

Tips for Your Beginner Flute Class

Dr. Kimberly Clark

The following is an excerpt from the "Flout Fire Foundations Book".

Holding the Flute

How you sit and stand affects the quality of the breathing and the quality of the playing. Teachers must pay attention to the student's body and their surroundings when they play. There are many ways to hold the flute. These are suggestions based on my observations as a teacher, player, and mover.

Holding the Flute

- Think of the flute as a front held instrument (like an oboe or a clarinet) rather than a side held instrument. Students should hold the flute with their hands in front of their body (instead of in front of their right shoulder).
- The right arm extends forward. Be careful that the upper body doesn't twist to meet the flute.

TRY THIS!

Have students practice extending their arms without the instrument. Push one hand forward at a time and notice that the movement is happening throughout the entire arm structure (arm, collarbone, and shoulder blade.)

- Remind students to allow the arms to be easy and the elbows to hang. They do not need to hold their arms or shoulders up.
- Notice if their arms have potential for movement. This means they are not locked into a specific place and can move independently if needed.

TRY THIS!

Ask students to roll their shoulders or flap their wings while they are playing.

- The head stays balanced over the spine and gently turns to the left. Bring the flute to the face not the face to the flute!
- Ask students to sense the weight of their head on their spine and allow their neck to be free.
- The body should be neither held up nor pulled down (slouching). Remind students they are designed to be upright, don't get in the way of it!

- Ask students to notice their whole self as they play their instrument. Notice if they are tense or free. Notice if they are moving easily or with extra effort.

- Tell students they *should not be in pain when they play their instrument*. If they are, please ask for help.

Sitting

- There is no perfect sitting position; we are movers. Instead, think about relationships, balance, and ease.
- Notice the relationship of the body to the chair and the stand. The chair should be turned about 45 degrees to the right of the stand.
- Notice the relationship of the head to the stand and the conductor. The head should face the music stand and the conductor. Be sure the student has a good line of site for both!
- When sitting, the weight of the body goes into the sitting bones—into the chair—and then into the floor.
- Turn chairs to the right, about 45 degrees to the music stand. Do not set the flute section chairs to look uniform to the other woodwinds.
- Students should sit squarely in the chair, not on the corner. Most music chairs are not flat. Sitting on the corner of the chair make the hips uneven, causes back strain, and compromises breathing. Do not ask flutists to use a posture chair in a manner that is contrary to its design.



The student is sitting sideways in the chair and her right hip is higher than her left hip. (Notice the right foot.) Her chin is down.



The student is sitting properly in the chair and her body is better balanced. (Notice how her feet make contact with the floor.) Her head is better balanced.

All photos: Schick Photography

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Standing

• There is no perfect standing position because we are movers. Instead, think about relationships, balance, and ease.

• Notice the relationship of the body to the music stand. The feet and body turned about 45 degrees to the right of the stand.

• Notice the relationship of the head to the stand and the conductor.

The head should face the music stand and the conductor. Be sure the student has a good line of site for both!

• When standing, the weight of the body goes through the arch of the foot and into the floor. The whole foot should make contact with the floor. The hips, knees, and ankles should be free.

• Be sure to leave space between the players in the group. Flutists should

not stand so closely to each other that they have to put their flute behind the person next to them.



Beginner Classroom Set Up

The body alignment of flute players is different from other instruments. For this reason, flutists have important and specific needs as to their placement and spacing.

Homogeneous Beginner Classes

Place the students in a row or an arc.

Row:

- *Positive:* You can better see the students' body to stand relationship. The students can look at others in the class to mimic their arrangement.
- *Negative:* Students to your far left will not be able to see you while they are playing.

Arc:

- *Positive:* Students will be able to see you more comfortably.
- *Negative:* Turning chairs correctly with relationship to their position in the arc is very confusing for young players.

Mixed Instrument Beginner Classes

• Flute students should always be to the left side of the conductor and not past 1:00.

All Beginner Flute Classes

• Leave enough space between rows so that you can walk between the students to give individual help.

• Students should have space to assemble their instruments on the floor near their chair. In the beginner class, you will switch between using only parts of the flute and using the whole flute. You will want to keep the instrument case close to the player.

• Leave ample space between the chairs. **Flute seating takes more space** than other woodwinds. If the chairs are too close together, the students will twist their bodies to fit their flute behind the next person. This causes pain, inhibits proper breathing, and affects technique.



These flutes are too close together.



These flutes are better spaced.

Dr. Kimberly Clark is an active chamber musician and free-lance flutist who has performed across the U.S. and in Europe. She is a member of Eavan Trio (flute, harp, and cello) and Principal Flute of the Energy Corridor of Houston Orchestra. Currently, Kimberly is the Executive Director of Flook Fire Inc., a nationally recognized 501 C3 arts education organization, whose primary focus is flute education for students and adults. Recently, Kimberly teamed up with the Phantom Regiment to help create their Expert Lesson Series, a set of online beginner lessons for all wind, brass, and percussion instruments. Dr. Clark teaches both Flute and Body Mapping in the series. Formerly on faculty at the University of Houston Moores School of Music, Dr. Clark is highly sought as a teacher and clinician. She has performed and given clinics at numerous conventions and has been a featured artist/clinician at many notable flute festivals. Dr. Clark has served the National Flute Association on the Board of Directors, as the Flute Clubs Coordinator, and as an Acting Piccolo Artist Competition Coordinator. She is a former President of the Houston Flute Club. During her tenure she founded the HFC Flute Fest, Denise Jennings Solo and Ensemble Competition, and the Byron Hester Competition. For more info: www.kimclarkstudio.com, www.flookfire.com.