

Clarinet 101: Simple Steps to Improve Your Clarinet Section

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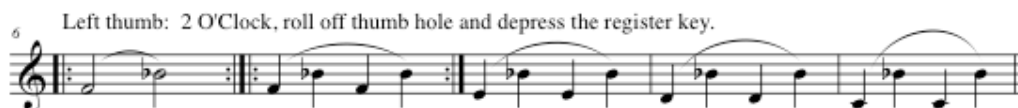
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This clinic will provide practical tips to improve your clarinet students, focusing on visual and aural cues to diagnose common problems. Basic fundamentals of technique, tone production and articulation will be discussed, giving effective strategies to teach these concepts to beginning, intermediate and advanced clarinetists. Simple exercises to develop good hand and finger position and improve transitions between registers will be highlighted and demonstrated. Effective equipment options will be included.

I. Technique

- A. Posture: watch for a natural head and neck position, not angled up or down.
- B. Hold position: Right elbow should not rest on right thigh. Clarinet neckstraps can relieve some of the weight off the right wrist. Clarinet angle 30-35 degrees.
- C. Hand position: rounded fingers as if holding a pop can, close to the keys. No “hailing a taxi cab” or “waving to your friends”.
- D. Fingers must cover holes properly. Diagnose: turn clarinet halfway around.
- E. Left hand:
 1. Thumb position: 2 O’Clock.
 2. First finger: roll from E tone hole to A key and G# key.

Exercises for the left hand:



- F. Pinkies: the weakest finger is assigned the most to do.
 1. Curved! No “Teacup syndrome”, no curling up or placing below the instrument.
 2. Consider a default position for young players: Left pinky rests on E/B key, right pinky rests on F/C key. Band methods have both pinkies on low E.
 3. Always alternate. No sliding. Ab/Eb on right and C#/G# on left determines proper fingering. Marking parts with “L” and “R” over the notes is typical clarinet procedure.

Produced only by left pinky. Produced by either left or right pinky. Use left pinky only!

Produced only by right pinky. Use right pinky only!

II. Tone production

A. Air—volume, air speed and support all keys to success. Blow paper to the wall. Blow out candles on the birthday cake. Inhale/exhale lying down.

B. Embouchure

- 3 basic components:
 - top teeth resting on the mouthpiece
 - lower lip folded over bottom teeth. “Cushion for the reed.” Watch for too little or too much lip folded over. Goldilocks.
 - lips around the mouthpiece like a “drawstring bag”. No puffing cheeks.
- “Point chin to the floor.” Chapstick. Look for indentation in chin. Mirror.
- Too little mouthpiece = small sound, sharp; Too much = raucous, flat
- Too much embouchure pressure = tight sound, sharp; too little = flabby, flat
- Embouchure should remain static while changing pitches—no “micromanaging”.
- EZO® Denture Cushions can help alleviate lower lip discomfort (braces).

C. Tongue position

- Thumb on the garden hose.
- Say “E” or “Hee” or “Shh”. “EE” + “Ew” = good tongue position + corners of lips.

D. Playing the clarinet mouthpiece and barrel alone

- Pitch: Concert F#
- Ideal sound: clear, full, focused, does not waiver and in tune.

E. Clarinet registers: Clarinet does not have an “octave key”, each register has distinctive, unique tone quality, challenging to evenly transition from one to the other.

Overtone series based on A.

Clarinet produces every other note.

The range of the clarinet registers:

Chalumeau Throat Clarion Altissimo

F. Register slur. Use exercise below to approach the clarion register. Be sure left thumb position is correct. Demonstrate first for the student.

G. Crossing the break. “RHD” = “Right Hand Down”

Crossing the break--

leave fingers of the right hand down, including pinky, through the entire exercise.

H. Approaching the altissimo. Need lots of fast air. Stronger reed strength?

- High C#: NO E-flat key.
- All pitches D and higher: add E-flat key with right pinky.
- For a smooth slur to the altissimo, roll the first finger down exposing half the tone hole.

- I. Squeaks. Definition: a higher pitch than intended
 - 1. Reed may not be well positioned, and/or in bad condition
 - 2. Uneven or too much embouchure pressure
 - 3. Fingers not covering the holes/leaky pad.

- III. **Articulation:** attempt to converse with your neighbor without using any consonants.
 - A. Simple: **tip of tongue on tip of reed**
Say “doo”. The tongue makes contact with the reed inside the mouth where the tongue comes forward to produce the “d” part of “doo”.
 - B. “Simon says...”

Repeat first measure several times. Vary the length of the note using the tip of your tongue on the tip of the reed!



