



## **Tips for Teaching the Beginning Flutist**

**CLINICIANS:**

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# Tips for Teaching the Beginning Flutist

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## Selecting Flute Students - Physical Characteristics

- An aligned jaw is crucial. An under bite limits first octave and flexibility. Extreme Overbites limit overall tone.
- No “teardrop” upper lips. The teardrop splits the air stream. The only way that this can work is for the student to have an off-center aperture by closing one of the holes to produce a tone. We only recommend flute players attempt to place students with teardrops on flute.
- Avoid double jointed fingers. This can cause a lack of agility in fingers. It mainly causes problems in holding the flute and in the pinkies.

## Equipment

- Quality open-hole flute. This develops superior hand position and technique.
- Plastic or wooden tuning rod. The metal ones scratch the inside of the flute.
- Mirror
- White handkerchief or silk swab. **NO** cleaning kits! There are too many chemicals that when used improperly can ruins pads and damage key mechanisms.

Amy’s List	Brittney’s List	Kim’s List
Yamaha 281 or 261 Armstrong 103	Yamaha 281 Pearl 505RE-1R Pearl PF525 RBE Jupiter 507RSO	Yamaha 281

## Posture

Flute players need ROOM!!! Allow their chairs to be far enough apart that they can freely sit with good posture and hand position.

- This may mean that the chairs are not in a perfect arc. Allow your flute players the freedom to move their chairs.

Amy	Brittney	Kim
Sit on the corner of the chair away from the back with one foot on each side of the corner – Hips aimed 90% away from stand, shoulders aimed 45% to the right of the stand, head is looking at the stand	Sit on the corner of the chair, head towards the stand, right hand should be able to push forward or come back to create most free flowing breath  Lots of room for each child	Sit on the front of the chair with case in the back of the chair

## Embouchure

- While watching in the mirror, say “POOH” or “OOH.” The corners of the lips should stay in a natural position and the lower lip stays as relaxed as possible producing a small aperture.
- When doing this on the flute, the lower lip should pout and cover approximately 1/3 of the embouchure hole. The bottom lip needs to be relaxed and not stretched.
- The air stream should be directed to the outside edge of the embouchure hole with approximately 50-60% of the air stream going into the headjoint to produce a full sound. Tell the kids to aim their air into the flute while maintaining relaxed, full lips.
- Things to watch out for:
  - **Smiling embouchure** - airy, sharp sound. Students need to think more of a pouting frown.
  - **The aperture is too large.** This will produce a very airy, unfocused sound. The aperture needs to be about the size of a grain of rice.
  - **Teeth are closed.** The oral cavity needs to be open - about 3/8 of an inch apart. Teeth closed will produce a thin sound that cracks easily. Can have students put largest, elbow shaped, dried macaroni between the back teeth and practice long tones to feel what it feels like to play with open teeth.
  - **Blowing straight across the embouchure hole** - very sharp and unfocused sound.
  - **Covering too much embouchure hole** - very thin, flat sound. Students will start to do this when they get tired. It can also be a quick fix to produce a sound; however, it is damaging in the long run.

## Articulation

The tip of the tongue should touch at or slightly behind where the gum and the upper teeth meet. Use or think the syllable “TOO”. The tongue then goes all the way back down. You can tell the students to blow through the valley of their tongue once a note is articulated.

## Headjoint Exercises

The students should spend a great deal of time on the headjoint - typically 3-4 weeks, depending on the class. They need to feel comfortable with their embouchure before they move on to the rest of the flute. **DO NOT RUSH THIS PROCESS.** Also, continue to practice headjoint exercises the entire year.

- The headjoint alone should produce an Ab.
- The headjoint covered should produce a lower A.
- Practice bringing the headjoint up and down producing the same strong sound 7x. If they produce a different sound, start over at one.
- Mary Had a Little Lamb and Hot Cross Buns - putting their finger in the end of the headjoint will produce different pitches. These are their very first songs.
- Cover the end of the headjoint and go from low to high.

