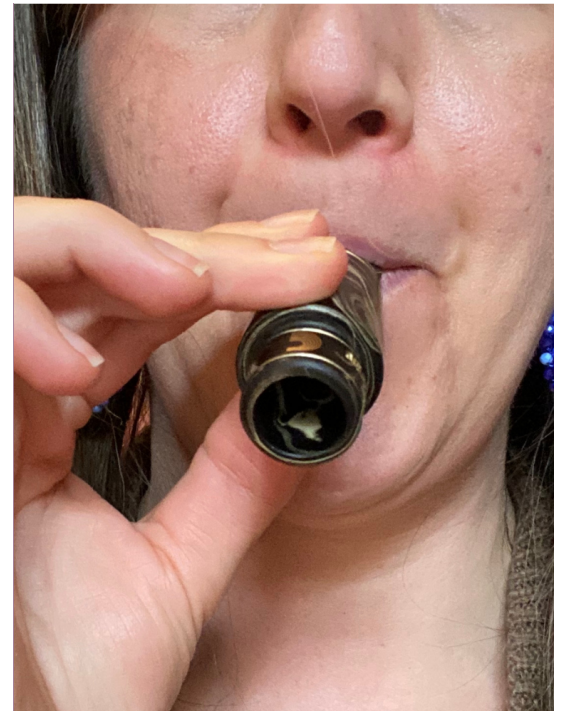
- Whistle face has natural softer lip
- Bottom lip makes contact with reed, but not tightly (like clarinet)
 - If student is too firm with bottom lip, reverse embouchure steps 2 and 3

French cow analogy

- “Ee” tongue, “oo” lips
- American cows “moo” where French cows “mœ”

Goal pitch of mouthpiece and neck = concert A flat

- If pitch is too high....
 - Solution: check bottom lip tightness and/or jaw tension (blueberries!)
- If pitch is too low....
 - Solution - hum/sing (to feel throat position); experiment with different vowel shape (ah eh ee oh oo)



Question: What Needs to be Adjusted if the Goal Pitch is Wrong?

If the sound is unfocused in any way, check for:

- Airstream: air blows directly forward in a skinny, directed column
- Tongue placement (likely too low, especially for clarinet)
- Jaw (biting)
- Equipment: reed quality/health, placement, ligature position, etc.
- Amount of mouthpiece

Problem Checklist

Section 3: Articulation

Tonguing

Steps for teaching articulation

1. Say syllable
 - "Tee/Dee/ Duh/Tuh" for clarinet
 - "Ta/Da" for saxophone
 - Goal: notice where the tongue touches back of top teeth
2. Say syllable while instrument is placed on bottom lip
 - use mirror to see where tongue touches reed
3. Form entire embouchure + add air (wind band)
 - keep air steady; no stopping air before saying syllable
4. Repeat step 3 with sound
 - blow for 2 counts to start with steady tone, then add articulation
5. Add metronome
 - Once students can consistently touch reed at the same spot (tip) with the same intensity (firmness), implement rhythms (rhythm rap back and forth/call and response game)

Best practices:

- Use a straw to align air, syllable, and embouchure
 - Tactile feedback allows student to feel tastebuds activate
- Dot test
 - Visual aid of where the tongue is touching the reed
 - This process is hard on reeds, but worth sacrificing one for!
 - Can use Sharpie or Kool-Aid powder on a "dying" reed
 1. Draw dot in the center of the top of the reed
 2. Have student articulate 2-3x on the reed
 3. Stick out the tongue and see where tongue was making contact with the reed
- Call and response
 - TONS of demo from you
- Build consistency
 - Go through entire series of steps every time for 2-3 weeks
- Depending on the sound you're hearing, try different syllables
 - Too light? Try "D" instead of "T"
 - Too firm? Try "T" instead of "D"



Section 4: Position + Posture

Best Practices

- “C” shaped hands
- Each finger positioned over single key
- Thumbs under thumb rests
 - Remember: thumbs rests are adjustable
 - Use Nubs or other thumb cushions for comfort
- Instrument angle = 35-45°
 - Saxophone: on the side when seated
 - Why? Playing in the center while sitting can compromise posture (slouching), hand position (wrist tension), and negatively impact intonation on E-flat (because the body is obscuring that tone hole, making a flat pitch even flatter)
- Head in alignment (no neck reaching forward or down), top teeth resting on mouthpiece
- Use a neck strap to bring the instrument closer to you
 - An ill-fitting or stretchy neck strap (e.g. neoprene) causes neck/spine issues and discomfort
 - Recommended: Rico padded neck strap with snap hook
 - Clarinets and bass clarinets with no peg benefit from using a neck strap (again, to keep their body in alignment)
 - Recommended: Rico clarinet neck strap



Question: What Should the First Notes on the Full Body Be?

