



**Texas Bandmasters Association  
Virtual Convention July 20-22, 2020**

**A Sequential Approach to Beginning  
Woodwinds**

**CLINICIAN:  
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# **Texas Bandmasters Association**

2020 Virtual Convention



## **A Sequential Approach to Beginning Woodwinds**

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# Notes from the Author

## Disclaimer

The pedagogical ideas and beliefs contained within are evidence-based on my experience in the classroom and reflect the teachings of my mentors – John Benzer, Brian Merrill, Lynne Jackson, Claire Johnson, Erin Hannigan, and many others. My beliefs and techniques have changed a lot over the years and are still subject to change. Please take the best of what I have to offer and consider the rest! 😊

## Purpose

The purpose of this presentation is to share critical knowledge to promote healthy habits in your beginning woodwind classrooms. This presentation will not cover *every* aspect of how to teach each instrument. Instead, my aim is to equip you with the “tricks of the trade” that I’ve collected over the years. **This handout also includes highlighted text. These highlighted passages are tips that I learned from master teachers that I felt made a big difference in my personal pedagogy.**

## Overview

In this presentation we will cover the following topics –

- Embouchure
- Articulation
- Vibrato

## Philosophy

It is my belief that the success of any band program, 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade, is a direct result of the quality of instruction in the beginning year. Here are a few thoughts to consider before we dive into the fine details of the pedagogy –

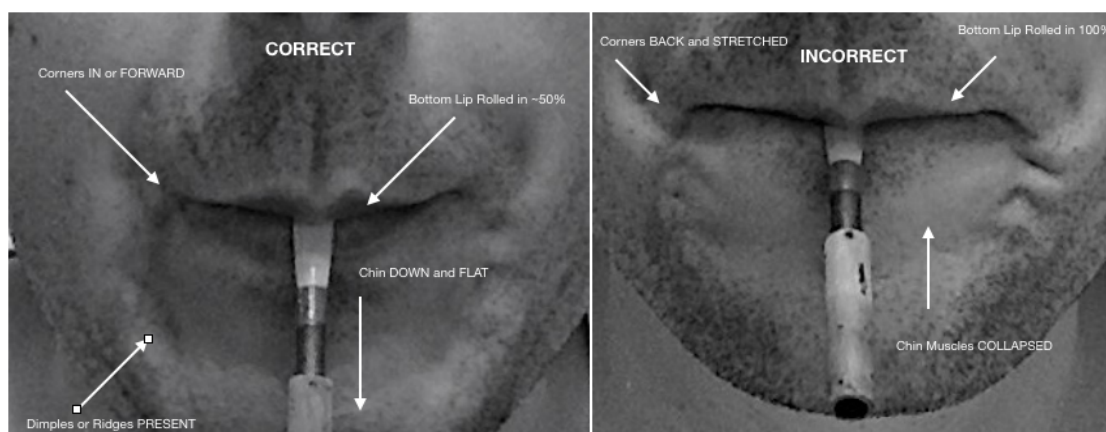
- ✓ Make sure you are getting the right kids on the instruments!
- ✓ *Spread the wealth.*
- ✓ There is no substitute for knowledge. This applies to teachers and students!
- ✓ Pacing is an art.
- ✓ *Plan the work, work the plan.*
- ✓ Would you rather do it right or do it twice?
- ✓ The 80% rule.
- ✓ Set your students up with a *face for the future!*

## Tips for Teaching Flute Embouchure

- Relaxed face
- Natural corners
- MMM-pooh
  - Airstream should be 30-45 degrees downward if measuring from a horizontal plane.
- Head joint placement starts by putting the inner line of the tone hole on the line where the lower lip and skin meet.
  - If a student has a full bottom lip you may need to bring it up on to the lip a little.
  - Do not “kiss and roll!”
- The head joint should be rolled in enough to cover 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the tone hole when placed in the correct spot. Placing the head joint in the right spot should take care of this naturally for most children.
  - Too little coverage will create airy and sharp tone.
  - Too much coverage will create a wispy and dark sound that lacks the full harmonic series.
- The teacher must help each student troubleshoot their placement until they find the *sweet spot* where their tone is the most clear and resonant.
- The hardest concept for students to understand is that they must put their head joint in the same location every time. *The sweet spot only lives in one place!*
  - Practice setting the head joint over and over in class. *Set it, play it, take it off... repeat!*
  - Ask them to think about the following questions when they set their head joint –
    - Does it look the same?
    - Does it feel the same?
    - Does it sound the same?
- Once they can make a consistent sound it's time to talk to them about tongue position. In general, the flute plays best when the tongue rests at the bottom of the mouth. Try having them touch the tip of their tongue to the bottom tooth-gum line to help them understand low tongue position.
- **Always use a mirror!**

## Tips for Teaching Oboe & Bassoon Embouchure

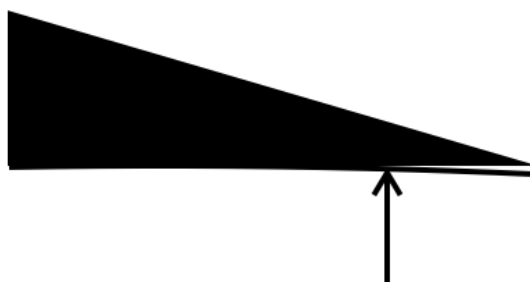
- I prefer the same embouchure for both oboe and bassoon. (I know, I know... this will be controversial for some, but what isn't controversial about oboe and bassoon?!)
  - I use the phrase EEE-YOU to form the embouchure. Teach the kids to look for the following qualities as they model your embouchure –
    - Chin FLAT – Dimples or ridges will be present if your chin muscles are pulled down and engaged.
    - Corners IN or FORWARD – Teach them how to move their corner muscles forward.
    - Lips are 50/50 – Specifically, check the bottom lip! Don't let them roll too much bottom lip in or they will play very sharp and fatigue quickly.
  - 50% of the reed cane goes on the bottom lip.
    - This will not change for oboe, but as the bassoons mature, we push them towards 60-75%.
  - Oboe reed direction is 30-45% down from horizontal and bassoon reed direction is 0-15% down from horizontal.
  - Teach your oboes to play their reed to a C on the tuner and the bassoons to play to an F (some people prefer F#, but I like F because I don't want them to overtighten too early.)
  - I ask my double reeds to get a “big smiley face” on the Tonal Energy Tuner before I let them play on the full instrument. This demonstrates ability to hold pitch and also gives them something to work on at home while we are learning to assemble, hold, and finger the instrument.
  - Here is an example of a correct and incorrect oboe embouchure –



**Note** – Embouchure and pitch are a symbiotic relationship with double reeds. You must use a tuner daily in the beginning year to help the students learn to control their embouchure on all notes.

## Tips for Teaching Clarinet Embouchure

- Creating a great clarinet embouchure is very similar to creating a great oboe embouchure.
- I use the phrase EEE-YOU to form the embouchure. Teach the kids to look for the following qualities as they model your embouchure –
  - Chin FLAT – Dimples or ridges will be present if chin muscles are pulled down and engaged.
  - Corners IN or FORWARD – Teach them how to move their corner muscles!
  - Lips are 50/50 – Especially check the bottom lip! Don't let them roll too much bottom lip in or it will dampen the tone, create false sharpness, and dampen the harmonic series.
- Teach the kids how to find where the mouthpiece and reed come together. This is how you know where to put the top teeth on top of the mouthpiece and teaches them the appropriate amount of mouthpiece to put in their mouth. (Tip – You can take a silver sharpie and put a dot on top of their mouthpiece and use that as the “X marks the spot” for their top teeth!)

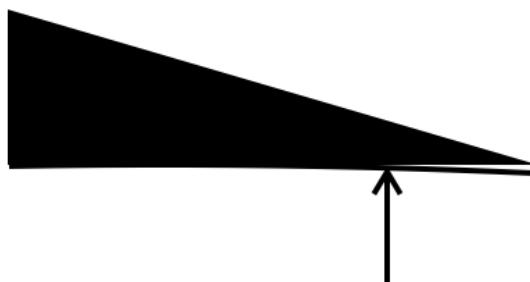


- A proper mouthpiece and barrel (MP&B) should be pitched at F#. However, you must know what pitch your MP is built for and how it will affect the MP&B pitch.
  - For example, we use the Vandoren M13 Lyre Profile 88 which is pitched at 440hz. Therefore, we tune MP&B to F# +25 cents. Anything less and they will play flat on the instrument. Anything more and they are biting.
- Tongue position is vital to successful clarinet tone production. Clarinet tongues should be arched high in the mouth as if you're saying “EEE.” The tongue then hangs out 1-2mm away from the reed.
- Students must blow ACROSS the MP&B, not DOWN the MP&B.

