

Clarinet Tips

Sound Production:

Sound is vibration – of a string, say, or in the clarinet’s case a column of air. On the clarinet, the source of the air column’s vibration is the reed against the mouthpiece. Pitch is raised or lowered by opening or closing the tone holes along the body of the instrument, shortening or lengthening the air column.

Assembling your clarinet:

- ★ Reed in your mouth (or a jar of water) to moisten it.
- ★ Apply cork grease to all joint corks that require it.
- ★ Carefully and without squeezing rods, bell onto lower joint.
- ★ Lower and upper joints together – depress upper keys and watch key mechanism that connects the two halves so that it doesn’t get bent.
- ★ Barrel onto top joint.
- ★ Mouthpiece onto barrel, table (flat side) towards you opposite brand name. If it’s hard to get on, apply cork grease to the mouthpiece cork.
- ★ Ligature onto mouthpiece, fat end first, loosened screws on table side.
- ★ Slide moistened reed butt-first under ligature.
- ★ Centre reed on table and line up tip with the mouthpiece tip. Reed placement is very important.
- ★ Top of ligature just below cut part of reed. Tighten screws firmly but not too tight.

Sitting with your clarinet:

The angle of the instrument should be around 45 degrees from your torso.

Keep the hands as relaxed as possible.

Cover the tone holes with the pads of your fingers. If you are squeaking, look at your fingers and check the ring marks on the fingers’ pads. If one is incomplete, that finger is not sealing its tone hole.

Getting a Great Clarinet Sound

1. Breathing

- ★ Sit or stand with great posture
- ★ Drop your jaw and inhale through the mouth
- ★ Fill lungs from bottom up, as a pitcher fills with water
- ★ Exhale from top to bottom
- ★ (See exercises below)

2. Embouchure

- ★ Say “vee”. The spot on your lower lip where your teeth touch the lip is where the reed should touch it, too.
- ★ Pretend your thumb is the mouthpiece: insert until cuticle reaches lower lip, gently rest top teeth on thumb.
- ★ Now, smile the corners of the mouth until the lips are sealed around the thumb/mouthpiece. Squeeze. Relax. Find a medium-firm embouchure.
- ★ Drop the jaw to inhale deeply. Close the embouchure and exhale. Try to blow your thumb out of your mouth, but use just enough embouchure pressure to keep it in.
- ★ Try the same procedure with just the barrel and mouthpiece: create the embouchure the same way. Inhale deeply. Exhale cool air into the clarinet.
- ★ Keep cheeks relaxed but firm.

3. Articulation (using the tongue)

- ★ Always begin a note with the tongue unless it is contained by a slur.
- ★ Inhale. Exhale and say “tee tee tee”, keeping a steady air stream. This is the concept you want.
- ★ Contact the reed near the tip. There is no need to seal off the opening, simply touch the reed with the tip of your tongue to stop the vibration.
- ★ Once you get the hang of the embouchure and articulation on the barrel and mouthpiece, add the whole clarinet.

Clarinet Practice Routine Warm-up

This warm up will only take 5 minutes and it is critical to your development as a wind player. If you only have 5 minutes to practice (how can you not?), do this.

1. Breathing (see exercises below). At home, you can soak your reed in water while you do this so it will be ready for step 2.
2. Long tones on mouthpiece and barrel. Play “tee - - -” for a full breath. Continue this until the embouchure feels right and the sound is steady. Then “tee - tee -”. Then “tee tee tee tee,” keeping the sound steady as you tongue.
3. Assemble the clarinet and do step 2 on an open G. Now do it on middle B. Now do it on low C. High G.

Done. That wasn't so bad, was it?

Breathing Exercises

1.
 - ★ Lie on your back on the floor
 - ★ Place a book on your stomach
 - ★ Inhale, lifting the book
 - ★ Exhale with a “hissss”, keeping the book up as long as possible
 - ★ Repeat 3 times
2. Inhale deeply. Exhale “ha ha ha ha ha ha ha”. Repeat 3 times.
3. Inhale deeply. Exhale “tee - - -” with cool air as though to cool down your food. Repeat 3 times.