Clarinet First Notes

First Notes

- Open G
 - Why? Ease of response
- Descend to F E D C
 - Why? There is a straight descent down with what should be ease of response, while adjusting just the left hand.
- First octave jump = C to G, then descending Bb to F, A to E, Ab to Eb, G to D
 - Why? Not a lot of fingers involved, with attention to air, embouchure and hand position.

Clarinet Full Body Checklist

1. Hands cover tone holes fully
2. Angle of instrument 35-40 degrees
 - Use neckstrap if needed to achieve this



Saxophone First Notes

First Notes

- Left hand: B A G C
 - Why? Middle register for easy response, encourages proper hand position (can think about both hands at the same time)
- Right hand: low D, middle D
 - Why? Playing in the lower register helps ensure proper embouchure and air support
 - If this doesn't come out, the lips are too firm OR the jaw is too tight

Saxophone Full Body Checklist

1. Neck strap height
 - Move high enough so the head doesn't tilt down to meet the saxophone
2. Gold line underneath the neck lines up with with clear rubber notch on body
 - This is the octave key, and it functions optimally when aligned with the neck
3. Check/adjust mouthpiece
 - No tilting the head to meet the mouthpiece!
4. Tighten neck screw



Section 5: Mouthpieces, Ligatures, and Reeds

Mouthpieces

How to Choose

- Hard rubber, ideally machine-milled
 - Excellent tone quality and ease of response
- More closed tip
 - Promotes ideal embouchure development
 - Bigger tip openings mean more resistance, which can cause beginners to take in too much mouthpiece in order to get the reed to vibrate/respond
- Avoid...
 - Plastic material = poor tone quality
 - Hand-polished = inconsistent

Recommendations

- Clarinet: D'Addario X5 or X0
- Saxophone: D'Addario D155 (alto) or Selmer S90 180 (for all saxophone voices)



Mouthpieces 101 Guide

Ligatures

Metal vs. Leather

- Metal
 - Pros: resonance, projection
 - Cons: fragile
- Leather
 - Pros: durability, cost
 - Cons: dampen the sound

Recommendations

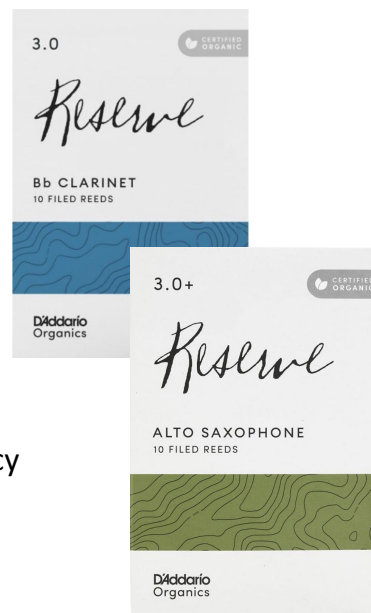
- Clarinet: Rovner/ D'Addario H-ligature
- Saxophone: D'Addario H-ligature (for all saxophone voices)



Reeds

Overview

- Vital to tone production and articulation
 - Reed is 1st point of contact when playing
 - Air causes reed to vibrate, creates sound that travels through mouthpiece into body
- Cane quality, cut/design, and manufacturing process impact playing
 - Cane quality: perfect balance of climate and 2+ year growth process
 - Cut/design: medium-heavy spine and thinner blank = ease of response
 - Manufacturing process: machine-made for optimal consistency within the box
- Recommendations
 - D'Addario Reserve Organic
 - Strength 2.5 or 3.0 for beginners
 - Increase strength as embouchure develops and range increases
 - VENN 3.0



