



**Get Me Out of This Mess!
Alternate Fingerings for Woodwinds in
Special Situations**

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Get Me Outta This Mess!

Alternate, Altered and Sensitive Fingerings
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DEFINITIONS

Alternate fingering

In this presentation, I use the term alternate fingering in cases where different levers operate the same key to close/open a tone hole, or when two different fingering combinations were designed to produce the same (or nearly the same) pitch.

Altered Fingering

Altered fingerings are those which use a standard fingering but with some fingering alteration, either opening or closing tone holes other than those that produce the basic pitch. Altered fingerings can be useful for improving intonation or response or in extreme dynamics.

In all woodwinds, most altered fingerings (except in extreme high register) involve either **venting** or **damping** (or shading). Venting is the process of opening a closed tone hole farther down the tube than the last closed hole in a row. Damping involves closing an open tone hole farther down the tube than the last closed hole in a row.

Sensitive fingering

Some sources use the term sensitive fingering to indicate an alteration that is used in very specific fingering passages or at specific dynamics. To simplify, sensitive fingerings are a subset of altered fingerings and I am not using it in this clinic. I only include this term because if you study several sources for alternate fingerings you will encounter the term.

PICCOLO



I. Alternate fingerings

Piccolo has the same alternate fingerings available as flute.

II. Altered fingerings

A. High Ab (G#)

One of the most important altered fingerings for a piccoloist is the one used for high Ab (G#), which aids in response tremendously.

	
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This is really useful on piccolo when a phrase begins on this note. Example, piccolo part to mvt. 2, "Horkstow Grange" from *Lincolnshire Posy* by Percy Grainger.





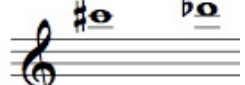
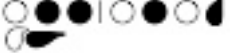


It is a good fingering for stability on flute, but it is indispensable for the piccoloist.

B. Three great pianissimo fingerings for piccolo (not for flute)

These three notes are hard to play pianissimo using the standard fingerings without the danger of dropping to the lower octave or

flattening. These will not drop, even at *ppp*!

	 Notice—no thumb!
	
	

II. Trill fingerings—unusual trills

Get a good trill chart. I am including these because they are the ones I encounter most when I work with bands—many outstanding players do not know these.

A. Third Octave Gb to Ab

This happens in *numerous marches* that are in the key of Db. Finger high Gb with standard fingering, trill l.h. thumb and index (yes, this feels awkward).



B. Third octave G to A

This appears in many pieces: *Russian Christmas Music* by Alfred Reed, *Passacaglia* by Ron Nelson, *Chorale and Shaker Dance* by John Zdechlik, *Fantasies on a Theme by Haydn* by Norman Dello Joio, *Variants on a Medieval Tune* by Norman Dello Joio, *Yiddish Dances* (mvt. 2) by Adam Gorb and *Festivo* by Edward Gregson. There are three ways to do this.

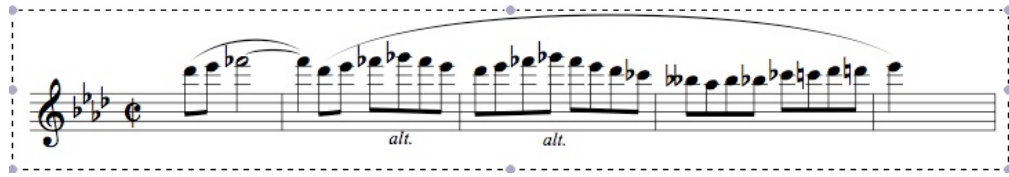
<p>1. Overblow low G, trill G key</p> <p>Trill G key</p>	<p>2. Play standard high G, trill l.h. pinky + both trill keys</p> <p>Trill three keys together</p>	<p>3. Play one regular G, then go to this false G and trill the G key</p> <p>Trill G key</p>
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I actually like the third one best, but it is the least like the standard fingering.

