

What's the difference between a saxophone and a lawnmower?

Clinic Outline

Presenter:

Dr. Jonathan Helton, University of Florida
Past President, North American Saxophone Alliance
Artist-Clinician, Conn-Selmer, Inc.

Keys to a Good Saxophone Tone

Equipment

- Proper strength reed (3 or 3½ for most medium mouthpiece facings)
 - Improper reed strength (too soft) leads to many bad habits:
 - Difficult low-register response
 - Difficult high-register response
 - Pitch problems
 - Uneven tone/volume as air is not steady
 - Difficulty playing intervals
 - Difficulty playing over the break
 - Proper reed strength...
 - Allows for steady embouchure throughout
 - Encourages proper use of the air
- Quality mouthpiece
 - Can make things easier to play
 - Better basic tone quality
 - Choose based on the kind of sound you prefer

Playing technique (see Teaching Tools below)

- Proper embouchure
 - Not too tense
 - Reed must remain flat
- Steady air
- Controlled vibrato

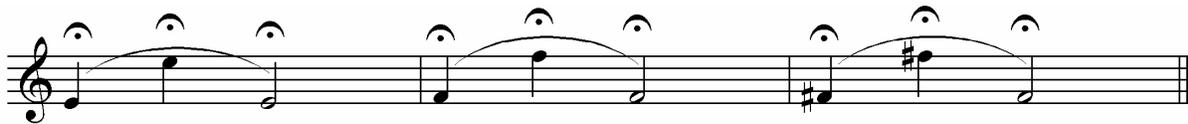
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Teaching Tools Handout

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Teaching Tool: Checking for proper reed strength and embouchure pressure



This exercise works best on E, F, and F-sharp. Have the student play the lower octave and get a friend or teacher to operate the octave key. The goal is to hear a very smooth legato between the octaves *without adjusting the embouchure or breath support*.

- If the tone of the upper octave is poor, apply a bit more pressure on the reed while playing the lower octave and try again.
- If the upper octave continues to sound after releasing the octave key, apply a bit less pressure on the reed when playing the lower octave and try again.
- If you cannot achieve a perfect legato both up and down) without embouchure adjustments, try a stronger reed.
- Once this is mastered with a teacher or friend operating the octave key, the student should attempt to achieve the same results without help.
- If the proper reed strength is being used, the student can then work on keeping the embouchure and breath support steady while operating the octave key.

Teaching Tool: Student self-tests to refine embouchure

There are two minor adjustments that the student can experiment with which can help improve the embouchure and result in dramatic improvements to tone, response and pitch control

- Adjust how much pressure applied to the reed (bite more, or less)
 - o Too much pressure results in a strained sound and difficulty playing in the lower register
 - o Too little pressure results in a spread sound and difficulty playing upper register notes.
- Adjust how much mouthpiece is in the mouth (take in more, or less)
 - o Too much mouthpiece in the mouth produces a bright, slightly out-of-control sound that may tend to squeak.
 - o Too little mouthpiece produces a stuffy, strained sound and causes problems playing in both upper and lower extreme registers.

Teaching tool: Exercises for independence of the breath, fingers and tongue

Breath/Fingers: Concentrate on keeping the air steady, move fingers lightly and quickly, do not go over the break:



Breath/Tongue: Concentrate on keeping the air steady, move tongue lightly, touching as little of the reed as possible:



Teaching tool: Exercise for embouchure-air-pitch control

Perform this long tone exercise with a tuner. Focus on the changes in the embouchure needed to stay in tune as dynamics change. Use a full breath. Play a variety of notes, from low to high. Begin by tuning at a *mezzo-forte* dynamic.

