

Elements of Clarinet Tone: A Guide for the Instrumental Music Educator

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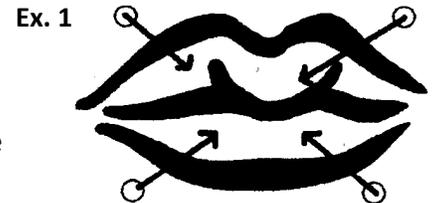
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Tone Production

- Basic Concept: We want to develop techniques that increase reed vibration, and discourage habits that hinder vibration.

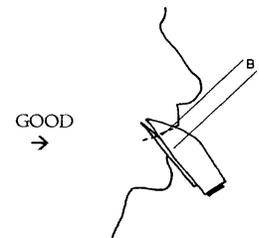
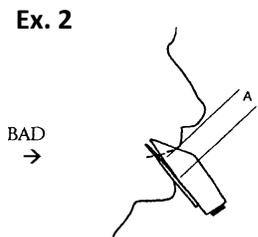
Embouchure Basics

- Top teeth should be about $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the tip of the mouthpiece, though this will vary by player.
- Bottom teeth should be covered by the lower lip, and you should see some pink of the lip when the clarinet is in your mouth.
- Embouchure pressure should be equal all the way around the mouthpiece. You naturally have amazing vertical pressure due to the hinge of your jaw, and must therefore balance this by bringing the corners of your mouth in, like a drawstring bag (think of saying "ooh"). Visualize the four points of your mouth coming in around the



mouthpiece (see example 1).

- Result: By keeping equal pressure all the way around the mouthpiece, you lessen the pressure on the back of the reed, allowing it to vibrate.
- Example 2: Chin A is bunched, causing excess skin to come in contact with the reed. The chin on the bottom (B) is flat, freeing the reed to vibrate. Have the student say "ooh" – this will aid in creating the correct chin shape.



Air Support

- Like any wind instrument, clarinetists need a lot of air to play. There are no clarinet-specific ways to get students to use more air; any breathing techniques you use for other instruments will suffice.

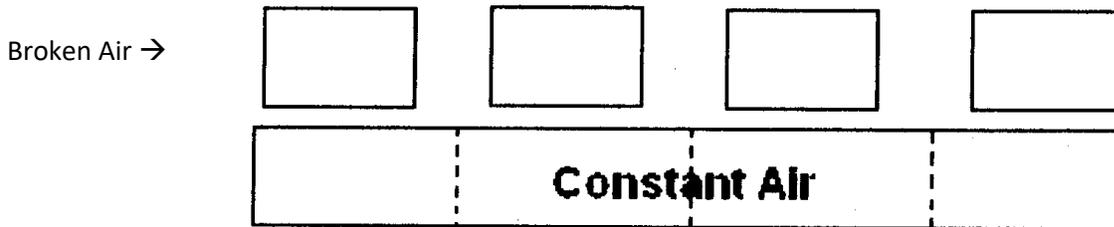
Tongue Position

- This is one of the most important aspects of clarinet playing, because it differs from every other band instrument.
- Your tongue naturally wants to lie down at the bottom of your mouth, like an "ahh" vowel (see example 3b). This creates a spread sound that many people refer to as "bright".
- Side effects of a low tongue position:
 - High notes have undertones, a grunting sound, or don't speak
 - Flat pitch, overall
 - Very dull tone in the low register, and a bright/brittle tone in the high register
- Ideally, you want to think of your tongue as being high in your mouth, like an "eee" vowel (see example 3a). When you say "eee", the tongue mirrors the roof of your mouth and funnels the air into your mouthpiece. This position is VITAL for a good tone, playing in the upper register, and good intonation.



Tonguing / Articulation

- Articulation occurs when the tongue simply stops the vibration of the reed for a split second.
- For good articulation, keep your air stream constant and let the tip of the tongue lightly touch the tip of the top of the reed.
- Example 4: Say “dee dee dee” and notice how little your tongue moves.



Equipment Upgrades (in order of importance)

- Reeds (\$2/reed)
 - D’Addario Reserve and Vandoren Traditional and Vandoren Traditional or V-12.
 - Rico Reserve Classics (purple box) and Vandoren V12 are a little thicker with a steeper cut.
 - Reeds must be broken in and cycled through.
- Ligature (\$20-30)
 - Bonade (inverted or not, screws go on the right!) silver or nickle
 - Rico “H” ligature silver only
- Mouthpiece (\$90-120)
 - D’Addario X0 or X5 (\$99)
 - Vandoren M13 lyre, or M15 (\$90-\$120)
 - Both of these have a more closed mouthpiece and should be played with 3.5 or higher

Going Over the Break/ Resonance Fingerings

- The main reason why students have difficulty going over the break is often because their fingers can’t cover the holes. They then use biting or embouchure irregularities to compensate.
- Make sure all the tone holes are covered, especially the third finger on the right hand.
- Throat tones (open G, G#, A, and Bb) have a tendency to be sharp and airy sounding. These issues can be corrected by using “resonance fingerings”:
 - By adding extra fingers on the throat tones you can bring down pitch and clear up the sound.
- Steady air and quick finger motion from one note to the other is the key to going over the break.

Tuning

- To adjust the top half of the clarinet, play an open G. Adjust at the barrel, never at the mouthpiece. If the clarinet is extremely sharp a different barrel may be necessary.
- To adjust the bottom half, play a long B or C. Adjust at the middle joint, and make sure the bridge mechanism is still lined up when you play.
- Once the clarinet is in tune other adjustments can be made with fingers or tongue position. Having students do a tuning sheet can help them to find the tuning tendencies of their instrument.

If you have any questions in the future, please feel free to contact me.

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