

**Texas Bandmasters Association**  
**Reeder's Digest: A Comprehensive Guide to Beginning Clarinet**



## EMBOUCHURE

1. CHIN
  - Pointed Down and Flat
  - You should feel a dent- similar to when you smile, but corners are not that far!
  - All muscles around the teeth are flat – no air pockets!
2. CORNERS OF MOUTH
  - Pulled down and back.
  - What face do you make when you eat something sour?
  - As a rule, corners of mouth are very close to the canine teeth.
3. LOWER LIPS
  - Slightly over teeth (Pink of lip should be seen.)
  - The less lip that touches the mouthpiece, the more reed that can vibrate.
4. TEETH ON TOP
  - Front teeth down on mouthpiece.
  - Anchor firmly UP and into teeth.
  - Do you pass the “wiggle test?”
5. TOP LIP
  - Close around mouthpiece
  - Be sure to keep corners back and down
6. BREATHING
  - Out the corners of your mouth
  - Teeth and bottom lip stays on the mouthpiece.
  - Can you speak “clarinet” and still hold your clarinet in your mouth?
7. TONGUE/ARTICULATION
  - Tongue should ALWAYS be high on clarinet.
  - Use the “TEE” or “DEE” syllable to start tonguing.
  - Sides of tongue should touch top molars.
  - Recommended syllables later in beginner year: Dee/Tee/Dih/Tih

*\*Mouthpiece/barrel on clarinet is essential to form a correct embouchure and tongue correctly. The goal is to match a Concert F# - if the pitch is low, most issues are with tongue placement.*

## REEDS

1. HOW MANY?
  - Students should have a minimum of **FOUR working, playable reeds** at all times.
  - To make your **reeds last** as long as possible, **alternate days** that you play each one. Students can make small marks on the bottom of the label side in pencil.
2. WORKING REEDS
  - Some issues are obvious: cracked, chipped, lipstick covered, hamster chewed, etc.
  - A perfect looking reed may have still reached his/her life span.
  - Reeds will still work with slight chips.
  - Do not allow students to store the reed on the mouthpiece after playing!
3. REED STRENGTH (Lots of different opinions on this topic!)
  - I start beginners on Vandoren 2 ½. By second semester, a few will move to three. The rest of the class may move to three by the end of the year. Most of the second/third year players are on three – more advanced students MAY get to 3 ½.
  - Reeds come in different strengths, depending on thickness or hardness. It is important to explain to students that a harder REED SIZE does not make you COOL!

# HAND POSITION

## 1. LEFT HAND

- Thumb at forty-five degree angle (You should be able to cover the thumb hole and hit the register key at the same time.)
- 1st Finger should make a hook (You should be able to cover the first hole while side of finger touches Ab/A keys)

## 2. RIGHT HAND

- Thumb should rest between nail and first knuckle
- 1st Finger should not touch the side keys!

## 3. ALL FINGERS

- Curved, Relaxed, Pressing Fleishy Part. Think of a “C” or holding a water bottle.
- Keep fingers in ANCHOR POSITION (low E) as often as possible.

# TEACHING THE FINGERING CHART

## 1. START EARLY

- As soon as students have been taught to assemble the whole instrument, saying (NOT PLAYING!) the fingering chart should be introduced.
- Sharps ascending, flats descending.
- At the beginning, one note every four beats (metronome @ 60.)
- They will fight/scream/howl that it is too hard! Don’t give up!
- Every few weeks, speed up the chart. By December, we are SAYING the whole thing @ 60 in quarter notes!

## 2. BREAK IT DOWN

- Spend time on the pinky keys!
- Explain the difference in chromatic/commonly used fingerings.
- Prioritize notes before the third line B. Once they are comfortable, the second half of the fingering chart are the same fingerings with different names.

## 3. WHY ADD THIS?

- The minute you allow students take the instrument home, they experimenting! Showing proper placement/hand position from the beginning will discourage bad habits!
- Students will understand where/how to find fingerings. This saves you class time!
- Students will feel so smart when they reach a “new note” in the book! “We already know that one!”
- Your advanced students will progress much faster.

# COMMON BAD HABITS

## 1. FINGERS NOT CLOSE TO KEYS

- Make sure fingers lift only enough to produce a clear sound – usually less than an inch.

## 2. RESTING THE LEFT THUMB BELOW THE TONE-HOLE

- Many beginning clarinet players find it easier to rest the thumb on the wooden part of the instrument. This is wrong! It will slow down your technique.

## 3. RESTING THE RIGHT HAND AGAINST THE SIDE KEY

## 4. PUTTING PRESSURE ON LOWER LIP

- Everything on clarinet is “up and out.” If a student is not getting a sound and everything else looks correct, have them barely touch reed with lower lip.

## 5. USING TENSION IN THE HAND TO TRY AND FORCE SOUND

- Squeezing the clarinet will not help produce a sound. Keep fingers/knuckles relaxed!

## 6. SQUEAKS ARE USUALLY CAUSED BY:

- Bumping other keys
- Not covering the holes completely
- Not forming the correct embouchure

# **MAINTENANCE**

## **1. DAILY**

- Swab through your clarinet after you play – but not the mouthpiece! (This is very important to protect pads and remove moisture.)
- Dry the inside of your MOUTHPIECE with part of the swab, but do not swab through.
- Wipe Down the instrument daily with a soft cloth. (Do not use treated polishing cloths.)
- Always remove the reed from the mouthpiece when you finish playing.

## **2. AS NEEDED**

- Clean the mouthpiece with an old toothbrush and a little bit of toothpaste or dishwashing liquid. ONLY the mouthpiece can get wet. Remind students that the water should not be too hot. A washcloth/hand towel in the bottom of the sink can keep a mouthpiece from chipping.
- Use a small amount of cork grease on the joints. Cork grease may need to be used every day when corks are new. Clarinet players should always have this in the case.

## **3. REMIND STUDENTS NOT TO:**

- Force any part of the instrument together.
- Let the body of the instrument get wet.
- Tighten the screws on the instrument (leave that to the teacher!)
- Stand the instrument upright by the bell.
- Leave your instrument in extreme heat or cold.

## **QUESTIONS ON THIS HANDOUT:**

Christine Cumberledge, Central Junior High, HEBISD, [christinecumberledge@hebisd.edu](mailto:christinecumberledge@hebisd.edu)

## **CONTACT INFORMATION FOR THE OTHER FABULOUS PRESENTER'S:**

Jessica Shin, Coronado High School, EPISD, [jcshin@episd.org](mailto:jcshin@episd.org)

Manuel San Luis, Retired Leander ISD, [sanmanband@gmail.com](mailto:sanmanband@gmail.com)