C. Third octave A to B

It occurs in *Fiesta del Pacifico* by Roger Nixon, m. 381 ff., *Dance Movements*, mvt. 4 by Philip Sparke, m. 713, and in *Fantasies on a Theme by Haydn* by Norman Dello Joio, mm. 308-381.

<p>False high A for trill only (note—no r.h. pinky)</p>	<p>Trill to this (yes, that's low octave G, overblown). Can also trill the A key with these two keys, but I find that awkward.</p>
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This can be used in *Pines of Rome* by Ottorino Respighi, in the band arrangement by Duker, in mm.37-44, and in *Savannah River Holiday* by Ron Nelson, m. 60.

3. High E to F

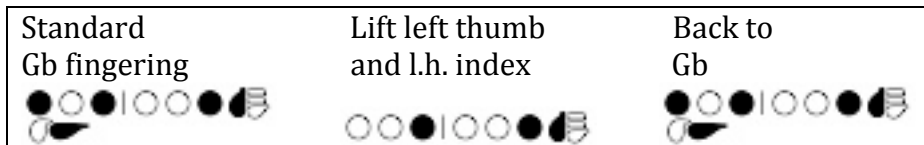
From *Roumanian Folk Dances*, mvt. 6, by Bartok, arr. Goto; use trill fingering for F in the triplet



Also useful in m. 181 of *Cajun Folk Songs II*, by Frank Ticheli and *Yiddish Dances* (mvt. 5) by Adam Gorb.

4. High Gb to Ab

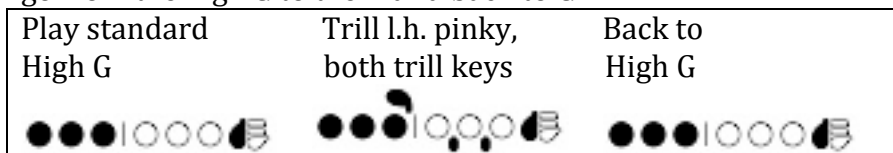
From *Fiesta del Pacifico*, by Roger Nixon, use the trill fingering for this triplet (and many of the other triplet passages in this piece).



5. Each of these measures from *Russian Christmas Music* by Alfred Reed, contains a repeated pattern that is much more easily played using trill fingerings.



In measure 193, I would recommend this fingering pattern to go from the high G to the A and back to G:



Mm. 192 and 193 could be played as harmonics, overblowing fingerings an octave below. This is by far the easier way, but it will be loud.

C. Harmonics

Harmonics can provide valuable fingering options, especially in the third octave. The most useful harmonics are the third partials available from the lowest octave (the fundamentals) of the first octave of the flute, from low C to open Db. Overblow these an octave and a fifth (corners of the embouchure forward, aiming air upward) to produce a really useful set of harmonic fingerings.

Chart of third-partial harmonics:

Use the fingering for the lower pitch to produce the upper note.

The chart consists of two staves of music. The first staff shows notes on a treble clef staff: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4. Above each note is a fingering diagram. A bracket under the first four notes (C4 to F4) is labeled "not as useful". The second staff shows notes on a treble clef staff: A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5. Above each note is a fingering diagram. A bracket under the last two notes (E5 and F5) is labeled "stuffy".

Example of usage, from *Chester*, by William Schuman. Finger the lower pitches and overblow to produce the upper.

The notation shows a sequence of notes on a treble clef staff. The first group of notes (C4, D4, E4, F4, G4) is bracketed and labeled "use harmonics". The second group of notes (A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5) is also bracketed and labeled "use harmonics".



Another example, from the second movement of *Carmina Burana*, by Carl Orff in both the original and in the band transcription by John Krance. This is fast, *alla breve*.

The notation shows a sequence of notes on a treble clef staff. A bracket above the notes is labeled "use harmonics".

The third measure could be played with standard fingerings, optionally using the 2nd trill key for the high D, because the harmonics in that bar could crack.

