Beginner Saxophone: Don't Let Your Whispers Be Careless

CLINICIANS:

Rylon Guidry, Kelsey Lien, Gary Williams

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Beginner Saxophone

Don’t Let Your Whispers Be Careless

Selecting/Physical Characteristics

- Since there are limited seats available, smart/average students only. Saxophone class is not a "dumping ground". Siblings of students who have stayed in band are fantastic candidates.
- Fingers/hands large enough to hold instrument and not press into palm or side keys.
- Test to be sure the student can create a seal with their lips around the mouthpiece and produce a sound. Everything else is teachable.

Equipment

GUIDRY	LIEN	WILLIAMS
Beginner Model YAS-23 Vandoren AL3 Mouthpiece Rovner Ligature Vandoren Blue Box 2 ½ reeds Mouthpiece Patch Non-Stretch Neck Strap Silk Swab Tuner/Met Combo Wire Music Stand Professional Model: Selmer Reference 54 *or* Selmer Series II *or* Yamaha Custom EX brass lacquer.	Beginner Model YAS-23 Vandoren AL3 Mouthpiece/ Selmer C* Mouthpiece/ Yamaha 4C Mouthpiece Inverted Bonade Ligature Vandoren Blue Box 2 ½ reeds Mouthpiece Patch Non-Stretch Neck Strap Silk Swab Tuner/Met Combo Wire Music Stand Professional Model: Selmer Reference 54 *or* Selmer Series II *or* Yamaha Custom EX brass lacquer.	Beginner New Model YAS-26 Beginner Old Model YAS-23 Vandoren AL3 Mouthpiece Rovner Ligature Vandoren Blue Box 2 ½ reeds Mouthpiece Patch Non-Stretch Neck Strap Silk Swab Korg TM-50 Met/Tuner Combo Korg CM 100-L Tuner Clip Wire Music Stand Professional Model: Selmer Reference 54 *or* Selmer Series II *or* Yamaha Custom EX brass lacquer.

Posture

1. The student should stand in front of their chair with their feet inside and under the shoulders (a balanced body). Ears, shoulders, hips all in line. Rib cage lifted. Shoulders naturally sloped.
2. The student should sit in their chair where they can get up and down without any extra movement.
3. The ankles should not be behind the knee.
4. The feet should never move.

Reed, Ligature & Mouthpiece Assembly

GUIDRY:

- "The reed talk": how to care for & break them in, rotate your useage, don't touch the tip, be gentle, etc. (I use the junker reed that comes with the saxophone to learn to assemble - it's going to break anyway…) Some reeds are "practice reeds" that no one besides you should ever hear, some are rehearsal reeds and some are performance reeds. Always check reeds of reed players - 6th through 12th grade.
- Ligatures - practice how the look when they're correctly on.
    - Screws ON THE RIGHT.
    - Learn to maneuver using only the thumb and index finger, so the other hand can be responsible for lowering/adjusting the reed.
- How to assemble neck & mouthpiece (this is taught & practiced a few days before everyone makes their 1st sound):
    - Reed out of reed case and begin to soak in mouth - it's safest here.
    - Get mouthpiece & ligature, wear ligature like a ring so it's out of the way.
    - Twist mouthpiece & neck together. Look at both holes (neck hole and mouthpiece hole both face DOWN, and should face you as a check).
    - Place the loosened ligature on mouthpiece correctly.
    - The reed should match mouthpiece "flat to flat, fat to fat, thin to thin". Tiny sliver of black mouthpiece is seen above the reed. Lower the ligature to the glossy part of reed and tighten. Stress not to tighten too much - I show them what tight enough is (the reed moving after all of that work is frustrating…)
    - The director should examine and always fix SOMETHING for the first few weeks, even if it's super picky. Get students to be FAST and VERY PICKY about their assembly/placement of reed and ligature.

