



**Texas Bandmasters Association  
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**Fundamental Freedoms: A Concise  
Approach to Saxophone Pedagogy for  
Musical Independence**

**CLINICIANS:  
The Moanin' Frogs**

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# The Moanin' Frogs Presents:

## “Fundamental Freedoms: A Concise Approach to Saxophone Pedagogy for Musical Independence”

-opening musical performance-

Welcome to a presentation by The Moanin' Frogs, in which we will outline for you some of our fundamental beliefs in saxophone pedagogy that allow us to play the deep and various music that make our lives so rich. While we cannot cover everything in this workshop, we hope this overview of saxophone basics can help supercharge your saxophone sections and allow them to find the same joy we do, in having nearly unlimited possibilities of expression in their music.

We understand that the classroom is a challenging atmosphere to provide individual feedback, but we hope to give you a quick reference manual of skills, tricks, and diagnostics to help your sections succeed in all of their goals. We will demonstrate the following techniques and what sounds to expect when a student is achieving the desired technique, or what sounds to expect when the student's attempts have gone awry.

### Embouchure

- Bottom lip tucked in over bottom teeth with teeth under middle of lip, allowing for player to create a physical roundness of the embouchure
- Top teeth touching top of mouthpiece
  - A general marker/guide for placement of teeth can be where the reed comes into contact with the mouthpiece
    - This creates optimal reed vibration
    - Allows air to flow more freely and improves articulation
  - It is a good idea to have student take in more mouthpiece before or as opposed to moving up reed strength if they are not yet taking enough mouthpiece. More mouthpiece requires more air and creates resistance
    - Many students squeak at first when trying this for the first time. This is due to the fact that when playing with too little mouthpiece they developed a tightness and vertical pressure on the reed that translates to higher notes coming out. When there is not enough mouthpiece in the mouth, squeaking (and eventually playing the extended altissimo register) is virtually impossible
- Top lip **not** tucked in, engaged as part of roundness and sitting on top of mouthpiece
- Corners pulled all the way into the sides of the mouthpiece, creating a seal. Corners should be engaged, allowing for jaw position to not be as clenched

- A looser jaw will also help with vibrato. Many students have problems producing vibrato at first because they are biting too hard on the mouthpiece, and their embouchure becomes dependent on the pressure
- Chin muscles are pulled down creating a flat chin, and taking unnecessary pressure and extra skin away from the reed (will help maximize vibrations)

### **Breathing**

- Bottom lip/jaw and top teeth stay in place as you open your corners of the mouth and top lip to take a breath
  - Some professionals also breathe in by lowering jaw and bottom lip while keeping corners inward, both of these methods are trying to create the openness needed to take in a full breath in a short amount of time
- Stomach expands first, then chest, shoulders need not move at all
- Encourage a deep breath before every start and count off, as well as during rests in the music
  - Many kids only take the breath they need to execute the correct notes and rhythms of a short passage, while playing with full lungs will improve any passage, even if only a single note
- To increase breathing skills have a student take in breath for 4 beats and then play for 8, then take in breath for 3, play for 8, take in for 2, play for 8, take in 1, play for 8. You can also do this without the instrument, by just blowing air in a steady narrow stream through the lips
  - This will teach kids to gradually take the same amount of air in shorter time periods

### **Tone and Pitch**

- Tone and pitch start on the mouthpiece
  - A good tone on the mouthpiece translates to the instrument (not airy, not bombastic, focused)
  - Pitch on mouthpiece affects tone on instrument
    - High Pitch (B, C): squeezed/sharp/cut off sound
    - Low Pitch (Pitches much lower than concert A): less focus/flat/rougher sound
- Producing an in-tune Concert A, G for tenor, D for Baritone (880Hz or A5) on the mouthpiece is the biggest goal in having an even intonation across the range of the saxophone
  - A higher pitch on the mouthpiece leads to a squeezed, sharp sound. The higher notes on the instrument are affected more than the lower notes, creating an uneven intonation
  - Pitch change on mouthpiece requires movement of the back arch of the tongue, you could think of the syllables “eeee”, “ahhhhhh”
  - To produce a Concert A properly, air support is essential, relax the throat, jaw should not be biting, and tongue should be experimented with