D. Specific cases for special altered fingerings.

1. High E, slurred in between two high Fs. This pattern occurs in *Hounds of Spring* (m. 275) by Alfred Reed, *Pegasus* by John W. Gibson and *Morning Star* by David Maslanka. Only use this in fast tempo and if slurred. Use this altered E in this case:

<p>Altered high E (between two high Fs)</p> 	
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2. High E in other upper register slurs

The standard fingering for high E on flute is really an overtone of the A below it with an alteration, making it particularly difficult to slur from high E down to A. It is also hard to slur from high A to the troublesome E. Both of these are present in m. 218 of *Russian Christmas Music* by Alfred Reed. Play the high E without pinky—if it is still stubborn, add the 2nd trill on the high E.

m. 218



Here is the same problem from one of the all-time great Grade 3 pieces, *Chant and Jubilo*, by W. Francis McBeth, mm. 108-113:



(add 2nd trill to standard High E fingering)





3. High Ab (G#). High Ab can be improved (more in response than in intonation) with this fingering on flute. It is thought by many piccoloists to be the first choice fingering on piccolo for that note.




OBOE

I. Alternate fingerings

A. F Alternates

	<p>Forked F This is the standard fingering, which is often flat and resistant, especially in the low octave. Though not the best sounding F, some passages have to use it, especially if the instrument does not have a left F alternate key.</p>
	<p>Chromatic F This alternate is available on every model of oboe. Teach this to beginners from the start—the response on this fingering is way better on all those repeated concert Fs they will play. Problematic in passages where an adjacent note uses the D key.</p>
	<p>Left F Not always available on cheaper models of instruments. An extremely useful key and worth every penny if you are looking to buy a school oboe.</p>
	<p>Resonance F In moderate to lower range oboes, this can be a useful way to improve both the intonation and the response of F in the low register. Some moderate to upper level oboes have an F resonance key. It would be a pad located near the D pad, and it would remain closed unless the forked fingering was pressed. If an oboe has a resonance key, don't do this.</p>

B. Eb Alternate

	<p>Alternate Eb (same in both octaves, half hole shown here) Teach this when you teach the Ab scale. The adjacent Db can only be played with the r.h. little finger, so this alternate allows for even finger movement from Eb to Db.</p>
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Here is a good case for using alternate Eb (“left Eb”) in *Variations on a Korean Folk Song*, by John Barnes Chance.



There are *many* passages that need left Eb on oboe.

CLARINET

Of the three and one-half octave range of the clarinet, nearly a third of the pitches have alternate fingerings, and most of the rest of them can be altered in some way.

I. Alternate fingerings

Because clarinets have so many alternates available, a useful overall concept is to keep the motion in one hand.

A. Little fingers

On standard instruments, little fingers operate four keys each. Three of the four keys on each side are equipped with connecting levers, allowing pitches to be produced using either little finger. The remaining key for each hand produces a fingering with no alternate. Therefore, the pitches produced by those two keys determine the order of alteration between left and right little fingers.

In cases where the passage is going to require a repetition (a hop) of the little finger on one side, use the following rules:

1. If the passage offers the option, hop on a tongued note rather than a slurred one, as in this pattern from the 2nd movement of *Four Scottish Dances* by Malcolm Arnold, tr. Paynter.



Another case of hopping in a tongued sequence, from *Circus Overture* by William Schuman, tr. Owens.



Another tongued hop example, from the 1st movement of the *Symphony No. 3* by Vittorio Giannini.



From m. 125 in 2nd clarinet part of *Wild Nights* by Frank Ticheli.

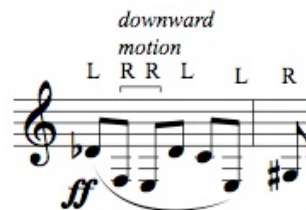


Similar case, m. 161 in 2nd/3rd clarinet part of *La Forza del Destino* by Giuseppe Verdi, tr. Mark Rogers. A similar case can be found in m. 259, 1st clarinet part, of *Angels in the Architecture* by Frank Ticheli.