Amy	Brittney	Kim
<p>Ah-Oo:            -Students put fingers on corners of mouth and say "Ah Oo". The goal is to feel the corners come in and the bottom lip moving out slightly.            -Students then play (covered) low to high thinking "Ah Oo"            -Air should never stop but should also not speed up            -The entire bottom lip does not need to move, mainly the center of the bottom lip</p>	<p>Low-Low-High-High:            -uncovered low then covered low            -Uncovered low to high            -Covered low to high            -The goal is to do all of this in one air stream</p>	<p>-To produce the higher sound, they need to move their bottom lip out. This will also move the bottom jaw forward. The goal is to aim the air higher with the bottom lip. Don't let them cheat by just using faster air. This will cause flutes to play very sharp and have poor upper registers.            -Once students can facilitate the low to high in slow 8<sup>th</sup> notes, move to the entire flute</p>

### **Assembling the Flute**

- The flute must never be assembled while touching or holding keys.
- The rod on the foot-joint should be aligned with the center of the D key.
  - If you line up the key rods on the body and the footjoint, the pinky finger cannot reach the Eb key. The arrows on the Yamaha 281 foot and body joint have students line up this way, so we do not recommend having students use these.
- The embouchure hole should line up with the center of the keys or a little to the left when looking up the flute from the foot-joint.
- The headjoint should never be pushed all the way in. It needs to be pulled out 1/8th to 1/4th an inch.

### **Holding the Flute**

There are 3 points of contact

- Chin
- Right thumb
- Base of index finger on left hand
- All fingers should close the keys with the pads of their fingers on the center of the keys. Never use the finger tips.
- The keys of the flute should face up towards the ceiling.
- The flute needs to be parallel to the lips. If a student plays at a slight downward angle, the head needs to tilt to the right.
- Finger plugs - start removing them soon. The easiest plugs to remove initially are from fingers 2, 4 and 5. The plugs for fingers 3 and 6 should be taken last.

### **Left Hand Position**

- Thumb should be straight and the middle knuckle pushes the key.
- The base of the index finger rests on the body between the 1st and 2nd key with the finger arching over to close the key.
- The middle finger and ring finger arch over to close their keys.  
If the third finger does not reach the G key - shifting the wrist to the right will fix this.
- The pinky always hovers above the Ab key.  
Allowing the pinky to sag under the key will pull on the 3rd finger and cause a leak.

### **Right Hand Position**

- The right hand will make a flat, relaxed C - like you are eating a hamburger hovering over their respected keys.
- The fingers should never rest on the rod.
- Place the thumb on the bottom under the 1st trill key. This will balance the flute.  
The thumb should not point toward the face or stick beyond the flute.  
Place a foam sticker (Wal-Mart) where their thumb needs to rest.  
The right hand wrist should be relaxed and slightly arched.

For both hands: think curvy fingers, straight thumbs.

### **Warm-Ups/Fundamentals**

- Long-tones. In the beginning work down chromatically to a low C. Develop a good low register before moving on the middle or high notes since the low register is the hardest to develop.
- Octave slurs. These can be taught by rote in the beginning; however, **INSIST** they move their bottom lip! Changing octaves by overblowing will lead to poor tones, tight lips, and extremely sharp upper register. Thinking “OOO” when going to the top higher octave helps students think about moving corners in and aiming the air higher with the bottom lip.
- Harmonics - Octave slurs must be mastered before moving on to Harmonics. Start with low C and without changing the fingering, use the embouchure to change the note. They should get six notes from one fingering.

### **Common Fingering Problems**

- Bb (low and middle)
  - Use thumb Bb 75% of the time. Use when playing in a flat key.
  - Use lever Bb 20% of the time. Use when playing chromatic passages.
  - Use 1&4 Bb 5% of the time. Use when finger 4 is already down or will be down on the following note. There is a great margin of error when using this fingering with “blips”.
- Eb and D (middle only)  
1st finger **MUST** be up.
- Using the Eb pinky key
  - This key is used on every note except:  
The bottom 3 notes of the chromatic scale.  
The top 3 notes of the chromatic scale.  
Middle D.

