

# Beginning Oboe: Fundamentals for Your Future Oboists

Serena Finnigan

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Band directors everywhere crave an oboist that has a mature sound and the skills to be a soloist in the ensemble. This starts with selecting students with the right personality traits or qualities. Look for a student who looks you in the eye and follows instructions well, enjoys homework, likes being the center of attention, wants to practice an instrument, possible piano background, and the patience to handle steeper learning curves. When testing them on the instrument ask them: What subjects do you struggle with the most? Are you a neat and organized person? Are you someone who likes individual or group work? These questions can help narrow down the pool of applicants. Parental support is also a huge factor in playing a double reed instrument. Discuss with them the initial and monthly costs required for oboe.

Physical factors can also play a part in selecting a student. Detrimental physical factors can include double joints, hand size, pronounced underbite, short upper lip, and inability to match sung pitches. Non-detrimental factors would be braces or facial structure.

**Equipment:** All instruments should have full conservatory key system. When purchasing instruments for your school, the following models are recommended:

FOX Renard 333 - plastic, beginner model

FOX 300 - plastic, full conservatory

FOX 450 - option of plastic top joint, bottom joint grenadilla wood

Loree AK - professional

**Reeds:** Students should play on homemade reeds. If you have a private teacher that makes reeds, start using the teacher reeds right away. Having at least three working reeds in your case at one time is ideal. Students need to have a reed case that holds at least 6-8 reeds. Oboe reed companies like *bocalmajoritystore.com*, *wildflowerreeds.com* and *obonik.com* offer a monthly reed package ensuring that your students will have new reeds every 3-4 weeks. Rotating and using a different reed daily will increase the lifespan of each reed.

**Private Lessons:** Have your potential teacher play for you and ask yourself, "Do I like their tone?" Ask them to outline a curriculum and a method book that they would implement for each level of student. Watch them teach a lesson either live or via video. This gives you a insight into their process and teaching style. If a private lesson teacher is not available for your oboists, it is recommend that the band director build time into their sectional schedule to meet with oboe students individually on a weekly basis.

**The First Two Weeks:** Before giving the students a reed to play on, do some prep work with straws and balloons. Cut a normal sized straw to about the length of an oboe reed, then attach a balloon to one end. Start with an inhalation on the word "WOAH" and then blow through the straw simulating the feeling of blowing through a reed and the back pressure associated with playing. Using the straw is also a great way to teach students to keep the center of their lips soft and the corners firm in regard to embouchure. It also shows how fast or slow the student is blowing which will correlate to sound on the oboe reed.

**Embouchure:** Start by saying the syllable "ooo" with the teeth apart. Place the reed (or straw) on the bottom lip and the close the top lip around the reed. Students should be able to see the pink of both the top and bottom lip. If the lips are completely lost and only skin is showing students will more than likely play sharp and be biting the reed. The dry part of the lip should touch the reed and lips should close with equal pressure all the way around. Common embouchure pitfalls are bunching chin, squeezing top and bottom lip together and not using "corners in", as well as teeth being too closed.

**Reed Pitch:** A common misconception about reed pitch is that it should be a "C." It should actually CROW a "C" which means when your lips are on the thread of the reed and you blow with an open throat and stable air you should get a double octave C. A stable, functioning reed should play between an Ab/G# and an A natural. Oboists should feel like only the tip of the reed is in their mouth at all times. If more of the reeds begins to slip into the mouth the sound will become metallic sounding and sharp.

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**First Notes:** Beginning oboists should start in the middle of the oboe on B natural, A, and G. It is very easy to play “recorder” three-note songs and keep them interested while maintaining good habits in hand position or embouchure. When adding the right hand, go down the oboe naturally adding F#, E natural and D. This will set them up to easily learn the first octave of the D major scale.

*Beginner Class Boot Camp* by Sally Bohls and Jennifer Auerbach is a method book you can use to teach oboe and bassoons separately or together and is not written for full band instruction.