**Note** – After years of going back and forth with reed strengths, I am a solid believer in starting clarinets on Vandoren 2.5 reeds. I keep them on 2.5s until January-March depending on their tone and pitch. Then I move them up to strength 3. My 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> graders play exclusively on strength 3 reeds and most are on some form of D'addario reeds. I rarely allow even my best to players to play on 3.5s. **Hard reeds don't fix embouchure and tone problems, they just mask them!**

## Tips for Teaching Saxophone Embouchure

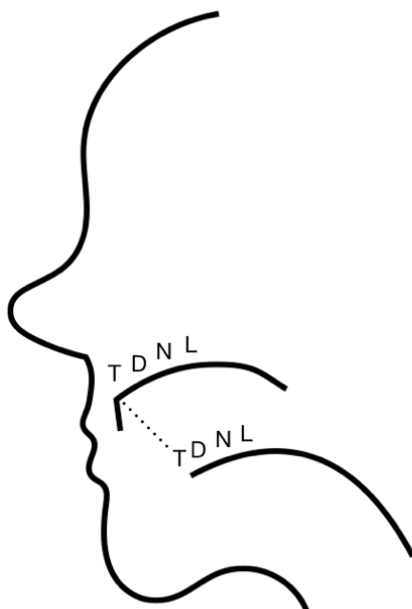
- Creating a great saxophone embouchure is very similar to creating a great clarinet embouchure.
- I use the phrase EEE-YOU to form the embouchure. Teach the kids to look for the following qualities as they model your embouchure –
  - Chin FLAT – Dimples or ridges will be present if chin muscles are pulled down and engaged.
  - Corners IN or FORWARD – Teach them how to move their corner muscles!
  - Lips are 50/50 – Especially check the bottom lip! Don't let them roll too much bottom lip in or it will dampen the tone, create false sharpness, and dampen the harmonic series.
    - Warning – OPINION – I strongly disagree with rolling the bottom lip too far on saxophone. It creates a muffled sound that lacks resonance and overtones.
- Teach the kids how to find where the mouthpiece and reed come together. This is how you know where to put the top teeth on top of the mouthpiece and teaches them the appropriate amount of mouthpiece to put in their mouth. (Tip – You can take a silver sharpie and put a dot on top of their mouthpiece and use that as the “X marks the spot” for their top teeth!)



- A proper mouthpiece (MP) should be pitched at A. However, this is super hard for young students to produce. I highly recommend emphasizing the mouthpiece and neck (MP&N) pitch with the students. It should produce a resonant Ab.

**Note** – I start my saxophones on Vandoren 2.5 strength reeds and only move them up to 3's in 7<sup>th</sup> grade when they are ready.

## Articulating on the Flute



### Sequencing articulation on the flute –

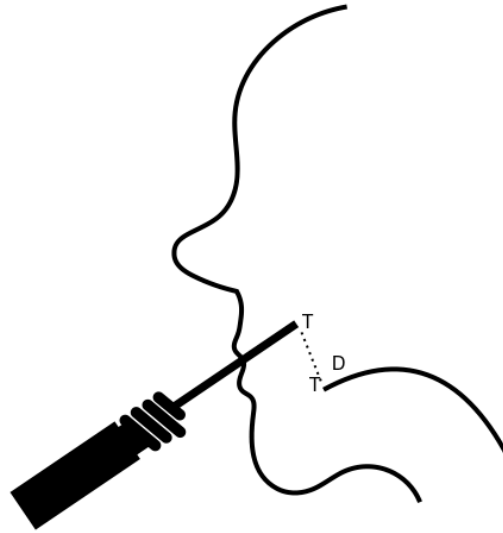
- The *forward tip* of tongue touches the *tooth-gum line* (TGL). The *TGL* is the place where the back of the top teeth and the roof of the mouth meet.
- Beginners easily understand the *TGL* when you draw a picture on the board.
- Using a mirror, have the beginners touch and press firmly on the *forward tip* of their tongue with their index finger nail. They should press until it tingles.
- Have them touch the *tingly spot* of their tongue to the *TGL* and hold it there.
- *Tonguing* is created by releasing the tongue *down and back* using the syllable *TU*.