Embouchure/Producing 1st Sound

GUIDRY:

- Identify the parts of the embouchure in the mirror to create a common vocabulary: corners (always normal or in toward the mp), cushion/bottom lip (always soft & flat against teeth), top teeth, bottom teeth, chin, jaw, tongue (no detail, just acknowledge it)
- Breathing: In nose, out mouth to begin. No embouchure movement this way. We begin basic breathing exercises on day 1. By the time first sounds happen they are calm/relaxed and we have a vocabulary & understand of the body.
- TEACHING EMBOUCHURE SET UP: Practice on the thumb ("really quick, so you get what's about to happen when I come around one at a time, and so you have something to practice on when I'm with another student"):
    - "Wrinkle & flatten your cushion against your bottom teeth". Then place thumb nail on bottom lip.
    - "Corners in toward the mouthpiece, like saying "ooo". Towards the sides of your thumb.

    - "Anchor top of mouthpiece on top teeth - push up gently". Without letting your thumb nail leave your cushion, bring thumb to top teeth.
    - "Gently support the reed (your thumb nail) with your bottom teeth THROUGH your bottom lip. This is how you get the correct pitch!
    - Top lip stays soft and bottom lip stays wrinkled, corners stay in touching the mp.
- I walk around to each student to help them create their first, second, third, etc. sound. We do this over and over until they get it, then I watch them do it. Down the row every day for a few weeks before "class sounds" happen. There is NO BENEFIT to a group sound if random things are still happening for kids. (This is only about ⅓ of the class. The other time is spent on ⅓ hand position/fingerings and ⅓ music theory).
- NOW THE REAL THING: I set the reed on the bottom lip to get them used to the correct amount of mouthpiece and support from bottom teeth ("if I push down, don't let your head go down"), and make sure there isn't too much bottom lip in the mouth. I check for a tiny bit of pink/red lip visible on both sides of the mouthpiece.
- Next I tell them to put their top teeth on the mouthpiece, then make a seal with their lips.
- The steps to make a sound:
    - Breathe in through the nose - blow air only, no sound. (this ensures no tension, biting, or explosive ugly sound).
    - Take in another breathe (through the nose), and speed up your air a little until the reed vibrates.
- I want a soft, still, steady, calm sound from the start. Nothing loud or explosive. I want them to understand "pretty" & "calm" from the beginning.
- If there's only air & no sound - they have to speed up the air AND support the reed more. If the sound is too low - do the wiggle test. Make sure corners are in & snug and the reed is being supported.
- This takes time to develop. Make a big deal out of doing it correctly, then give feedback followed by "practice it at home and I'll hear/see it better tomorrow, and give you something else to work on then". Everyday they play individually there should be a different goal - I have students write down what I tell them when we go down the line daily to achieve the goal of "fixing what I need to fix". Don't come to me tomorrow without *some* progress on your issue.

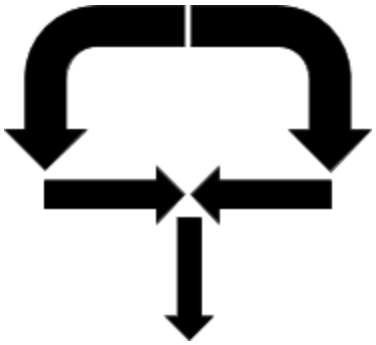
LIEN

- Students will need to learn how to assemble their "babies" (neck and mouthpiece).
- I place the mouthpiece individually for each student and help them to form a proper embouchure. I do it for them multiple times, for at least a week, and then I guide them through setting it up themselves. This is all done individually.
- I do a 4 step process: 1) Say "ah"; 2) Touch the reed on the bottom lip and roll in; 3) place top teeth on mouthpiece patch; 4) Close top lip down over mouthpiece like a garage door
- I model a properly formed embouchure, and simultaneously have them look in a mirror and match their embouchure to mine.

- To make a first sound (after properly forming an embouchure) I have them start with an air start. I'm listening for a clean beginning, smooth and steady sustain, and a clean end. I tell the kids no bumps or wiggles in their sound. I have them draw their sound. A good sound looks like a long rectangle (tone box). This is a fun exercise and students can get creative. As soon as students have a clear tone box, we move on to the big instrument.

