

Double
the Reed,
Double
the Fun!



Oboe Basics for the Middle and High School Band Director

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1) Choosing an Oboist-

- Reeds are expensive and fragile
 - Choose a student with high parental support who can afford to keep up with reeds and lessons.
- Confident and Self- Motivated
 - Most oboists are usually alone in a section.
- Someone who has a good ear for pitch
- Stubborn and Hard Working
 - Oboe is a very frustrating instrument. Tell the students upfront that they will be taking a step back in their playing technique but hard work and time on the instrument will pay off.

2) Switching from other instruments-

- Always switch from another instrument
 - One to two years of previous instruction on another instrument will help the student learn all the other aspects of music in advance without having to deal with the extra issues that accompany the oboe.
 - Common instruments to switch from are clarinet, flute, or saxophone.

3) Instrument Types-

- Basic Beginner
 - Plastic
 - No “left F” key and no “low Bb” key
 - NOT recommended
- Intermediate/ Student
 - Usually plastic
 - Has “left F” key and “low Bb” key

- Professional
 - Wood
 - Store in a controlled climate. NEVER leave a wooden instrument in a hot or cold car!
 - Warm up before playing- playing a cold oboe can result in water getting stuck in the keys and/or cracking of the joints.
 - Has all keys (plus the 3rd octave key)

4) Instrument Care-

- Bridge Keys
- Use silk swabs made FOR OBOE!
 - Cotton swabs will get stuck in the conical bore of the oboe
- Swab after every use!
 - Insert swab through the bottom of each joint
- Keep non-powered cigarette paper on hand for sticky pads or to absorb water stuck in a key
- Before giving an instrument to your oboist, have it checked out to make sure it is in proper working condition

5) Oboe Assembly-

- Upper Joint, Lower Joint, and Bell
- Be careful of bridge keys! Those are the first to get bent!

6) Holding the Oboe-

- Right thumb under the thumb rest
- Left thumb rests under the octave key (no flying thumbs)
- 45 degree angle from the body
- Straight wrists

7) Reeds-

- Need to be soaked in water for about a minute before playing
 - Over-soaking the reed becomes a problem
- Reeds should be stored in a container that is NOT airtight

- Hand Made
 - Made by professionals
 - Scraped in zones- tip, heart, spine, & windows
 - Play better and last longer

- Store Bought
 - Machine Made
 - Scrape starts thick and gradually gets thinner
 - Start on no less than a medium- soft
 - Picking a good reed from the store-
 - Medium- soft to medium
 - Reed blades are not separated on the sides
 - Steer clear of openings that are too wide or too narrow
 - Be wary of wire. The reed should support the opening on its own, not with wire
 - There are decent store bought brands
 - Have the parents (or band boosters) purchase several reeds before they begin. This is an investment.
 - Synthetic? No.

8) Embouchure-

- “Drawstring bag”
 - Lips should encircle the reed like a drawstring bag creating equal pressure all the way around the reed
- “Whistle”
 - Create a whistle shape with the lips, then curl bottom lip over bottom teeth
- Bottom lip folded in, top lip lays on top stabilizing the reed, and corners are in as if you are saying the word “home”
- FLAT CHIN
- When playing on the reed alone, it should sound a “C”
- Practice strengthening the embouchure by playing long tones in scalar form

9) Reed Placement-

- Too much reed produces a “quacky” sharp sound
- Too little reed produces a muffled flat sound
- Lips should be placed on the “heart” of the reed

10) Air Support-

- Oboe takes a great deal of air support to play
 - The reed creates a small opening that only allows very little air to pass
- Lower notes take less air support
- Higher notes take more air support