

NCMEA BAND CLINIC: FLUTE PEDAGOGY SESSION

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ALL ROADS LEAD TO TONE The success of all foundational flute playing skills depends on the player's "embouchure geometry." Don't hesitate to help students refine the physical parameters of mouth set-up. Checklist for the basics:

- Goal = Stability with Flexibility
- Jaw is dropped/relaxed (pronounce the word "OH" theatrically)
- Breathe *and Play* with the throat in "Yawn" position
- Aim for *Low Corners*, NOT *High Corners*
- Top and bottom lips are supple (pronounce the word "pure" to experience lip flex)
- Aperture is oval/elliptical and is the appropriate size for register
- Airstream travels across smooth, inner surface off the lips
- