

Clarinet 101: Simple Steps to Improve Your Clarinet Section
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This clinic will provide practical tips to improve your clarinet students, focusing on visual and aural cues to diagnose common problems. Basic fundamentals of technique, tone production and articulation will be discussed, giving effective strategies to teach these concepts to beginning, intermediate and advanced clarinetists. Simple exercises to develop good hand and finger position and improve transitions between registers will be highlighted and demonstrated. Effective equipment options will be included.

I. Assembly, Posture and Hold Position:

- A. Press D key on upper stack while gently twisting together with lower stack so as to not bend the bridge mechanism.
- B. When adding bell to the lower stack, grip the lower stack where there are no keys, on the bore only. Don't bend the long metal rods associated with the pinky keys.
- C. Use cork grease regularly to reduce bending/breaking mechanisms.
- D. Place ligature on mouthpiece first, then insert reed from above so reed is less likely to become chipped during assembly. Just a shadow of the mouthpiece should be visible at the tip behind the reed.
- E. Head and neck should be in a natural-looking position while sitting tall. "Bring the instrument to you, not you to the instrument."
- F. Clarinet angle to the body of 30-35 degrees. Right elbow should not rest on right thigh. Clarinet neck straps can relieve some weight off the right wrist.

II. Tone

- A. Air—volume, air speed and support all keys to success. Blow paper to the wall. Blow out candles on the birthday cake. Blow bubbles through a straw in a glass of milk.
- B. Embouchure
 1. 3 basic components:
 - a. top teeth resting on the mouthpiece.
 - b. lower lip folded over bottom teeth. "Cushion for the reed." Watch for too little or too much lip folded over. Goldilocks. Place lower lip on reed where reed is no longer flat against the table—eyeball it or use a business card.
 - c. lips around the mouthpiece like a "drawstring bag". No puffing cheeks.
 2. "Point chin to the floor." Chapstick. Look for indentation in chin. Mirror?
 3. Too little mouthpiece = small sound; Too much = raucous, squawky.
 4. Too much embouchure pressure = tight sound, sharp; too little = flabby, flat.
 5. Embouchure should remain static while changing pitches—no "micromanaging".
 6. EZO® Denture Cushions can help alleviate lower lip discomfort (braces).
- C. Tongue position
 1. Thumb on the garden hose.
 2. Say "E" or "Hee" or "Shh". "EE" + "Ew" = good tongue position + corners of lips.
- D. Playing the clarinet mouthpiece and barrel alone. Ideal pitch = concert F#. Ideal sound: clear, full, focused, does not waiver and in tune.

- E. Clarinet registers: Clarinet does not have an “octave key”, each register has distinctive, unique tone quality, challenging to evenly transition from one to the other.

Overtone series based on A.
Clarinet produces every other note.

The range of the clarinet registers:

Chalumeau Throat Clarion Altissimo

- F. Register slur. Use exercise below to approach the clarion register. Be sure left thumb position is correct (pointing to 2 O’Clock). Demonstrate first for the student.

- G. Crossing the break. Tone does not match going from throat tones to clarion register and so many fingers to coordinate = TRAUMA! Solution: **RHD!** “Right Hand Down.”

Crossing the break--
leave fingers of the right hand down, including pinky, through the entire exercise.

Now, read in reverse!

- H. Approaching the altissimo. Need lots of fast air. Stronger reed strength?

1. High C#: NO E-flat key.
2. All pitches D and higher: add E-flat key with right pinky.
3. For a smooth slur to the altissimo, instead of picking up first finger of left hand completely, roll it down exposing half of the tone hole.
4. Bass clarinet altissimo: instead of picking up first finger, roll down to expose pinhole.

1st time, use the standard fingering,
2nd time, use the chromatic fingering

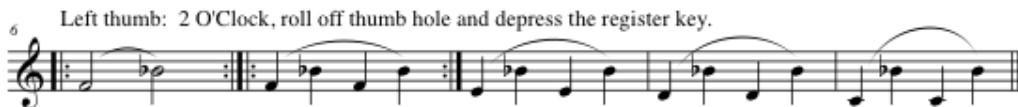
- I. Squeaks happen. Definition: a higher pitch than intended

1. Reed may not be well positioned, and/or in bad condition.
2. Uneven or too much embouchure pressure.
3. Fingers not covering the holes/leaky pad.