Cane vs. Synthetic

- Cane
 - Pros: tone, timbre, price
 - Cons: fragile (delicate and need to be temperature/humidity controlled), require break-in process
- Synthetic
 - Pros: durable, minimal break in process
 - Ideal for marching band or jazz band doublers
 - Cons: different “mouth feel” than cane



[Reed Comparison Guide](#)

Section 6: Reed Break-In Process and Instrument Care

Break-In Process

1. Date back of reed
2. Soak for 1-2 minutes
 - Use warm water
 - Drop of hydrogen peroxide
3. Play for up to 5 minutes
4. Remove excess moisture and place in reed guard
5. Repeat playing process, rotating reeds and increasing playing time incrementally over 10 days



Best Practices

- Rotate as many reeds as possible
 - 4 minimum
 - More reeds = more rotation = increased longevity
- Use a humidifier
 - Prevents mold, cracking, and warping
- Dead is dead
 - Chipped, bent, split = dead
 - A dead reed will sound thin, chirpy, and have unstable intonation
- Adjust strength up or down as needed
 - Signs a reed is too soft:
 - Thin, edgy, bright sound
 - Frequent squeaks/squawks
 - Explosive, accented entrances
 - Exaggerated intonation, notes very flat or sharp
 - Note: reeds get softer as they age
 - If your (not old) reeds consistently sound soft, it's likely you need to go up a $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ strength
 - Signs a reed is too hard:
 - Tone is airy and unfocused
 - Unclear note beginnings/inability to articulate
 - Endurance and breathing issues
 - Bottom lip discomfort
 - Air leakage from corners
 - Low notes not responsive (saxophone)



Instrument Care - Supply List

Considerations

- Sound concept
 - Tone, timbre, and blend are vital for a strong single reed section
- Longevity
 - Can equipment last from beginner through high school (grades 6-12)?
- Establishing a solid foundation
 - Investing in quality materials ensures proper embouchure development and encourages correct habits are ingrained

Answers to these questions help you address any pushback from administrators or parents (e.g. why cost of equipment is worth their investment)

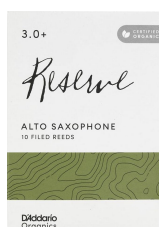
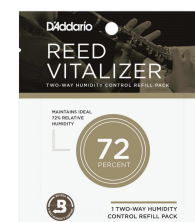
Supply List - Clarinet

- D'Addario Reserve mouthpiece: [X0](#) or [X5](#) model
- Reserve [mouthpiece patches](#)
 - Black
 - Clear
- Rovner Dark [ligature](#) and mouthpiece cap (included)
- D'Addario certified organic [cork grease](#)
- D'Addario [reed case](#) (includes reed vitalizer)
- [Reed Vitalizer](#)
 - Replace approximately every 3 months OR when gel turns solid
- D'Addario Reserve Classic Organic reeds, strength [2.5](#) or [3.0](#)
- Rico Clarinet [neck strap](#)
- Hodge silk swab
 - Available for [A and B-flat clarinet](#) and [bass clarinet](#)



Supply List - Saxophone

- D'Addario [D155](#) Mouthpiece; Selmer [S90](#) Mouthpiece, 180 facing
 - Tenor: MacSax [Oneothera](#) mouthpiece
 - Bari: MaxSax [Orchid](#) mouthpiece
- Reserve [mouthpiece patches](#)
 - Black
 - Clear
- D'Addario [H-ligature \(gold\)](#) and mouthpiece cap (included)
- D'Addario certified organic [cork grease](#)
- D'Addario [reed case](#) (includes reed vitalizer)
- [Reed Vitalizer](#)
 - Replace approximately every 3 months OR when gel turns solid
- D'Addario Reserve Organic reeds, strength [3.0](#)
- D'Addario padded snap-hook neck strap
 - Available for [soprano/alto](#) OR tenor/bari
- Hodge silk swab
 - Available for [soprano saxophone](#), [alto saxophone](#), [tenor saxophone](#), and [baritone saxophone](#)
 - Note: Baritone saxophone swab looks like a wand and cleans through spit valve



Section 7: Fingering Charts

Clarinet Fingering Chart

Supplemental Resources

[Resonance Fingering Chart](#)

[Clarinet Altissimo Chart](#)

Saxophone Fingering Chart

Pitches that tend to be sharp on saxophone:

- Low B flat, B
 - Use saxophone [mute](#) - dampens vibrations in bell that cause sharpness on these notes
- Middle D, E-flat, E
 - Add low B or low B-flat key
- A above the staff
 - Add 5 (right hand middle finger)
- High C#, Palm D, E-flat, E, F
 - Add 4, 5, 6 (any combination of right hand fingers)

Pitches that tend to be flat on saxophone:

- Low E-flat
 - Add G# or low C# key
 - *flatness can be exacerbated by playing in the center (as the E-flat key cup is blocked by the legs)
- Middle B, C
 - Add side B-flat key
- Middle C#
 - Add side B-flat key
 - Can also position as octave + 3 (octave key and left hand ring finger)

Supplemental Resources

[Labeled Saxophone Diagram \(the function of every key\)](#)

Section 8: Scales and Warm Up Techniques

Clarinet - [Pinky Warm Up](#)

[Articulation Exercises](#)

[Half-Hole Exercises](#)

[Chromatic Long Tone](#)

Saxophone - [Magnificent Seven Packet](#)

- 7 Daily Fundamentals for Saxophone Ninja Skills (Level 1 - Beginner)

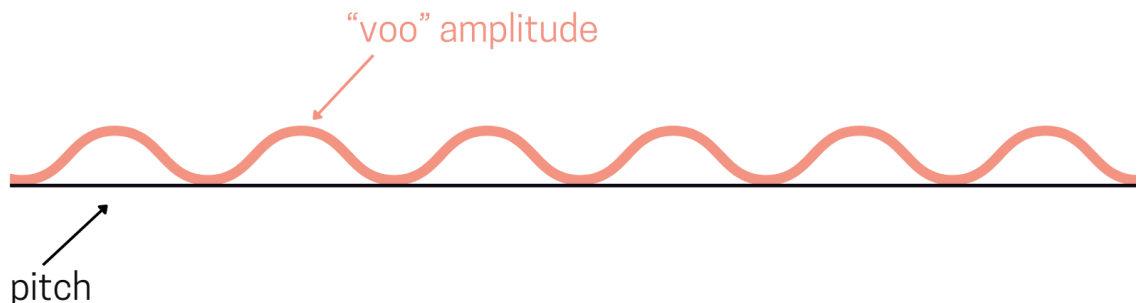
BONUS: Vibrato (for saxophone only!)

Begin teaching vibrato ONLY when tone and articulation foundation are solid

- Earliest would be 6 months into learning the instrument

Steps for teaching vibrato

1. Say “voo”
 - This syllable gently activates bottom lip
2. Add metronome
3. Wind band
4. Play



Best practices

- Language = “Hug and release”
 - “Squeeze” or “bite” lead to reed not vibrating evenly, and creates small, tinny sound
 - “Hug” implies gentle pressure, with “release” being the letting go

- Wider is better (at first) - can always make the movement narrower over time, but it's harder to make it wider
- Teach with call and response rhythms
- See amplitude on visual tuner (like Tonal Energy)
- Connect to long tones/octave slurs in a warmup
 - Toggle between straight tone and vibrato

Pitfalls and how to avoid them:

- Pitfall - Pitch drops too flat
 - Solution - tongue is moving too far down (should still be in "ee" syllable)
 - Embrace this by trying to drop too far down
 1. Start with "ee" tongue position (middle of tongue is high)
 2. Glissando to "uh" tongue position (tongue is flat in the mouth)
 - This sounds like a dolphin dive!!
 - Sometimes it's easier for students to hear/feel what "too much" movement feels like in order to find "just right"
- Pitfall - chin bunches
 - Solution - go back to saying "voo" with mirror to see how chin can/should stay stable
- Pitfall - jaw moves too far down
 - Place one hand underneath chin to feel a little press downward, without letting the jaw go too far down (the other hand holds the neck of the instrument)

Speed suggestions

- 300 divided by tempo bpm = # of pulses per beat
 - $300/75 = 4$ pulses = ♪ vibrato
 - $300/100 = 3$ = triplet ♪ vibrato
 - $300/150 = 2$ = ♪ vibrato

Vibrato Scales Exercise

- Note: you can use these same vibrato patterns in other scales OR as articulation exercises