**Articulation:** Teach articulation as soon as students can make a steady sound with a correct embouchure. Go back to your balloon and straws and have students blow up the balloon while articulating. If students stop their air, the balloon will stop blowing up! If they use continuous air, the balloon will continue inflating! The “tu” syllable is best as the tip of the tongue touches the tip of the reed. One should feel both blades of the reed when articulating.

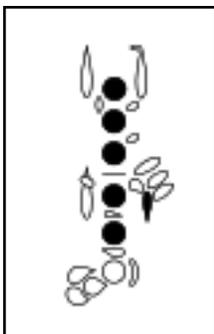
**Vibrato:** Vibrato is best taught once students can play with a good tone and air support. Common pitfalls of vibrato are not using enough air or letting embouchure move. Build a habit of adding vibrato to all long notes, and start incorporating it into your music early. Listening to recordings of your private teacher and other professionals are great ways to emulate vibrato.

## Alternate Fingerings/Oboe Specific Technique

Hierarchy of The Three Fs - *Teach in this order!*

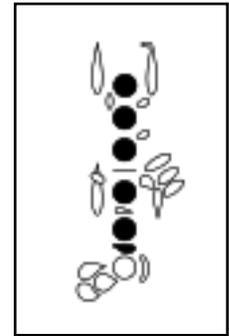
**#1 - Left F** (teach early - even before Regular F)

- Most commonly used in band due to method books and key signatures/scales (Bb, Eb)
- Use when preceded or followed by a C#/Db, D, or Eb



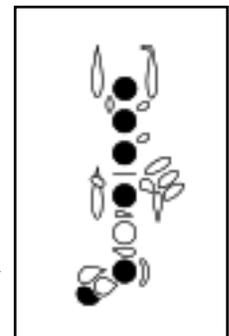
**#2 - Regular F** (Banana key-most commonly nicknamed)

- Use in Chromatic, F and C scales



**#3 - Forked F** (worst tone and tuning on most oboes)

- Use in Ab, Db key signatures/scales
- Use in patterns that obligate both pinkies before or after the F



## Half Hole Technique

- Roll 1st finger to uncover hole of B key
- Only roll enough to uncover, common for students to roll too much
- Practice playing Low C#, D, and Eb to Half Hole C#, D, and Eb by moving only first finger in rolling motion

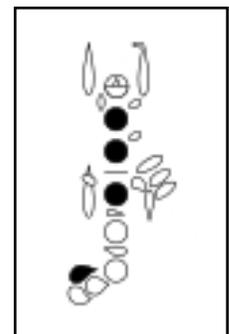
## Chromatic Scale Technique

- Low C to C# Chromatic- rocking motion. Use second knuckle for the C and tip of pinkie for C#
- Low B to Bb- rocking motion. When playing low Bb you can also hold down the B key; Press pinkie between Bb and B key pressing both at once, rock pickie to B key and let off the Bb key to play B

## High Note Fingerings

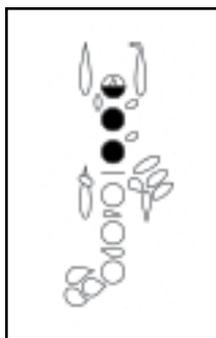
All subject to tuning for your specific instrument and private lesson teacher preference!

**High C#/Db**, often not played correctly! (LH - Index finger UP!)

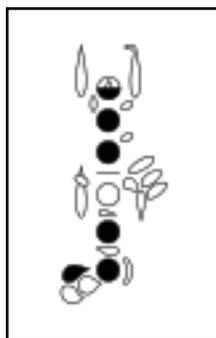


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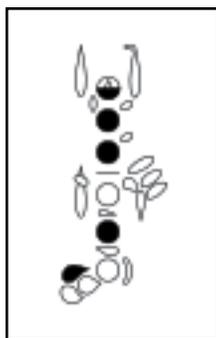
**High D** has several options, as a beginner it is best to stick with one. As the player advances, switching to a fingering that is more stable with accurate tuning is best.