- C. Visual and aural telltale signs of problems
 - 1. Chomping on the mouthpiece.
 - 2. Separate breaths—motion in the chest cavity (not using any tongue at all). Use analogy: not using the tongue is like giving a speech without using any consonants.
 - 3. “Th” sound: Increase support, be sure tip of tongue touching tip of reed.
 - 4. Harsh attack: too hard action of the tongue. Think of a cat on a stovetop checking with her paw to see if a burner is on.
 - 5. Motion below the chin: anchor tonguing?
 - 6. Not sure what part of the tongue your student is using? Use a Non-Toxic marker and a mirror.
 - 7. Flabby tone on high notes: keep the air stream fast. Slur first, use same air.
 - 8. Finger-tongue coordination. Practice difficult passages slurred first.

- IV. **General issues**
 - A. Intonation
 - 1. Primary adjustment of clarinet intonation is between barrel and upper stack, secondary adjustment is between upper stack and lower stack.
 - 2. General principle: short tube notes are more unstable and able to be adjusted with the embouchure than long tube notes.
 - 3. In fortissimo, single reed players tend to go flat, need to keep the embouchure firm. In pianissimo, players tend to go sharp, so relax the embouchure. This tendency is opposite many other sections of the band.
 - B. Effective equipment options
 - 1. Mouthpieces: stock mouthpieces are extremely inefficient.
 - a. Beginner/Intermediate Pyne Polycrystal, Hite Premiere, Fobes Debut (order a free one through www.clarkwfobes.com), Van Doren B45
 - b. Advanced: Van Doren M13, M15 or 5RV.
 - 2. Ligatures—regular or inverted.
 - a. Luyben ligature. Darkens tone quality and eases articulation.
 - 3. Reeds
 - a. Recommended Reed Brands:
 - 1. Beginner/Intermediate: Mitchell Lurie, La Voz,
 - 2. Intermediate/Advanced: Rico Royal, Van Doren (blue box)
 - 3. Advanced: Van Doren V-12 (gray box), Rico Grand Concert
 - b. Strength: increase strength as clarinet student plays higher and embouchure strengthens, altissimo requires 3.5 or higher.

- c. Care
 - 1. Store reeds flat and dry.
 - 2. Reeds prefer to be broken in slowly.
 - 3. A quick fix for a warped reed.

V. Additional resources:

A. Books:

1. Thomas Ridenour. *The Educator's Guide to the Clarinet: A Complete Guide to Teaching and Learning the Clarinet*. Denton, TX: Thomas Ridenour, 2000.
2. Carmine Campione. *Campione on Clarinet*. Fairfield, OH: John Ten-Ten Publishing.
3. Howard Klug. *The Clarinet Doctor*. Bloomington, IN: Woodwindiana, Inc.,
4. Larry Guy. *Embouchure Building for Clarinetists*. Rivernote Press, Fifth Edition, 2004.
5. Larry Guy. *Hand and Finger Development for Clarinetists*. Larry Guy, 2007

B. Web Sites:

1. International Clarinet Association www.clarinet.org
2. The Clarinet Pages www.woodwind.org/clarinet/
3. The Woodwind Fingering Chart www.wfg.woodwind.org
4. Van Doren www.vandoren.com : has a slideshow about how reeds are made from seed, and a reed brand/strength comparison chart.

VI. Clinician information:

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Gail Lehto Zuger, Associate Professor of Clarinet at the Capital University Conservatory of Music, joined the faculty in 1999. In addition to teaching applied clarinet, she directs the Clarinet Choir, coaches student wind chamber groups, teaches woodwind methods and performs with the Capital Winds Faculty Wind Quintet. She teaches during summers at the International Music Camp near Dunseith, ND. An active clinician, Dr. Zuger has presented clinics at the Eastern Division MENC conference in Providence, RI and at state MENC clinics in Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania and Minnesota. Zuger has appeared as soloist with the Capital University/Bexley Community Orchestra, Westerville (OH) Community Band, Westerville Symphony Orchestra and Capital University Symphonic Winds, and performed in recital at the 1998 International Clarinet Association.

Zuger is currently principal clarinet of the Newark-Granville (OH) Symphony Orchestra and second clarinet of the Ashland (OH) Symphony Orchestra. She has played with the Columbus, Roanoke (VA), Richmond (IN) and Lancaster (OH) symphony orchestras as well as the CAPA Broadway Show Series. She has performed with such noted popular artists as James Taylor, The Moody Blues, Michael McDonald and Joel Grey. She is a regular contributor to *The Clarinet*, the quarterly publication of the International Clarinet Association. Originally from Racine, Wisconsin, Dr. Zuger holds degrees from University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee and The Ohio State University. Her former teachers include James Pyne, Russell Dagon and Jack Snavely. Her hobbies include running, having finished 5 marathons and 19 half marathons, traveling and cooking. She is married to Dr. Thomas Zuger, Associate Professor of Trombone and Euphonium at Capital University, and is overjoyed at the arrival of their son, Nathan this past April 2010.