### Tips for teaching beginners to articulate on the flute –

- I call articulation *tonguing* consistently for the first semester until they've mastered the concept. Then I use the terms *articulate* and *tonguing* interchangeably.
- After introducing the big picture concepts, articulation is best taught on a one-to-one basis. Grab a rolling chair and check each person!
- I generally teach *WHO-TU* first on flute before I teach a *TU* start from silence.
- Make sure there is no lip or face movement when they are articulate.



## Articulating on the Oboe & Bassoon



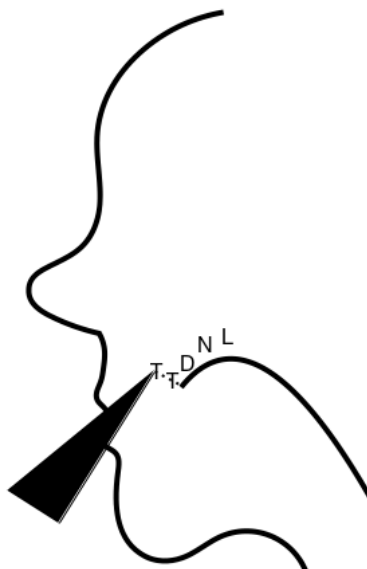
### Sequencing articulation on the oboe/bassoon –

- The *forward tip* of tongue touches the *forward tip of the bottom blade*.
- Using a mirror, have the beginners touch and press firmly on the *forward tip* of their tongue with their index finger nail. They should press until it tingles.
- Have them touch the *tingly spot* of their tongue to the *forward tip of the bottom blade*.
- *Tonguing* is created by releasing the tongue *down and back* using the syllable *TU*.

### Tips for teaching beginners to articulate on the oboe/bassoon –

- I call articulation *tonguing* consistently for the first semester until they've mastered the concept. Then I use the terms *articulate* and *tonguing* interchangeably.
- After introducing the big picture concepts, articulation is best taught on a one-to-one basis. Grab a rolling chair and check each person!
- I generally teach *WHO-TU* first on oboe/bassoon before I teach a *TU* start from silence.
- I strongly recommend against using *DU*. Double reed players rarely double tongue and need to learn to single tongue at 120bpm and faster. Teaching *TU* sets them up for fast single tongue articulation.

## Articulating on the Clarinet



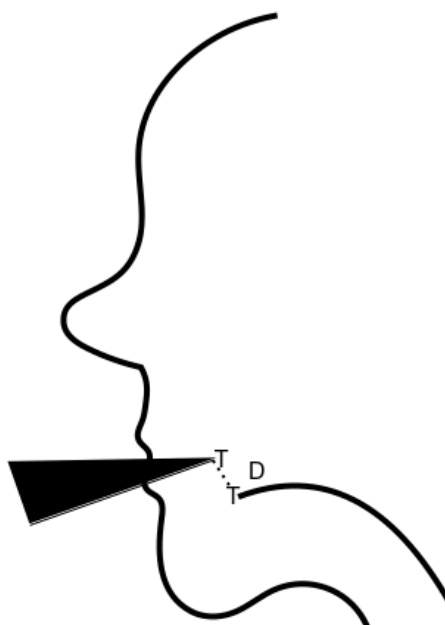
### Sequencing articulation on the clarinet –

- The *forward tip* of tongue touches the *forward tip* of the reed.
- Using a mirror, have the beginners touch and press firmly on the *forward tip* of their tongue with their index finger nail. They should press until it tingles.
- Have them touch the *tingly spot* of their tongue to the *forward tip* of the reed.
- *Tonguing* is created by releasing the tongue *back* using the syllable *TEE*. This allows the tongue to stay higher in the mouth when it releases from the reed.
- With correct tongue position, the tongue only needs to move 1-2mm to articulate on the reed.

### Tips for teaching beginners to articulate on the clarinet –

- I call articulation *tonguing* consistently for the first semester until they've mastered the concept. Then I use the terms *articulate* and *tonguing* interchangeably.
- After introducing the big picture concepts, articulation is best taught on a one-to-one basis. Grab a rolling chair and check each person!
- I generally teach *HEE-TEE* first on MP&B before I teach a *TEE* start from silence.
- I strongly recommend against using *DEE*. In my opinion, while this creates a really nice legato articulation, it will never have the clarity of a *TEE* note-start. *TEE* also promotes faster tonguing in the future. (I know this one is going to start a fight!)