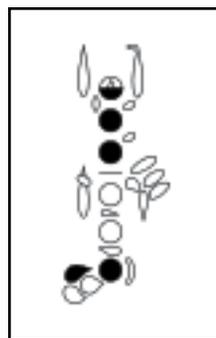
General Pedagogy Book  
Fingering - tendency is  
quite sharp



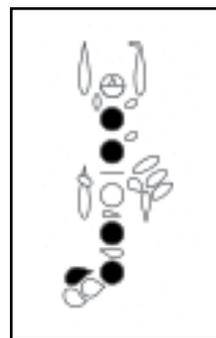
Full High D



Full High D Opt. 1

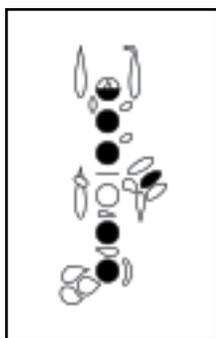


Full High D Opt. 2

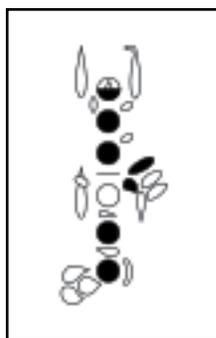


Full High D NO Half-Hole

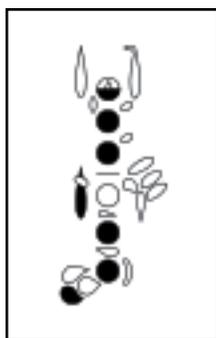
### High D $\sharp$ /Eb and E



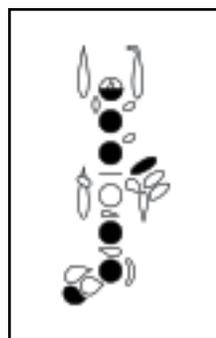
High D $\sharp$ /Eb - LH Pinky is  
most commonly on the  
wrong key! Attributes  
to pitch issues.



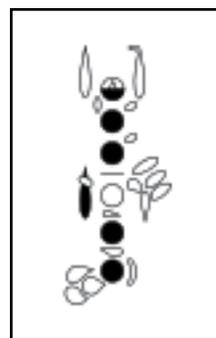
High E LH  
• Use in the F Major scale  
• Use when approaching  
or descending to a C $\sharp$ /Db



High E RH  
• Use in Chromatic Scale  
• Use when approaching  
or descending to a D $\sharp$ /Eb



High E Combo - Not  
often utilized! Use as  
a last resort!



High E Short - Used  
in fast passages and  
pinky changes

Oboe is not an easy instrument to teach or learn. Therefore, be patient and willing to go slow. The goal is to prevent bad habits that students will need to overcome later in their playing.

*Serena Finnigan is a middle school band director in Central Texas and recently joined the faculty at Wiley Middle School in Leander ISD. Mrs. Finnigan's teaching responsibilities include teaching the Symphonic Band, Beginning Double Reeds, Flute, Euphonium and assists with the Wind Ensemble and Concert Bands. In addition to teaching, she coordinates the woodwind curriculum for the Rouse HS Band Cluster, sixth through twelfth grade. Mrs. Finnigan holds a Master's degree in Oboe Performance from the Butler School of Music at the University of Texas, Austin and a Bachelor's degree in Music Education and Oboe Performance from the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. She began her teaching career as a private lesson instructor in the Austin area during her time at the University of Texas, Austin and then continued teaching after moving to Guadalajara, Mexico. While in Mexico she was the oboe professor at the Universidad de Guadalajara, Jalisco and also taught elementary music and middle school band at the International American School Foundation of Guadalajara, Jalisco. Once returning from Mexico, Mrs. Finnigan taught at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville as the adjunct professor of oboe. Wanting to be closer to her husband she decided to stay in Austin and began her Texas teaching career in Austin ISD. Most recently she taught at Canyon Vista Middle School in Round Rock ISD. Mrs. Finnigan is a current member of the TMEA, TBA, International Double Reed Society and alumni of Sigma Alpha Iota, Sigma A Province. She also just completed her 13th year as second oboist in the Corpus Christi Symphony.*