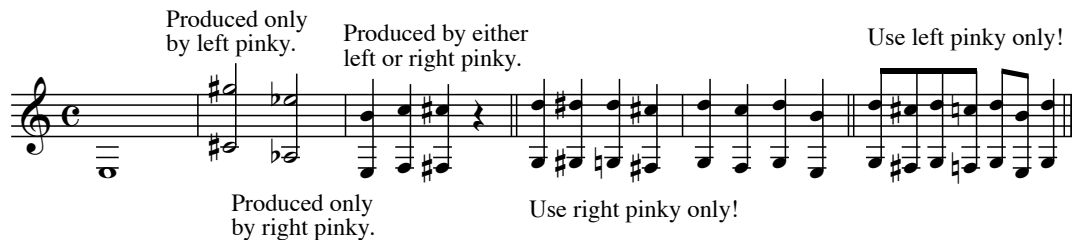
III. Technique

- A. Hand position: rounded fingers as if holding a pop can, close to the keys. Right first finger not anchored under side key. No “hailing a taxi cab” or “waving to your friends”. Tone hole press exercise.
- B. Fingers must cover holes properly. Diagnose: turn clarinet halfway around to diagnose fingers not properly covering holes or leaky pad.
- C. Left hand: thumb position: 2 O’Clock, first finger: roll from E tone hole to A key and G# key.

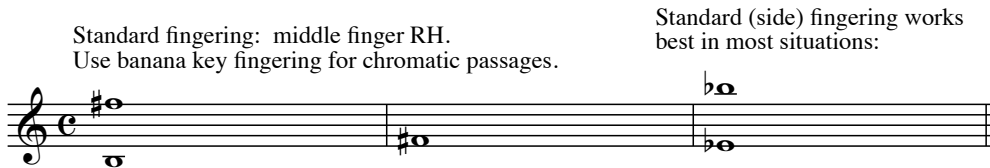
Exercises for the left hand:



- D. Pinkies: the weakest finger is assigned the most to do.
 1. Curved! No “Teacup syndrome”, no curling up or placing below the instrument.
 2. Consider a default position for young players: Left pinky rests on E/B key, right pinky rests on F/C key. Band methods have both pinkies on low E.
 3. Always alternate. No sliding (note saxophone as comparison). Ab/Eb on right and C#/G# on left determines proper fingering. Marking parts with “L” and “R” over the notes is typical clarinet procedure.
 4. Establish good pinky habits during technique building exercises such as scales, broken chords and scales in thirds.



- E. Commonly used alternate fingerings:



Standard: First finger LH.
Use Thumb F plus bottom 2 side keys for chromatic passages.

IV. Articulation:

A. Simple: **tip of tongue on tip of reed**

Say “doo”. The tongue makes contact with the reed inside the mouth where the tongue comes forward to produce the “d” part of “doo”.

B. “Simon says...” Tongue is the valve that allows the reed to vibrate or not.

Repeat first measure several times. Vary the length of the note using the tip of your tongue on the tip of the reed!



C. Visual and aural telltale signs of problems

1. Chomping on the mouthpiece.
2. Separate breaths—motion in the chest cavity (not using any tongue at all). Use analogy: not using the tongue is like giving a speech without using any consonants.
3. “Th” sound: Increase support, be sure tip of tongue is touching tip of the reed.
4. Harsh attack: too hard action of the tongue. Think of a cat on a stovetop checking with her paw to see if a burner is on.
5. Motion below the chin: anchor tonguing?
6. Not sure what part of the tongue your student is using? Use a Non-Toxic marker and a mirror.
7. Flabby tone on high notes: keep the air stream fast. Slur first, use same air.
8. Finger-tongue coordination. Practice difficult passages slurred first.

IV. General issues

A. Intonation

1. Primary adjustment of clarinet intonation is between barrel and upper stack, secondary adjustment is between upper stack and lower stack.
2. General principle: short tube notes are more unstable and able to be adjusted with the embouchure than long tube notes.
3. In fortissimo, single reed players tend to go flat, need to keep the embouchure firm. In pianissimo, players tend to go sharp, so relax the embouchure. This tendency is opposite many other sections of the band.