- After achieving a Concert A, it is recommended to try for more flexibility by targeting lower pitches. This allows for greater flexibility in pitch correction.
  - Tune mouthpiece with outside pitch sources
  - Target notes (starting and stopping)
  - Play simple songs, starting with limited range
  - Practice Intervals
  - Student should try to maintain good tone on mouthpiece (a clear, non-airy sound)
- Long tones are the most powerful tool in improving tone quality
  - Crescendo from niente to max volume and back down to niente (full breath every time)
    - Use a metronome with specific duration goals for added intensity
  - This encourages a great embouchure, and demands a great awareness of air support and control for the entire range of the horn
  - Once you have focus and beauty on a very soft note, simply increasing air will give you a beautiful sound throughout the dynamic spectrum
  - It will take most students more time to learn how to support the sound while decreasing dynamics from max volume to niente
- Jaw pressure effect the tone in a huge way
  - Too tight of a jaw position creates a buzzy, sharp, squeezed sound, possibly even cutting off from too much pressure
  - Too low of a jaw will sounds airy, spread, and flat
  - Student should have immediate response of octave key when correct amount of jaw pressure is applied

### **Articulation (a release, not an attack)**

- To articulate the tongue touches the the very tip of the reed (only touching the edge), just behind the tip of the tongue
- Variable of articulation include the following:
  - Duration of tongue on the reed
  - Pressure of tongue on the reed (the more pressure, the closer to silence and completely blocking air)
  - Air, for accents and different types of releases
- The easiest way to teach articulations is to start with legato articulation
  - Have the students start notes without articulations
  - Touching the very tip of the reed lightly and relatively quickly will produce a connected, smooth articulation
  - Starting from this point the student can make variations on the articulation, leaving their tongue on the reed longer, or more pressure
- **To articulate the first note after a breath or lift, it is important the student understands immediate airflow is the most important factor**

- **Have the student start a note without tonguing at all to show the air must be immediate**
- **Explain that articulation is a release, not an attack. Place the tongue on the reed, remove it and blow at the same time. You tongue and produce tone at the same time**

### **Vibrato (a characteristic part of the saxophone sound)**

- Vibrato is produced by a downward and upward movement of the jaw
  - Embouchure (other than the jaw) remains constant
  - Air still only changes with dynamic level
- Variables of vibrato include:
  - Width of pitch change (amount of jaw movement)
  - Speed of pitch change (frequency of jaw movement)
- With vibrato many students squeeze the jaw too hard
  - Start from a normal jaw position with excellent tone quality and move the jaw down and back from that position
  - Neutral-down-neutral-down in time (halves, quarters, eighths, etc.)
- Try vibrato exercise with rhythms and metronome for regularity, and experiment with wide, narrow, slow, and fast movements Goal tempo: 16ths at 72-80bpm. Start with quarters, eighths, triplets, etc.
- Students will have the most success applying vibrato to longer notes in music, in which they have the opportunity to think and apply
  - As students advance, vibrato will become automatic and should start to be applied to shorter notes and used in more creative and expressive ways

### **Finger Technique/Playing Position**

- Neck strap height. Saxophone should come right in to the mouth.
- Playing position. On the side vs in the middle.
- Fingers should be relaxed with a slight curve
- Right thumb resting on thumb rest
- Left thumb resting and ready to pivot on octave key, without lifting
- Fingers should limit themselves from lifting too far away from keys
  - This will help in the execution of faster passages, in which response time is important, having your fingers far away from the keys = wasted time
- Practicing scales, arpeggios and intervals, while keeping great hand position will lead to fantastic technique
  - Start all technique slowly, and focus on clean and fast finger motions, no matter what the tempo is
- Try not to change hand position too much when playing palm keys
- As soon as students know the full range of the instrument, it is a good idea to start making all scales and techniques full-range

**-closing musical performance-**