WILLIAMS:

- Draw this simple diagram on the board:



Top Arrows represent the upper lip and how it pulls down and in towards the corners
Middle Arrows represent the corners or fulcrum
Bottom Arrow represents the chin

- Use index finger to teach them how to breathe in through the center and then focus the air when blowing out.
- Explosive saxophone sounds will destroy your entire ensemble blend. Teach calm sounds from the very beginning and be relentless about it.
- I set a chair up at the front of the classroom and set up every single student for a consultation on their mouthpiece and neck. Once they show correct consistency, I start allowing them to do more on their own.
- When I am working with each student individually, I always challenge the other students in the classroom to "steal the intel" and get better even when they are not playing. This is a great time for them to practice their embouchures with their personal mirrors.
- We also have "band aides" walking around the classroom monitoring the beginners and giving them helpful feedback.
- Do not let the top lip come off the top of the mouthpiece when breathing.
- Make sure top teeth are always on the mouthpiece and don't let them put the weight on the bottom lip.
- Like Kelsey, I love to draw their sounds on the board as they happen so the understand the three important parts of a good sound: start, sustain, release.
- The Tonal Energy App is a great resource to record your students and then play it back with the visual.

Articulation

GUIDRY:

- Say “doo doo”.
- TEACHER: Put index finger in front of lips (like saying “shh”) and demonstrate with air, no explanation.
- Create a good, still sound first (they’re still air starting), then flick the reed twice in the middle of your sound (I demonstrate). This teaches that 1. air/sound doesn’t stop when you tongue and 2. Air creates the sound, not the tongue. Doing this unmetered helps in understanding the fast flicking motion.
- I am always addressing tonguing that stop the air or vibration (in ALL instruments), so I make it known it’s the worst thing ever from the beginning.
- The rules:
    - Tone quality cannot change.
    - Tongue moves up and down only.
    - Top tip of tongue flicks the edge of the reed. “You should feel the shape of the edge of the reed”.
    - “Flick it don’t stick it”. Tongue is up 1% of the time, down 99%.
    - Watch in the mirror for no visible movement around lips or throat.
    - Again, this takes time to develop. Make a big deal out of doing it correctly, give feedback followed by “ go practice”. Don’t get hung up - time develops skills better than anything you can say in one class.
- Tongue starting is next, once they demonstrate a fast, light tongue in the middle of a good sound: Breathe in, set tongue right before you play, let the air blow it down.
- Metered tonguing on foot taps in next (usually with 4 quarter notes) in a call/response. *This is when the tongue can start moving in a down/up motion like a foot tap, creating space between the notes. Demonstrate on hands, clap fast, no sticky tongue.
- Tonguing on down & ups is next, followed by tonguing when fingers move.

LIEN

- I use the syllable “too” when teaching tonguing.
- I tell the students to touch the tip of the reed with two tastebuds on the top of the tip of the tongue. It’s just like saying to word “too”.
- I have them say the word “too”; Then they blow air on their hand starting with “too” tongue.
- To place the reed on the right part of the tongue, I have them stick out their tongue and I touch the reed right where it belongs. Then I have them put it in their mouth and say “too”, touching that same spot. Then they blow just air with a “too” tongue. Finally, using a firm (never tight) embouchure, and good air pressure, I have them “too” tongue and produce tone. Then, we do more tone box/note shape drawings with tongue starts. Make sure the beginning of the note isn’t explosive and that the release is an air release, not a tongue stop.

WILLIAMS:

- "Doo" syllable
- Practice saying words that start with a "D" syllable to make the connection of articulation with the simplicity of speaking.
- A simple visual is always a good thing to use. I use my right hand to represent the motion of the tongue and the location of the reed in which it needs to hit.
- Lots of call and response with articulation followed quickly by having your individuals play around the room.

Band Director Non-Negotiable: listen to every single child play something by themselves every single day!

MP Exercise/Check

- Check for pitch & flexibility.
- Biting will cause the infamous "spitty" sounds.
- Individually only - it's really loud!
- Put a drone on Concert "A" and make them match.
- Start checking this in November and revisit periodically.

