

OBOE REED ADJUSTMENT GUIDE FOR MUSIC EDUCATORS

Reed is too closed (difficult to see opening upon visual observation).

- Soak reed in warm water for 1-2 minutes.
- Gently pinch open with fingers.
- Remind student to keep chin down and corners in (biting closes reeds).

Reed is too open (looks more like a circle than an eye).

- Soak reed in cool water (dip, then remove) for 1 minute. OR let reed dry (many times, reed is too open because it has been over-soaked).
- Gently squeeze reed closed with 1 finger on each blade of reed. Hold for 10+ seconds.

Reed is too sharp.

- Reed may be too closed (see above).
- Most likely, student is using too much reed or pinching too hard. Check embouchure position and remind student to keep chin down and corners in.
- Reed could be too stiff. Adjust with knife (if able) to create more vibrations.

Reed is too flat.

- Reed may be too open (see above).
- Reed may be cracked. In this case, discard reed.
- Check to make sure that reed is pushed in all the way.
- Embouchure may be too loose. Check embouchure and make sure there is a firm “grip” (but no biting) on reed.
- Reed may need to be clipped (approx. ½ to 1 mm cut off of tip). Soak reed, then use single-edged razor blade and cutting block to clip off tip (if able). This will bring up pitch.

Reed is leaking.

- Check for leaks by soaking reed, then: plug end of cork with finger. Blow hard into reed opening and feel for air leaking from sides of reed.
- If leaking, a small amount of plumber’s tape can be applied to seal leak.
- If leak is too big (i.e. you can see a gaping hole where sides of reed should meet), discard reed.

RECOMMENDED OBOE/EH REED SUPPLIERS

Double or Nothing Reeds

www.doubleornothingreeds.com

Oboe Chicago

www.oboechicago.com

I Hate Oboe Reeds

www.ihateoboereeds.com

Many more on...

www.reedreviews.net

Pamela Ajango French
Instructor of Oboe, Butler University
pfrench@butler.edu

TOP 10 SUGGESTIONS FOR BEGINNING OBOE INSTRUCTION

1. FIND A PROFESSIONAL OBOE INSTRUCTOR to assist beginning oboe students in school (at the very least) or, ideally, make sure oboe students have regular professional instruction. 1x/month is much better than no lessons at all. Skype lessons are also an option.
2. Choose the correct students for oboe. Psychological profile more important than physical features. Oboe can be played with or without braces, with big or small lips (most important: all front adult teeth in, fingers big enough to cover all keys; asthma causes difficulties, but not impossibilities). However, the best chance at success is with an intelligent, mature, hard-working student who excels in school. Ability to read music before beginning oboe is ideal.
3. Top choice for beginning oboe book: Gekeler Method Book 1. Other good choice: Rubank Elementary Method.
4. Top choices for store-bought reeds: Leshner, then Jones. I suggest beginners purchase medium-hard reeds and then the teacher adjusts them to a smaller scale, if needed. Soft or medium-soft reeds create bad habits in that the reed opening is not sufficient, and there is very little resistance. Absolutely NO FIBERCANE REEDS (ever!). These create bad habits that can take years to undo. I switch students to professional-quality reeds by year 2 or 3 (at the latest).
5. Reed adjustment: see music educator reed adjustment guide (additional material).
6. Air support is crucial! No quiet playing before proper air support is established (normally, about 1 year). Deep breath thru mouth (no nose breathing) and support with diaphragm. The higher notes need faster air speed. Beginning students get dizzy (frequently) when playing oboe, especially high notes. This will improve with time, but do not expect good endurance in the first year. Reassure them that the back pressure they're feeling is normal (small reed opening + tons of air = lots of pressure in head!).
7. Embouchure: lips over teeth, chin pointing down, corners pointing in. Lips formed as if to say the "o" in "home". Cannot be completely loose, but also no biting. Biting is evident if the embouchure looks like a smile (i.e. corners out). After correct "open" embouchure is established, adjustments can be made for the higher register and for pitch adjustment (pushing into lower lip for high note support).
8. Reed should not be pulled out of instrument for pitch adjustment, but rather reed amount adjusted in embouchure. Generally, proper position of reed is with hardly any reed in the mouth. To position, have student start with lips relaxed (not rolled). Place tip of reed on middle of bottom lip, then roll lips over teeth. Only tip of reed should be felt with tongue. Visual observation should show about ½ the cane of the reed exposed while playing.
9. Proper hand position established from beginning. All fingers over "buttons" and pinkies hovering over keys, even when not in use. Common bad habits include pinkies behind keys when not in use, fingers on either hand curling up toward top finger when not in use, and "jumping" instead of "rocking" 1st finger LH for the ½ hole fingering.
10. The TUNER is the oboe student's best friend. If they can get a note (or a few) in tune during the first year of study, consider it a major victory. I tell my students that the tuner is their "teacher in a box". I insist that every beginning student own a tuner and bring it to each lesson. I tell them that they should use it all the time, except in rehearsals. They develop good habits of air/embouchure and tuning by attempting to get notes in tune. It can even become a game! (Seriously, it appeals to the competitive oboe personality...)