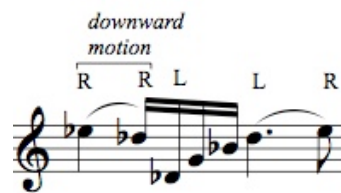
2. In a slur, slide downward (or outward from the centerline of the instrument) if possible. Example from 2nd clarinet part, mvt. 4 of *Four Scottish Dances* by Arnold, tr. Paynter.



Another slurred downward slide, from m. 1 of the "Gnomus" movement of *Pictures at an Exhibition* by M. Mussorgsky, arr. Hindsley. This is in both clarinet and bass clarinet parts.



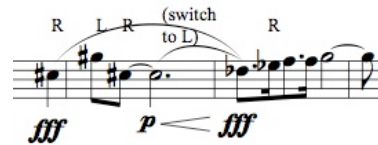
One more downward slide, from m. 163 in the 2nd/3rd clarinet part from *La Forza del Destino* by Giuseppe Verdi, tr. Mark Rogers. Yes, you could hop (L, L) from the first sixteenth to the second, but at that tempo, the downward slide is a better bet:





From *Vientos Y Tangos* by Michael Gandolfi, m. 132 in 2nd clarinet.





3. In a moderate or slower passage, one may be able to use “organ” fingering, the process of exchanging fingers during the course of any given note, in order to avoid a slide. Here is a perfect example of organ fingering, from the 1st clarinet part of *George Washington Bridge* by William Schuman, mm. 21-22.



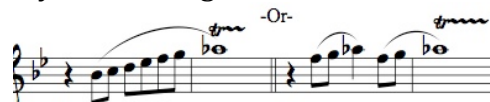
- B. One important standard alternate fingering: the side key Bb instead of throat tone Bb. The side key Bb is richer in tone than the standard fingering. Side key Bb is really useful if the passage does not cross the break. This example is from the clarinet solo in the opening of the 2nd movement of the *Second Suite in F* by Gustav Holst.

<p>Side key Bb, shown with resonance additions.</p> 	<p style="text-align: right;"><i>side key</i></p> 
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- C. Trill fingerings
1. One of the least-known trills on clarinet appears in m. 4 of *Undertow* by John Mackey. The trill for Ab to Bb is to play the standard finger for Ab and trill the l.h. index finger.

<p>Trill Ab to Bb: trill l.h. index finger</p> 	
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It appears in *countless marches* that are in the concert key of Db, in figures like these:



It also appears in mm. 303-308 in 1st clarinet in *Vesuvius*, by Frank Ticheli.

2. Using trill fingerings within passages.
 Players can use trill fingerings to facilitate smoother technique in many passages. Most of the mordents in Vincent Persichetti's *Pageant* need trill fingerings. A great many of the triplet figures (almost all are upper neighbor whole half steps) in *Equus* by Eric Whitacre.

The Ab-Bb trill shown above can be used in several sixteenth triplet figures in *Fiesta del Pacifico* by Roger Nixon. This example is m. 383, but there are more in that piece and others.



B-C# trill, entering the altissimo. There are two main ways to trill this B-C#:

	<p>1. Tr bottom 2 side keys</p>	<p>2. Tr next-to-top side key</p>
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People seem to know the first one, but the second makes a little better tonal match.

Here is the clarinet solo after M in Robert Jager's *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann*. There is an altissimo C# between two Bs, under a slur—use a trill fingering (#2) for a smoother slur.



The trill fingering for high C# may also be used for the grace note in m. 27 in *Festivo* by Edward Gregson.



Also useful in cl. 1 in *Fiesta del Pacifico* by Roger Nixon, mm. 178,-182, for the sixteenth triplets Cb-Db-Cb. Also in 2nd cl., m. 61, *Savannah River Holiday* by Ron Nelson.