- High F#/Gb and B  
Thumb must be on the natural side!
- Wrong fingerings in the 3rd octave.  
Make sure students are not overblowing lower fingerings to get the higher fingering notes

### Vibrato

- Begin teaching once the majority of the class is able to consistently produce a good tone, typically the second semester between February and March.
- The train - start pulsing slow and speed up like a train leaving the station.
- When introducing into music, it might be helpful for the students to use metered vibrato (a certain number of pulses per beat). Once this becomes comfortable, the vibrato needs to “spin” without measurement.
- It is very important to vary the speed of the vibrato.
  - Low register - slower vibrato
  - Higher register - faster vibrato
  - Character of the music
  - Matching vibrato within the section
- Students need to be able to turn off the vibrato and play with a straight tone.

Amy	Brittney	Kim
-Vibrato is done by speeding the air up like an accent, going back to the earlier speed, and repeating -Go around the room and blow on each students' hand so they feel what it feels like -The speeding up from the air comes from the stomach, not the throat -Vibrato Scales: pulses should be much wider than they will play in music. Start with quarter, then move up to 8 <sup>th</sup> , triplet, and 16 <sup>th</sup> pulses	-Blow a steady stream of air, then blow pulses maintaining a fast air stream and always come back to the same speed -Students practice blowing on their own hand as well as blowing on teacher's hand, attempting to replicate the teacher's speed -All of the energy comes from the stomach, not the throat	Start by having students do staccato pulses (ah, ah, ah; ho, ho, ho), speed up gradually and have the pulsations run together

### Intonation

- The flute is flat in the low register and sharp in the 3rd octave.
- The cork needs to be set properly.
  - At the end of the tuning rod there is a line. Put that side in the headjoint and the line should appear in the middle of the embouchure hole. The student should only pull out the headjoint 1/4th or 1/8th of an inch. If they need to putt out further and the cork is set properly, the problem is likely their embouchure.
- Intonation is effected by:
  - The speed of the air (slower - flatter. faster - sharper)
  - The angle of the air stream (lower - flatter. higher - sharper)
  - Left hand pressure (more - flatter. less - sharper)
  - Volume (loud - sharp. soft - flat)

Amy	Brittney	Kim
<p>Teaches bending pitches: To bend down: drop jaw, keep aperture the same, get taller shape in the cavity of the mouth, keep head up high</p> <p>to bend up: keep teeth open, aim air higher with bottom lip, raise eyebrows</p> <p>Students learn to bend pitches around March and practice it every day the remaining of the year</p> <p>This works on flexibility of the lips so that students do not have to roll in or out and do not change the speed of their air in order to fix intonation</p>	<p>Spends lots of time learning to hear the waves and pulses</p> <p>To make the pitch lower, you create more space in the mouth and drop your jaw without changing head angles</p> <p>To make the pitch higher, aim air to the upper edge of the riser/tone hole</p>	<p>If a student is always sharp, bring the headjoint down, open teeth and blow more in the embouchure hole.</p> <p>If a student is flat, don't press. Blow more across the hole and blow faster air.</p>

### **Special Problems**

- Braces: Don't press! Have them create a vacuum between the braces and upper lip so air is not escaping in the space created by the braces.
- Cracking: Cracking is not caused by air being too fast, just air aimed in the wrong direction. Check the following:
  - Are they covering the wrong amount of embouchure hole?
  - Are they pressing? They shouldn't be.
  - Are they playing with their teeth too close together?
  - Is their tongue in the middle of the mouth (blow through the valley of the tongue)
  - Are they aiming the air too high?
- Fuzzy Sound
  - Is the aperture too big?
  - Are the teeth too close together?
  - Is their tongue in the middle of the mouth (blow through the valley of the tongue)
  - Are they blowing all of their air into the embouchure hole? It should be split: 50-60% in, 40-50% across.
- Thin, covered sound
  - Are they covering too much of the embouchure hole with their lip?
  - Are they looking down while playing?
  - Are they blowing fast enough air?
  - Are teeth too close together?
- Always sharp in 3<sup>rd</sup> octave
  - Are they blowing all of their air across the hole? They need to aim more into the hole.
  - Are they overblowing? Their bottom lip needs to come forward.
  - Is the flute too high on the lip?
  - Are the corners firm and/or pulled back? Lips should be forward and relaxed.
  - Are teeth too close together?