

# THE THREE “T’s” OF SAXOPHONE PERFORMANCE: *TONE, TECHNIQUE AND TUNING*

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The “Three T’s of Saxophone Performance” (Tone, Technique, and Tuning) involve the essentials or basics of teaching the saxophone to students at all levels of performance and instruction. These concepts should be presented to the student at a relatively early stage of development in order to build strong positive habits and skills.

## **TONE**

Perhaps the most important ‘T’ is **TONE**. The concept of a beautiful tone quality is one of the most difficult aspects of performance for all instrumentalists. The following concepts should be followed for proper tone production:

- 1) EMBOUCHURE FORMATION** - Form the mouth in the shape of an ‘O’ by saying the syllable ‘**oooh.**’ Carefully roll the lower lip over the lower teeth with the mouthpiece, reed, ligature combination, placing the top teeth on the top of the mouthpiece. Bring the lips completely around the mouthpiece, creating a seal.
- 2) THROAT POSITION** - The throat is a tube carrying the air directly from the lungs to the saxophone. It is best to relax the throat muscles as they would be during normal breathing, striving for a ‘bottomless pit’ sensation, using the syllable ‘**AHHhh.**’
- 3) BREATH SUPPORT** - Two areas of concern must be addressed: *Breathing in* - Inhale quickly and deeply, through the corners of the mouth, filling the lungs to capacity *Pushing the air into the saxophone* - The most important aspect here is the use of **WARM AIR**. This is the use of a very large air stream, creating the optimum balance between embouchure, throat position, and breath support.
- 4) MOUTHPIECE BLOWING** - Following the above steps, push warm air into the mouthpiece at a ‘FFF’ dynamic level striving to attain the specific “concert” pitches listed below. Using ‘muscle memory’ student should retain this same sensation when the mouthpiece is placed on the saxophone and the instrument is played.

***SOPRANO=CONCERT 'C'***  
***ALTO= CONCERT 'A'***  
***TENOR= CONCERT 'G'***  
***BARITONE =CONCERT 'D'***

5) VIBRATO - Jaw vibrato yields the greatest success for the saxophonist. Through the use of jaw vibrato, the performer is able to achieve a controlled pulsation of the basic pitch and timbre by moving the jaw DOWN AND UP without distorting the embouchure formation. The syllable which presents the saxophonist with the proper vibrato jaw movement is 'VAH,VAH,VAH' This syllable allows the jaw to move in a relaxed manner both down and up. Practice vibrato by setting a metronome at 60-72 for the quarter note and playing 4 equal 'vahs' per beat, allowing the student to gain control of the basic movement.

### **TECHNIQUE**

- 1) Three areas must be addressed in a discussion of technical development:
- 2) PERFORMANCE POSTURE - Whether standing or sitting, it is necessary that the human body maintain a natural and relaxed posture. Adjust the neckstrap so the instrument comes directly into the mouth. Do not 'Stand at Attention' or lean back in the chair while playing.
- 3) HAND POSITION - Using the natural/relaxed curve of the hands, place the fleshy portion on the keys on the instrument, allowing the fingers to move in a direct manner with the keys. Be certain to keep your fingers close to the keys. Do not allow the fingers to become straight or flat. Do not use the tips of the fingers.
- 4) ARTICULATION - Use the syllable 'tAH' where tah has a very small or soft 't.'The 't' gives a clean start to the note, while the 'AH' allows the air to create the tone, producing the concept of MORE AIR AND LESS TONGUE.

### **TUNING**

The main factor affecting good intonation on the saxophone is a proper approach to tone production. Following the steps listed above, particularly the concept of warm air, will give the student the best possibility of playing with good intonation.

- 1) Do not allow your student to tighten-up when approaching the high range or drop the jaw when approaching the low range. This will both distort the tone and cause poor intonation.
- 2) Encourage your student to use an electronic tuning device and to match pitch with a reliable sound source.
- 3) Be certain that the student 'knows' the intonation tendencies of her/his instrument.
- 4) At times, the addition or subtraction of keys will also aid in the proper tuning of specific notes.