Another option for a false high C# is this fingering based on F# a twelfth lower:



In this example, from the Eb clarinet part in mvt. 5 of *Lincolnshire Posy* by Grainger, a quiet entrance on high C# responds more easily with the trill fingering used when trilling C-Db.

	<p>use trill</p>
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That alternate is really a great way to play the pianissimo high C# in the Eb clarinet part at the end of the 2nd movement of the Gustav Holst *First Suite in Eb*.




3. A better trill for Db to Eb (C# to D#) in altissimo:

<p>Standard trill: trill r.h. index, but this is not a pretty trill. The resulting Eb is flat (and dull).</p>	<p>Better trill, but it takes coordination. The back edge of the r.h. ring is pressed without covering any of the tone hole.</p>
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This also works great in the troublesome passage 1st clarinets must play in mm. 21-22, 29 in *Divertimento* by Vincent Persichetti.



4. Altissimo F# to G# (rare) from *Pines of Rome* by Ottorino Respighi, tr. by Duker. 1st clarinet mm. 37-44:

Play long F# and move the four fingers together.		
Long F#	Alt. G#	
		



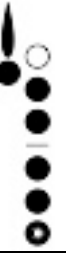
Also occurs in *Savannah River Holiday* by Ron Nelson and in m. 256 of *Dionysiaques* by Florent Schmitt.

II. Altered fingerings in the altissimo register

In the altissimo register, clarinets are often in unison with flutes or in octaves with trumpets. Because of this, they will sound flat, especially if playing loud (which makes reed instruments play flat!). Therefore, clarinetists need ways to raise pitch in that register: fortunately there are many. If altissimo notes need to be lowered, half-hole the bottom half of l.h. index finger.

A. Altissimo Eb (D#)

The trill fingering from altissimo Db to Eb shown in every chart isn't that pretty and it is flat. Here is a better one, but it takes coordination: the r.h. ring finger must press the back edge of the ring without covering any of the tone hole. Useful in this example from 1st clarinet part, in *Colonial Song* by Percy Grainger.

Use this for Eb...	...and this for Db	
		

B. Altissimo E

Here is a great use of altissimo high E—the famous leap in the solo in Percy Grainger’s *Irish Tune from the County Derry*.

Also very useful for the Eb clarinet, who must match flutes and piccolo at the end of movement 2 in *Music for Prague* by Karel Husa. (Also useful in 4th mvt. of same piece, mm. 55-57)

Useful in this figure which occurs several times in *Savannah River Holiday* by Ron Nelson.

C. Altissimo F

The standard fingering can be raised by venting (see my attached chart). The following fingering is called the “long fingering” for F and is really good for a soft, pure altissimo F. In Karel Husa’s *Music for Prague*, the Eb clarinet has to play a soft sustained altissimo F in the first movement:

D. Altissimo high Ab

This note occurs in *Variations on a Korean Folk Song* by John Barnes Chance. There are longer fingerings, but this one is really easy!

Same fingering from *Dance Movements* by Philip Sparke.



- E. Extreme example, using several altissimo fingerings, from *Passacaglia* by Ron Nelson, 1st clarinet part, mm. 153-158.

A	F	F#	G#	B	G#	A	F	F#

BASS CLARINET

- I. Alternate fingerings

Bass (and alto) clarinets have all the standard alternate fingerings of soprano clarinets. Some contra clarinets do not have the top two side keys on the left. Use the information given on alternate fingerings in the clarinet section above. Here is an example of the use of “organ” fingering on bass clarinet, in m. 140 from *Vientos Y Tangos* by Michael Gandolfi.



- II. Altered fingerings



- A. Altissimo fingerings

Bass and alto clarinets can use the standard soprano clarinet fingerings for altissimo notes up to high G, if they cover the half-hole plateau of the l.h. index finger. In addition, all low clarinets (including contras) should check out the options given in the pamphlet available online (i.e., free) by Donald

McGinnis, published many years ago by Selmer (see annotated bibliography).