## Articulating on the Saxophone



### Sequencing articulation on the saxophone –

- The *forward tip* of tongue touches the *forward tip of the reed*.
- Using a mirror, have the beginners touch and press firmly on the *forward tip* of their tongue with their index finger nail. They should press until it tingles.
- Have them touch the *tingly spot* of their tongue to the *forward tip of the reed*.
- *Tonguing* is created by releasing the tongue *back* using the syllable *TU*. This allows the tongue to stay higher in the mouth when it releases from the reed.
- Notice that the tongue position is naturally lower than on the clarinet.

### Tips for teaching beginners to articulate on the saxophone –

- I call articulation *tonguing* consistently for the first semester until they've mastered the concept. Then I use the terms *articulate* and *tonguing* interchangeably.
- After introducing the big picture concepts, articulation is best taught on a one-to-one basis. Grab a rolling chair and check each person!
- I generally teach *WHO-TU* first on MP&N before I teach a *TU* start from silence.

## Teaching Flute Vibrato

Flute vibrato is commonly referred to as *diaphragmatic vibrato*. It is created by pulsing of air that generally centers low in the lungs.

### A Sequential Approach to Teaching Flute Vibrato

1. **Stand up** - Have your students stand up and place one hand on their belly button. Their other hand should be holding a small locker mirror aimed at their embouchure.
2. **Sizzle** - Turn on the metronome to 60bpm with 8<sup>th</sup> note subdivision. Teach them how to *sizzle* a measure of quarter note vibrato and a measure of 8<sup>th</sup> note vibrato without moving their face. They should be focusing on pulsing from their belly button to create the waves.
3. **Airstream** - Teach your students to pulse air on a single *spot* on their hand using their flute embouchure. I use the base of the middle finger where the palm and middle finger meet. (Sometimes we even use permanent markers to put a dot or "X" to mark the spot. *See example below.*) It's important that the hand is positioned in the same slightly downward-facing direction that they would be blowing air across the tone hole and while they pulse air, they focus on holding the airstream still on the *spot*.



4. **Head Joint** - Teach your students to pulse on their head joint without any breaks in tone. Focus on holding the airstream still and pulsing from your *belly button*.
5. **Full Instrument** – Teach your students to pulse on their full flute without any breaks in tone. I usually pick a scale and do it in repeated whole notes so they can practice vibrating on different notes.
6. **Increase Tempo** – After a few days, increase the tempo by 2-4bpm. I usually do 4bpm each week. Once we reach between 90-100bpm in quarter notes and 8<sup>th</sup> notes I slow it back down to 60bpm and teach 8<sup>th</sup> note and triplet vibrato.

## Teaching Oboe & Bassoon Vibrato

Like the flute, vibrato is created by pulsing of the air on the oboe and bassoon. The sequential approach to teaching vibrato for these two instruments is exactly the same as flute except you focus the air pulsing higher up in the lower throat. This will help your students avoid unnatural body movements or extreme pitch changes.

Additionally, it is important to teach your double reeds to not let their vibrato waves fluctuate pitch more than 5 cents. I tell my students to *stay in the green* on the Tonal Energy app. Eventually we get them to keep their pitch between 0 and +3 cents.

## Teaching Saxophone Vibrato

Saxophone vibrato is commonly referred to as *jaw vibrato*. It is created by lowering the bottom jaw slightly inside the mouth creating gentle waves.

1. **Use Thumb** - Have your students place their thumb in their mouth and position it as if it's the mouthpiece.
2. **YOO on Thumb** - Turn on the metronome to 60bpm with 8<sup>th</sup> note subdivision. Teach them how to lower their jaw slightly in an up and down motion. Then have them practice that motion in quarter notes and 8<sup>th</sup> note vibrato without moving their outer face. All of the movement should be internal.
3. **YOO on Full Instrument** – Turn on the metronome to 60bpm with 8<sup>th</sup> note subdivision. Pick a scale and have them do a measure of quarter note vibrato and a measure of 8<sup>th</sup> note vibrato. (Note – I usually skip to the full instrument because it's easier to troubleshoot issues with the saxophone when you can hear tone.)
4. **Increase Tempo** – After a few days, increase the tempo by 2-4bpm. I usually do 4bpm each week. Once we reach between 90-100bpm in quarter notes and 8<sup>th</sup> notes I slow it back down to 60bpm and teach 8<sup>th</sup> note and triplet vibrato.