

Teaching The Other Woodwinds

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Many teachers are hesitant to work in depth with woodwinds other than their own because they fear not knowing enough to teach the other instruments "correctly." Actually, all the woodwinds are closer to each other than most realize. Aside from a few idiosyncrasies, the basics of playing all the instruments are the same.

The basics are: plenty of strong air (fast hiss); a consistent, efficient embouchure; make the mouth as big a resonating chamber as possible; and keep the fingers relaxed & close to the keys.

Amazingly enough, the biggest problems that students have are with the basics:

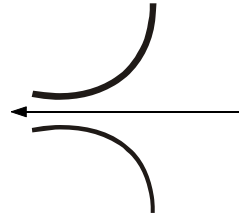
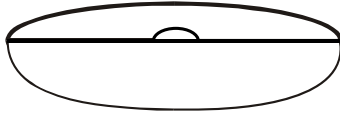
- Air pressure is generally weak and slow. This greatly affects the pitch, especially on the flutes and oboe.
- While students can make proper embouchure for a short period of time, consistency is a problem.
- Because of embouchure endurance issues, the student clamps the mouth creating a weak tone quality.
- Finger movement is erratic and inefficient.

The main differences are in embouchure formation and holding the instrument.

	Lip Pressure	Lip Direction	Key Balance Points
Flute	5. Least	Forward	Left Hand
Oboe	1. Most	Normal	Lips/Rt hand
Bassoon	2.	Slightly In	Crutch
Clarinet	3.	Slightly In Pressure against teeth	Rt Hand/ Mouth
Saxophone	4.	Slightly In Slight pressure against teeth	Neck Strap

The ensuing pages will outline the differences in the embouchures and give specific, helpful tips for each instrument. At the beginning of each section, the basic concept of the embouchure is diagramed. Following this is a chart showing how to go from the other woodwinds to the instrument discussed. These will help the teacher gain confidence in their ability to help all their woodwind students.

FLUTE



	Oboe	Bassoon	Clarinet	Saxophone
Flute	*Lips forward *Relax corners	*Lips forward *Relax corners *Small hole w/upper lip	*Lips forward *Relax upper lip *Small hole w/upper lip	*Lips forward *Relax upper lip *Small hole w/upper lip

No Pressure against lips

- Lips forward like Daffy Duck [Nyfinger's concept is to make lips long like a rifle barrel]
- Rockstro Method of aligning headjoint [edge of hole with the middle of the key hole] helps stabilization so pressing the instrument into lips is not necessary.

Range

- Think of lip plate as a wall and direct the air stream to different parts of the wall according to tessitura (low, think bottom of wall; high, think top part of wall)
- Constant fast air stream for upper range

Roll down for consistency of placement

- Flute just below red of lip
- Lip placement affects intonation [drastically on piccolo]

Focus attention on creating aperture with top lip, not bottom

Tonguing

- Tongue against base of upper teeth [tonguing on lips can work against a good aperture]
- Not a heavy stroke
- Beginner's lips get tired with a lot of tonguing

Fingerings in upper register awkward

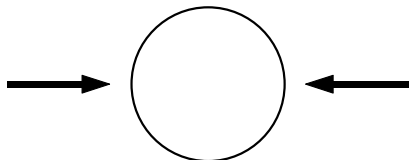
Intonation

- Sharp on high notes

PICCOLO

- Piccolo on the red of lip
- Small movements make big differences with intonation
- Fast air pressure constantly
- Recommend earplugs when practicing (at least for the right ear – rubber cones will reduce harmful sounds without blocking all sound)

OBOE



	Flute	Bassoon	Clarinet	Saxophone
Oboe	*Corners in *Lips regular	*Lips regular *Smaller reed *Slightly more teeth pressure	*Corners in *Lips regular *No teeth pressure	*Corners in *Lips regular *No teeth pressure

Reed placement

- Instrument more horizontal than vertical gives equal pressure against both top and bottom parts of reed
- One side of reed responds better than other – mark the cork

Embouchure

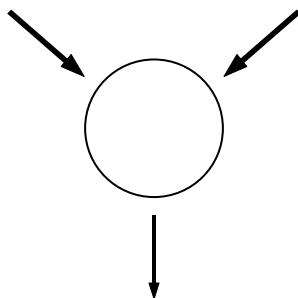
- Lips normal – curled in gives a muted (warmer) sound but losses flexibility/response in fast passages and large intervals
- No teeth pressure against the reed. Lips act as a firm cushion
- Focus on corners in – the natural tendency is to pinch the reed, cutting off the sound; pulling the corners in counteracts this
- Focus light tonguing on bottom reed

Intonation

- Lips get tired quickly, especially for beginners
- Upper tessitura – use more reed in mouth