B. Articulated low Ab mechanism



Some bass clarinets have a mechanism that allows low Ab to be played with a “forked” fingering, giving an option for avoiding sliding of little fingers. To see if an instrument has this feature, see if the fingering below produces an Ab: if it does, you do have one with that mechanism. In this example from *Incantation and Dance* by John Barnes Chance, a bass clarinetist can easily play this passage if the instrument has an articulated Ab.

<p>Articulated low Ab, if the instrument has that mechanism</p> 	
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BASSOON

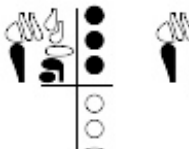


Using trill fingerings in special passages for smoother technique.

Here is a case from *Festive Overture* by Dmitri Shostakovich, tr. by Donald Hunsberger. Use the trill fingering for upper neighbor under a slur. The trill for Fb to Gb (E to F#) is produced by playing the standard Fb (E) fingering, and lifting the r.h. 2nd and 3rd fingers (A tone hole and G key):

	
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It works in this case because of the tempo and the slur.

Here is a case for using the trill fingering to make the motion of Db to Eb smoother in *Variations on a Korean Folk Song*, by John Barnes Chance, in m. 38:

<p>Standard Db</p> 	<p>Alternate Eb</p> 	<p>m. 38</p> 
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SAXOPHONE

I. Alternate fingerings

The saxophone has only a few true alternate fingerings in the standard range.

A. Alternate F#

	<p>Alternate F# (low octave fingering shown, same for upper with octave key) Teach in the chromatic scale. Use when slurring (or trilling) from F to F#/Gb.</p>
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B. Side C

	<p>Alternate C, "side key C" (low octave fingering shown, same for upper with octave key) Teach in chromatic scale. Can be used as top note in C scale. Use when slurring (or trilling) from B to C.</p>
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C. Left little finger stack alternates for G# (Ab)

The stack of keys operated by the l.h. little finger are connected in a way that allows any of the four to open the G# key. The top key in that stack is the standard G#, but the connectors between these keys are useful in certain patterns.

	<p>Low C# alternate for G# (Ab) Teach when brass reach the 7th position lip slur: <i>alt.</i></p>
	<p>Low B alternate for G# (Ab) Use if these adjacent pitches are slurred: <i>alt.</i></p>
	<p>Low Bb alternate for G# (Ab) Use if these adjacent pitches are slurred: <i>alt.</i></p>

Here is an example from m. 1 of the “Gnomus” movement from M. Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, tr. by M. Hindsley, in both alto and baritone sax parts. After the low B on beat two, leave the low B key down to produce the next Ab.



- D. Bb choices and using the bis key for Bb
 The standard Bb fingering uses the side key. Many fingering charts show the “1 and 1” version of Bb: avoid this (except when trilling from A# to B). Many fingering charts show the bis key version of Bb, but I have yet to find one that explains **that the index finger covers both the B key and and bis key to make use of this fingering.**

For woodwind doublers: the bis Bb on sax is just like using the Th Bb on flute, and the side-key (“normal”) fingering for Bb on sax is just like the use of the lever Bb on flute. Neither instrument has anything but the rarest of reasons to use “1 and 1” Bb.

	Standard Bb, same in both octaves. Use in chromatic scale, use (with exceptions) in keys of F, C, G and other sharp keys.
	Bb using bis key, same in both octaves. Use in keys of Bb, Eb, Ab, Db and relative minors, some exceptions will occur.

II. Altered fingerings

- A. Open C#
 One of the most unattractive sounds on sax is open C#:



This note has a very dead sound because it is such a short-pipe note: not much instrument is resonating when played “open.” Some new saxophones have a resonance key for C#.

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This has been a must-have for flutists for years.

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This is a must-have for clarinetists: it lists an unbelievable number of options for altissimo fingerings, including notes as to situational usage.