Assembling/Angles

- Learn to raise & lower the neckstrap on it's own.
- Pick up the saxophone from the bell, deliver to lap & clip neck strap. Always keep a hand on the instrument/don't trust the neckstrap.
- Assemble neck & mouthpiece (without reed or ligature) to body to learn the correct angles of mouthpiece on cork, neck into body, and neck strap height.
- Sit with correct posture and the mouthpiece should "hit you" in the correct spot. If not, adjust the angles.

Hand Position

- Curved, round C shape.
- Set the fingers/pearls, then pinky, and thumb LAST.

RIGHT HAND:

- Set the fingers on the pearls.
- Rest pinky on low C key (most common one)
- Thumb nail/skin line should be centered under the thumb rest. Should not slide past the thumb's first knuckle.

LEFT HAND:

- Set the fingers on the pearls.
- Rest the pinky on the G sharp key.
- The thumb should rest on the thumb rest so that the thumb can reach the octave key by merely rocking.

- The hand should hinge in/up and form a rounded C so the hand will not lean against the palm keys.
- The D & D sharp palm keys are pressed with the knuckle of the first finger. The F key is pressed with the knuckle of the middle finger.
- Fingers numbered 1-2-3, 4-5-6
    - Practice moving in different patterns.
- Number the LH pinky keys.

Fundamental Exercises

GUIDRY:

- Call & response for much of the year for tonal & articulation modeling.
- Squeeze/Release: "I-must-do-this-exercise". After 1st not on full instrument, before articulation, teach finger movement without stopping/changing the air.
    - B-C#, A-B, G-A, F-G, E-F, D-E
    - B to C flip
    - C to D with the octave key (after octave slurs introduced)
    - *All of this is by rote while theory/note naming still being worked on daily. Get these important skills going early. Written out exercises would be too complicated this early.*
- Four beat call & response - daily routine when full instrument is solid
    - Get down to low C early & regularly, then add low Bb.
    - Use G as a starting note regularly, B is the "first note". Never D w/octave key.
- Written Finger Patterns
- Chromatic-based long tones that expand to the full range
- Octave slurs
- Chromatic Scale chunks
- Major Scales, full range from the time they are introduced (since chromatic has been taught)

LIEN

- Finger Wiggles (SaxBook page 5)
- Interval Studies (SaxBook page 6)
- Note Lengths (SaxBook page 7)
- Octave Wiggles (SaxBook page 8)
    - I use and like these exercises because it requires no music theory at all. It's all rote teaching, and gives me a chance to associate fingers with keys: Fingers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Thumb and Pinkies. The students don't have to know how to tongue for 3 of these exercises, although tonguing can be added in later. These exercises give the students the opportunity to play notes throughout a wide range of the instrument so they can become well acquainted with the feel and sound of all the different notes. Again, they're not looking at anything, so they're just thinking about what they're doing, and reading music and trying to remember note names and fingerings isn't getting in the way of them becoming

comfortable on the instrument. I don't tell the students that the low notes and high notes are hard. I just expect them to be played like all the other notes. It's amazing what kids can do when they don't know it's hard.

WILLIAMS:

- Rhythm Rockers for the first 10 minutes of every class period (Thank you, Chris Meredith)
- Call & response for much of the year for tonal & articulation modeling. (Remember that the air starts the sound and the tongue defines the air)
- Again, make sure you are hearing your individuals play. As the year progresses, start having the students in the class be the "leader" to model while everyone else echoes.
- Finger Pattern Exercises (We have this written out)
    - Left Hand-One Finger Only
    - Left Hand-Two Fingers
    - Left to Right Hand (Think warm and calm air for the low notes)
    - Mixed Patterns
    - Patterns on C and Above (Voice "EE" syllable as you get higher)
    - Left Hand and Palm Key Exercises (Assign a numerical system to your left pinky keys, right pinky keys, palm keys and side keys)
- Octave slurs
- Major Scales
- Chromatic Scale in sequential form
- Read lines out of the book for the last 10 minutes of every class period. If you are doing everything correctly, the students should think everything in the book is EASY!!!