Alternate fingerings will help facilitate awkward passages

CLARINET



	Flute	Oboe	Bassoon	Saxophone
Clarinet	*Bottom lip in *More emphasis on top lip *Strong Lip pressure against teeth	*Bottom lip slightly in *Emphasis on top lip *More Lip pressure against teeth	*Bottom lip slightly in *Emphasis on top lip *Much More Lip pressure against teeth	*Lips similar – slightly less bottom lip *Slight more pressure against teeth *Higher voicing

Embouchure

- Curl little lip – red showing
- Teeth pressure against lip
- Focus on upper lip – the harder pressed down, the better the groove in the lower lip
- Bad embouchure will cause the pitch to be low
- Pitch on mouthpiece alone is concert “C” – when beginners first start forming a correct embouchure, they are generally higher than “C”
- Voicing with tongue – thinking “Eee” arches the tongue for proper airflow in mouth. Upper register (“G” top of staff and above) require a high “Eee” while the rest of the instrument range uses a low “Eee” voicing.
- Squeaking – if squeak is frequent, the reed is crooked. Check the bottom part of the reed for straightness.

Tonguing

- Focus where the tongue is striking the reed rather than where on the tongue. If they hit it properly (edge of the reed) the correct part of the tongue will be used.
- Less tongue stroke is used in the upper tessitura

Hand Position

- Use finger nails covering the holes as a guide for beginners; often, their fingers are too skinny to use the fingertips. They can use their nails to cover the holes and still have their fingers arched.
- Have the cuticle underneath the thumbrest. The tendency is to have the thumb way under the thumbrest, which causes bad/slow finger technique.
- Left hand should be angled & right hand straight – students generally have it the other way around.
- “A” key should be used by the top side of the first knuckle on the left index finger.

E-flat CLARINET

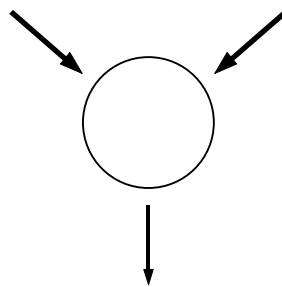
- More red of lip showing than soprano
- Voicing always a high “Eee”

- Upper tessitura requires super fast air
- Light tongue stroke on articulation
- Slight movements will drastically affect pitch – embouchure has to be rock solid and not move at all

BASS CLARINET

- Embouchure is more similar to the tenor sax than the soprano clarinet – more lip covering reed but red still showing
- Voicing is lower than soprano – low “Eee”
- Difficult section of instrument – “G” on top of staff up to high “C”

SAXOPHONE



	Flute	Oboe	Bassoon	Clarinet
Saxophone	*Bottom lip slightly in *More emphasis on top lip *Strong Lip pressure against teeth	*Bottom lip slightly in *Emphasis on top lip *Slight more Lip pressure against teeth	*Bottom lip slightly in *Emphasis on top lip *More Lip pressure against teeth	*Lips similar – slightly less bottom lip *Slight less pressure against teeth *Lower voicing

Embouchure

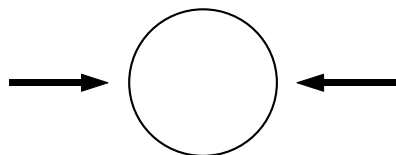
- Curl little lip – red showing
- Little teeth pressure against lip – more open than clarinet
- Focus on upper lip – the harder pressed down, the better the groove in the lower lip
- Bad embouchure will cause the pitch to be low
- Pitch on mouthpiece alone is concert “A” for alto, “G” for tenor, and “C” for soprano – when beginners first start forming a correct embouchure, they are generally high
- Voicing with tongue – thinking “Eee” arches the tongue for proper airflow in mouth for upper register (“G” top of staff and above) The rest of the time use “Ooo”
- Squeaking – if squeak is frequent, the reed is crooked. Check the bottom part of the reed for straightness.
- Range – if embouchure is correct, low notes and high notes respond easily.

Tonguing

- Focus where the tongue is striking the reed rather than where on the tongue. If they hit it properly (edge of the reed) the correct part of the tongue will be used.
- Less tongue stroke is used in the upper tessitura

Adjust neckstrap so mouthpiece enters mouth naturally with the head straight (normal)

BASSOON



	Flute	Oboe	Clarinet	Saxophone
Bassoon	*Lips in *Corners in *More open	*Lips slightly in *More open	*Top lip slightly in *Corners in *More open – No teeth pressure	*Top lip slightly in *Corners in *No teeth pressure

Reed placement

- Bocal should enter mouth straight, not at an angle
- One side of reed responds better than other – mark the cork

Embouchure

- Lips normal – curled in gives a muted (warmer) sound but losses flexibility/response in fast passages and large intervals
- No teeth pressure against the reed. Lips act as a firm cushion
- Jaw more open
- Focus on corners in – the natural tendency is to pinch the reed, cutting off the sound; pulling corners in counteracts this
- Focus light tonguing on bottom reed
- Voicing with tongue – thinking “Eee” arches the tongue for proper airflow in upper register

Intonation

- Lips get tired quickly, especially in beginners