B. Effective equipment options

1. Mouthpieces: stock mouthpieces are extremely inefficient.
 - a. Beginner/Intermediate:
 - Behn Overture collection (<http://www.clarinetmouthpiece.com>)
 - Fobes Debut (order a free one through <http://www.clarkwfobes.com>)
 - Hite Premiere
 - Pyne Polycrystal (http://www.pyne-clarion.com/Pyne_Clarion/Home.html)
 - b. Advanced:
 - Van Doren M13, M15 or 5RV
2. Ligatures—regular or inverted. Ligatures are manufactured “right-handed.”
 - Luyben—Darkens tone quality and eases articulation, priced right.
 - Bonade, Rovner Dark, VanDoren Optimum
3. Reeds
 - a. Recommended Reed Brands:
 1. Beginner/Intermediate: Mitchell Lurie, La Voz
 2. Intermediate/Advanced: Rico Royal, Van Doren (blue box)
 3. Advanced: Van Doren V-12 (gray box), Rico Grand Concert

- b. Strength: begin at 2 or 2.5, increase strength as clarinet student plays higher and embouchure strengthens, altissimo requires 3.5 or 4 (note <http://www.ricoreeds.com/ricostrengthcomparisonchart.page?mode=0>).
- c. Care: store reeds flat and dry. Many good cases for reeds. Ziploc® bags.
 - 1. Reeds prefer to be broken in slowly. Blow bubbles!
 - 2. A quick fix for a warped reed.

V. Additional resources:

A. Books:

1. John Anderson. *Concepts for the Clarinet Teacher*. Jeanne Inc., 1996.
2. Howard Klug. *The Clarinet Doctor*. Bloomington, IN: Woodwindiana, Inc.
3. Larry Guy. *Embouchure Building for Clarinetists*. Rivernote Press, 2011.
4. Larry Guy. *Hand and Finger Development for Clarinetists*. Larry Guy, 2007.
5. Larry Guy. *Intonation Training for Clarinetists*. Rivernote Press.
6. Thomas Ridenour. *The Educator's Guide to the Clarinet: A Complete Guide to Teaching and Learning the Clarinet*. Denton, TX: Thomas Ridenour, 2002.

B. Web Sites:

1. International Clarinet Association www.clarinet.org
2. The Woodwind Fingering Chart www.wfg.woodwind.org

VI. Clinician information:

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Gail Lehto Zuger is Associate Professor of Clarinet at the Capital University Conservatory of Music, in Columbus, Ohio. A position she has held since 1999, she teaches applied clarinet, directs the Clarinet Choir, coaches student wind chamber groups, teaches woodwind methods and performs with the QuintEssential Winds Faculty Wind Quintet and Inspirare Duo with flute colleague Lisa A. Jelle. She teaches during summers at the International Music Camp in North Dakota. An active clinician, Dr. Zuger has presented clinics at the Eastern Division MENC conference in Providence, RI and at state MENC clinics in Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania and Minnesota. Zuger has appeared as soloist with the Capital University/Bexley Community Orchestra, Westerville (OH) Community Band, Westerville Symphony Orchestra and Capital University Symphonic Winds, and performed in recital at the 1998 and 2012 International Clarinet Association ClarinetFest® conferences.

Zuger is currently principal clarinet of the Newark-Granville (OH) Symphony Orchestra and second clarinet of the Ashland (OH) Symphony Orchestra. She has played with the Columbus, Roanoke (VA), Richmond (IN) and Lancaster (OH) Festival symphony orchestras. She has performed with such noted popular artists as James Taylor, The Moody Blues, Michael McDonald and Joel Grey. She is a regular contributor to *The Clarinet*, the quarterly publication of the International Clarinet Association. Originally from Racine, Wisconsin, Dr. Zuger holds degrees from University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee and The Ohio State University. Her former teachers include James Pyne, Russell Dagon and Jack Snavelly. She is married to Dr. Thomas Zuger, Associate Professor of Trombone and Euphonium at Capital University and is overjoyed at the arrival of their son Nathan in April 2010.