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Flute

Notes that tend to be flat, especially in dimineundo

Fingerings solutions to raise pitch

Note: solutions shown are not standard fingerings

advanced: can vent r.h. 3 ring

advanced: can vent r.h. 2 ring advanced: can vent r.h. 1 ring advanced: can vent r.h. 3 ring

1. advanced: can vent r.h. 2 ring
2. *pp* fingering, won't drop to low octave:



1. advanced: can vent r.h. 1 ring
2. *pp* fingering, won't drop to low octave:



3. Same as above, but use 1st trill instead of 2nd--this is RAISE pitch a bit

(may be flat in softer dynamics) (maybe)

advanced: can vent l.h. 3 ring

1. Use 2nd trill instead of 1st:



2. Use both trills keys:



3. Another option:



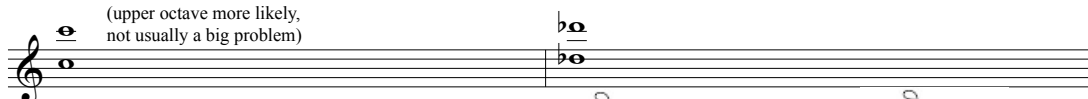
4. Can add r.h. 4 to #3 to raise pitch.

Flute

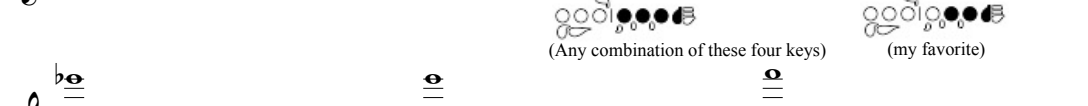
Notes that tend to be sharp, especially in *ff*

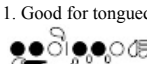


Fingerings solutions to lower pitch
Note: solutions shown are not standard fingerings

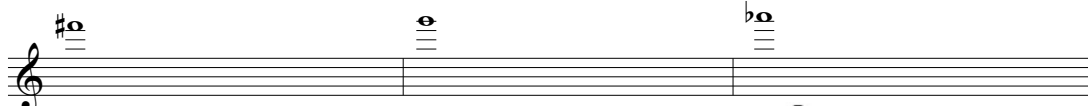
(upper octave more likely, not usually a big problem)




(Any combination of these four keys) (my favorite)

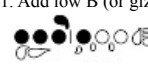





1. Good for tongued start (won't crack)


2. Sensitive fingering: won't crack, but still sharp
 Excellent in slurred approach or pp:
 (with or without r.h. 4)



Better response, not much change in pitch.
 This is the STANDARD way to play this note on Piccolo!



1. Add low B (or gizmo)

2. If no B foot, add low C

3. Lowers pitch, REALLY fuzzy.
 Only use in ensemble.

4. Sensitive fingering:
 Add r.h. ring 2 (middle finger)


Clarinet Intonation

problems and some solutions

NOTES THAT TEND TO BE FLAT

Can be flat in forte

Fingerings for G3, F3, E3, and D3 are shown below the staff.

NOTES THAT TEND TO BE SHARP

Usually sharp, especially in pianissimo:

Notes G3 and F3 are marked as "usually sharp, especially in pianissimo".

Notes E3 and D3 are marked as "shades" by fingering close to open holes, which improves tone and intonation.

Note G3 is marked as affecting tone a bit, but not as noticeable in pianissimo.

Notes G3 and F3 are marked as improving tone and intonation.

Note E3 is marked as "Do NOT use r. h. pinky on this note! That vent is used on notes above this."

ALTISSIMO CAN BE FLAT OR SHARP (OR IN TUNE!)

Sharp: If player pinches.

Flat: If embouchure/air is not developed, in forte and when articulated heavily. These notes will often sound low if in unison with flutes or an octave above trumpets.

My favorite, and no one knows this one! No pinky.

This one articulates well, especially on Eb soprano clarinet.

"Long" F: especially nice in pp

All of these are better in tune than the one usually shown in charts

An easy alternative to ones usually shown in charts