Alternate Fingerings/Intonation

GUIDRY

- The many C sharp fingerings:
    - 3 and octave key - most common (use in Remington/interval exercises)
        - Add side C to raise pitch
    - 1 and palm key D
    - C sharp above the staff - add 4 to lower pitch
- Side C - used only for trills, flipping B to C needs to be taught soon, it's common
- Chromatic F sharp (fork) - teach it early and use it early - watch their fingers
- Don't put down the low B key for "Concert F" - it changes the sound too much.
- Find a key to open for a flat note.
- Find a key to close to lower a sharp note:
    - For example, drop palm keys for palm key notes.
- Take care of the sticky keys: G sharp and low C sharp.

LIEN

- Palm keys and pinky keys (both pinkies) (SaxBook page 20)
- Chromatic Fingerings and enharmonic spellings of the chromatic scales (SaxBook page17)

- Using Front fingerings for High F and High E (SaxBook page 20)
- Bis Bb versus Side Bb versus 1 and 1 Bb
    - Bis Bb - use in flat key scales (SaxBook page 14)
    - Side Bb (A#) - use in sharp key scales and chromatic scale (SaxBook page 13)
    - 1 and 1 Bb - special occasions, rarely used

WILLIAMS

What Rylon and Kelsey said!

Vibrato

GUIDRY:

- "Vuh vuh vuh"
- Start with fast, small pulses. Metered in 8th notes quickly and implemented into long tones and starting/stopping notes of scales.
- Usually introduced sometime between TMEA & Spring Break, depending on the class.
- Triplet vibrato is the goal of the end of the year around 80 bpm.
- After 3-4 weeks, it becomes ***required*** on scales, lines from the book, long tones, etc.
- A 7th grader should use vibrato on "white notes" in their music as a minimum requirement. Straight tone all the time is unacceptable & uncharacteristic.

LIEN

- I use the syllable "Va Va Va"
- Saxophonists use jaw (sometimes called lip) vibrato. The jaw relaxes down slightly, causing a drop in pitch, then it firms back to normal. Practice bending the pitch down with students before starting vibrato exercises.

- I start a 60bpm. I play a whole note, then tongue quarter notes, then do 4 va va notes, and finish with a whole note. I increase the tempo, then move onto 8th note vibrato. I increase the tempo and then move to 8th note triplet vibrato. I increase them tempo, then move on to 16th note vibrato. I want them to learn control over their vibrato. Ultimately, 8th note triplet vibrato sounds the most natural for a majority of tempos they'll use. (SaxBook page 20)
- The SaxBook is a free reference book for teaching beginning saxophone. To access this free book, go to my website: saxmusicsa.wordpress.com

WILLIAMS:

- I have always used "Yee Yee Yee" when explaining this concept.
- I usually start vibrato around TMEA time.
- Vibrato gives the saxophone player LIFE. Think of it like a heart monitor line: Curves are GOOD. Straight line means you are dead or mostly dead.
- Remember that the vibrato only goes below the center of the pitch and not above center. Also make sure that the students are getting back to the pitch center after they do their vibrato inflection (don't let them start playing flat).
- Put the metronome on at 60 BPM and introduce quarter note vibrato.
- Draw their sounds on the board and put their initials by them. Then do it again with a different color so they can see the differences. They will get better immediately!
- Vibrato exercise that we do every single day:
    - Metronome at 60 BPM
    - 8 Beats each with no rest in between (breathe when they need to)
    - Quarter Note Vibrato
    - Eighth Note Vibrato
    - Triplet Vibrato
    - Sixteenth Note Vibrato
    - Quintuplet Vibrato (Epic Vibrato)
- Once the students get consistent with this, we go back to the beginning of the book and read the easier lines (lots of half notes and whole notes) WITH vibrato. Eighth note pulsing first with triplet pulsing being the ultimate goal. *Mary Had a Little Lamb* never sounded so good!
- Students must use vibrato on all white notes from this point on. We also encourage them to use a "shimmer" of vibrato every time they play the tonic on their major scales so that they sound even "older".

Rylon Guidry (817) 821-3919 Guidryr@lisd.net	Kelsey J. Lien (210) 771-3978 saxmusic2000@gmail.com saxmusicsa@wordpress.com	Gary Williams (214) 298-2448 gawilliams@mckinneyisd.net