

# Encouraging Our Oboists: Resources & Tips for Directors

Nora Lewis, DM  
Kansas State University  
LewisN@ksu.edu

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## How to Encourage Oboists

- To take ownership of their playing
- To become their own best teacher
- To troubleshoot and problem solve
- To develop models for concept of sound and technique
- To develop good fundamentals

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## Troubleshooting

Learn to identify the variables:

- Instrument
  - Common issues
    - Tenon cork fit, adjustment mechanism, bridge alignment, bent rods, bent keys, condensation, grime, cracks
  - Finding a quality instrument
- Reed
  - Encourage oboists to specifically describe how the reed is (or isn't) functioning
  - The reed is a variable but never an excuse

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## What's in a Reed?

The potential for:

- Tone, intonation, articulation, dynamics, control, phrasing, vibrato
- Confidence!

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## Tip #1: Finding a Good Reed

- Use handmade reeds
- Try a variety of reed types/sources
- Learn to recognize qualities of a good reed

- Crows “C” in octaves (reed in mouth with lips on thread, blow as hard as you can)
- Immediate response without “chirping”
- Sides stay together all the way through the tip
- Vibrates freely with good air flow
- Does not need muffling or controlling
- Very tip is the thinnest part

### **A note about pitch:**

- Flat reeds play sharp (counterintuitive, but true!)
- Pulling the reed out compounds the problem and makes notes unstable (particularly C<sub>5</sub>)

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### **Tip #2: Embouchure**

- Embouchure characteristics
  - Flexible
  - Wide space between teeth
  - Lips in front of teeth (“Play with the lips not lip-covered teeth”)
- Building an embouchure
  - Space between teeth
  - Top lip over bottom lip
  - Point the chin down
  - “Energy” from corners of mouth
  - Reed is allowed to vibrate freely

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### **Tip #3: Endurance through Flexibility & Breathing**

#### **Flexibility**

- Reed alone exercise for a flexible embouchure: “ooh-oh-oh-oh-oo-oo-oo”
  - Use sustained airflow throughout the exercise
  - Begin with about half the reed in the mouth (it should not crow)
  - Take full breath and think “ooh” syllable, reed should sound a B<sub>4</sub>
  - Shift vowel to “oh” as reed comes out of mouth and sounds A<sub>4</sub>
  - Shift vowel to “oa” as reed comes further out of mouth and sounds G<sub>4</sub>
  - Return to “oh” vowel, reed comes back into mouth, and sounds A<sub>4</sub>
  - Return to “ooh” vowel, reed moves further into mouth, and sounds B<sub>4</sub>

- Shift up to “ay” vowel, reed moves even further into mouth, and sounds C<sub>5</sub>
- Return to “ooh” vowel, reed moves out of mouth, and sounds B<sub>4</sub>
- Transfer reed alone exercise to oboe
  - “ooh-oh-oh-oo-oo-ay-oo-oo” = D<sub>5</sub>-A<sub>4</sub>-D<sub>4</sub>-A<sub>4</sub>-D<sub>5</sub>-A<sub>5</sub>-D<sub>5</sub>
- Extremely short and regular practice intervals should be encouraged through this development process ( 3-5 minutes several times per day)

### **Breathing**

- Comfortable slow and full breath, in tempo
- If air leaks from nose, “Seal off” soft pallet from mouth
- Avoid overinflation
- Exhale! Alternate in and out breaths
- Always keep the air flowing

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### **Tip #4: Articulation**

“Tip of the tongue on the tip of the reed”

- To articulate, whisper “toe”
- Use the same light articulation in all styles (staccato, legato, accent) and dynamic levels

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### **Tip #5: Posture & Hand Position**

#### **Posture**

- Head up
- Eyes look straight ahead
- Bring oboe to you (don’t meet it halfway)
- Create 45° angle between oboe and body

#### **Hand Position**

- Naturally curved fingers
- Fleshy part of fingertips contact the keys
- Relax fingers at your side
- Observe hand position
- Transfer this position to the oboe
- Stretch between second and third finger in left hand
- Pivot/roll for half-hole technique (don’t slide)

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## Tip #6: Vibrato

- Vibrato almost always emerges naturally
- Vibrato might not be present because of
  - A poor quality reed
  - Inconsistent air flow
  - Tight “biting” embouchure
- How to find vibrato
  - Vibrant connection between abdomen and throat
  - Have students practice metered vibrato, in sustained triplets (♩ = 60-108)
  - Think “huh-huh-huh” or “ss-ss-ss” for pulsation
  - Play through the intervals
  - minimize the abdominal motion

## Some Oboe Resources:

### Reeds and Tools

Brian Charles [www.charlesmusic.com](http://www.charlesmusic.com)  
Chicago Reed Company [www.chicagoreedcompany.com](http://www.chicagoreedcompany.com)  
Mark Chudnow [www.mcwoboe.com](http://www.mcwoboe.com)  
Forrests Music [www.forrestsmusic.com](http://www.forrestsmusic.com)  
Lisa Hudson [www.lisahudsonoboereeds.com](http://www.lisahudsonoboereeds.com)  
Ann Hodge Double Reeds [www.hodgeproductsinc.com](http://www.hodgeproductsinc.com)  
Midwest Musical Imports [www.mmimports.com](http://www.mmimports.com)  
Edmund Nielsen [www.nielsen-woodwinds.com](http://www.nielsen-woodwinds.com) (blue reeds)  
Oboe Works [www.oboeworks.com](http://www.oboeworks.com)  
Weber Reeds <http://webreeds.com/wrstore/>

### Instruments

Carlos Coelho [www.carlosoboe.com](http://www.carlosoboe.com)  
Pat McFarland [www.mcfarlanddoublereed.com](http://www.mcfarlanddoublereed.com)  
Midwest Musical Imports [www.mmimports.com](http://www.mmimports.com)  
Oboe Chicago [www.oboechoicago.com](http://www.oboechoicago.com)  
Oboe Works [www.oboeworks.com](http://www.oboeworks.com)  
Nora Post [www.norapost.com](http://www.norapost.com)

### Music

Eble Music [www.eble.com](http://www.eble.com)

Trevco Music [www.trevco.com](http://www.trevco.com)

### **Method Books**

Rubank (good fingering chart included and available separately)

Gekeler

Complete Oboe Method by Barret

48 Studies for Oboe by Ferling (advanced)

Vade-Mecum of the Oboist, edited by Andraud

### **Suggested Reading:**

*The Oboe* by Geoffrey Burgess and Bruce Haynes

*The Oboe and the Bassoon* by Gunther Joppig

*Oboe Adjustment Guide* by J. Patrick McFarland

*Oboe Art and Method* by Martin Schuring

*Oboe Reed Book* by Jay Light

*Oboe Technique* by Evelyn Rothwell

*Sound in Motion* by David McGill

*Marcel Tabuteau: How Do You Expect to Play the Oboe if You Can't Peel a Mushroom*  
by Laila Storch

### **Suggested listening (just a few of my favorite artists):**

Maurice Bourgue

Heinz Holliger

Gordon Hunt

Eugene Izotov

Richard Killmer

Nancy Abrose King

Alex Klein

John Mack

Albrecht Mayer

Ronald Roseman

Hansjorg Schellenberger

Ray Still

Kevin Vigneau

Allan Vogel

Liang Wang

### **Other Resources**

International Double Reed Society [www.idrs.org](http://www.idrs.org)

Oboe Articles [www.public.asu.edu/~schuring/main.html](http://www.public.asu.edu/~schuring/main.html)

Blog [www.oboeinsight.com](http://www.oboeinsight.com)