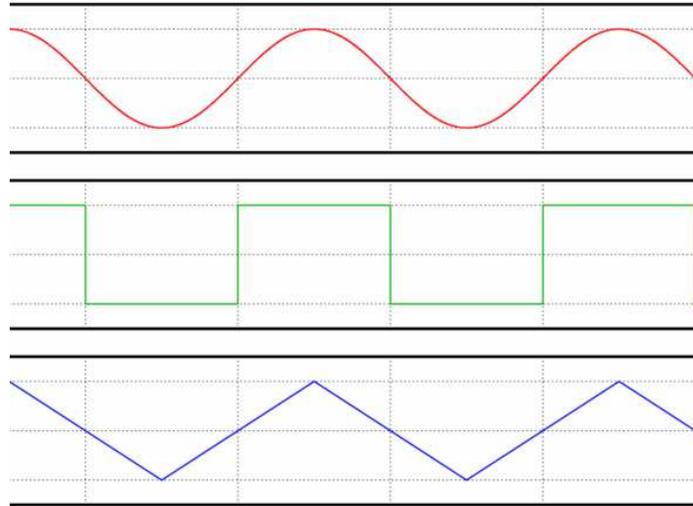


Mouthpiece selection: Commonly used saxophone mouthpieces

- Selmer S-80 C*
- Selmer S-90 190
- Vandoren AL3
- Vandoren A27
- Rousseau NC4
- Meyer 5 (only for jazz)

Teaching tool: Exercises for developing an expressive vibrato

Step One: Develop the proper vibrato contour. Strive for a perfect Sine wave. Other illustrated wave forms are, unfortunately, commonly produced by young players.



Step Two: Develop control. At quarter note = 50, begin by playing one vibrato pulse per beat for four beats. For the next four measures, play two pulses per beat, then three, four and five.

C 1 1 1 1 | 2 2 2 2 | 3 3 3 3 | 4 4 4 4 | 5 5 5 5 | 4 4 4 4 | 3 3 3 3 | 2 2 2 2 | 1 1 1 1 ||

Step Three: After mastering step two, the next objective is to work for quicker changes:

C 1 2 3 4 | 1 3 2 4 | 3 2 4 1 | 5 4 5 3 | 2 5 3 1 | 4 3 1 2 | 5 4 3 2 | 1 2 1 3 | 1 3 2 1 ||

Step Four: Work to obtain a gradually changing vibrato that moves from none to fast and from fast to none. Combine these with dynamic changes for effective, expressive playing.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for providing support for this clinic:

Conn-Selmer, Inc.
Eugene Rousseau
DANSR, Inc.

Clinician Biography

Concert saxophonist **Jonathan Helton** has been heard in performance throughout the United States, Canada, in Europe and the Far East, appearing with orchestras and wind ensembles, in recital, and in numerous chamber concerts. He has performed in Chicago, Montreal, Paris, London, Beijing, Singapore, Taipei, Washington, D.C., Miami, Calgary, Vancouver, Montreal, Minneapolis, and New York City's Lincoln Center. His performance credits include concerto appearances with the New Philharmonia of Riverside in New York City, Winston-Salem (NC) Symphony, the Northwestern University Symphonic Wind Ensemble, the Center for New Music (Iowa), the North Carolina School of the Arts Symphony Orchestra, the University of Florida Wind Symphony, the University of Florida Symphony Orchestra, the Harper Symphony Orchestra, the United States Air Force Tactical Air Command Band, and the Twelfth World Saxophone Congress Wind Orchestra. His orchestral experience includes performances with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra, the Grant Park Symphony, the Lake Forest Symphony, the Charleston Symphony, the Savannah Symphony Orchestra, the Northwest Indiana Symphony Orchestra, the Winston-Salem Symphony, the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, and the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra. Helton is featured in solo and chamber music performances on compact discs from Elf/Ludwig, Innova, Mark Records, and Music from Northwestern labels.

Dr. Helton holds degrees from the North Carolina School of the Arts and Northwestern University. His teachers include James Houlik, Frederick Hemke, Daniel Deffayet, and Jean-Marie Londeix. From 1992 to 1999 he served on the faculty at Northwestern University teaching saxophone and chamber music, and held an administrative position Coordinating the Wind and Percussion Programs. Helton is currently on the faculty of the University of Florida where he teaches saxophone, chamber music and conducts the New Music Ensemble. Helton is a Selmer Artist-Clinician, and Past-President of the North American Saxophone Alliance.

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