

Clarinet Guide

for

Woodwind Methods

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I.

Embouchure

Whistle position (sort of a whistle with a bitter lemon smile, frown)

- relax and drop jaw at the hinges, about $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch
- swing the jaw forward slightly, until the top and bottom lips are even.
- chin is pointed bottom lip lifts upward and away from teeth.

(i.e.) index finger pressing down on bottom lip and resisting this with corners and facial muscles

- top teeth anchored about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch from tip of mouthpiece.
- bottom lip approx. $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch down the vamp of the reed corners firmly together, turning inward

Throat

The throat is relaxed and open in "Hee" position.

Breathing

The stomach and lower back muscles press against the resistance of the diaphragm.

Tonguing (the "ee" position)

Example Here

The top side tip of the tongue releases the air stream which has already been set in motion by the stomach muscles. Only the tip or front part of the tongue should release slightly. The tongue then returns to the reed, stopping the sound. The back part of the tongue will be arched some and the front part forward and relaxed. During the entire tonguing process there *must not be any interruption with the embouchure, jaw or throat.*

Common Problems

- the tongue touching the reed too far down from the tip or front part of the tongue.
- the entire tongue moving, which closes the throat and interrupts the air passing through
- the chin or jaw moving up and down to the stroke of the tongue. (“Doi, Doi, Doi”)

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Common Problems (cont.)

These problems can be avoided by teaching students early on that you play the instrument with your stomach muscles (the air stream), not the tongue hitting the reed. The tongue releases and returns, opening and closing the air passage. Have them practice open G's slowly in front of a mirror. This enables them to see that there is no movement in the throat, jaw or embouchure. (“ee” position)



Form a small aperture with your lips, using the whistle position. Blow air out of the small opening and suddenly bring the tip of the tongue forward inserting it into the aperture. The air stops but you must continue blowing. (They will feel some back pressure in the nasal area and behind the eyes.) Then release. It is like spitting something off the tip of your tongue and returning. This is something everyone can do and clearly shows how the throat, jaw and embouchure are not affected. The air stream does 80% of the work. There is lots of air movement and very little tongue movement.

II.

Holding the Clarinet

The Clarinet should be directly in front of you at an angle between 30-40 degrees from your body.

The Left Thumb

The ball of the left thumb needs to be positioned to cover the ring and depress the register key at the same time. If the hand position is correct, the thumb should be aimed at approximately 2:30.

The Right Thumb

The right thumb should form a straight line with the thumb pointing at 9:00.

The ball of the thumb should be flat against the clarinet and thumb rest should be at the base of the nail or not too far down from it. (a common problem is putting the thumb rest on the knuckle. Another problem is facing the nail up and flush to the thumb rest.)

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III.

Hand Position

Formation of the hands should resemble a "U" position. The same natural way you would pick up a pencil. Be sure to use the entire ball of the tip of the finger to flatly cover the holes or rings. A common fault is arching the tip of the finger in to the holes. This of course will lead to squeaks. The left index finger will be slightly more angled so that its 1st and 2nd knuckle are somewhat snug against the G# and A keys.

It is sometimes a good idea to keep the right pinky depressed on the low F key. This will help to maintain good hand position. This will also help in balancing the clarinet, as long as it does not interfere with other pitches.

IV.

Finger Action

The desired technique should be a delicate one. The fingers go up with resistance and come down with resistance, as if there's chewing gum stuck to your fingers. Another analogy is to imagine a beam of sound coming out of the tone hole while squeezing it back inside. The fingers should not be hammered down unless it is for a certain effect or style of music.

The wrist plays an important part in making a smooth connection over the break. Going from the middle A to B, A to C and F# to A, it is important to roll the knuckle over to the A key, using the finger, hand and the wrist. They must be flexible enough to shift back and forth. A common fault is to lift the F# key or left index finger up to reach the A key. This will cause a little G to be heard in between the other two notes. (not desired)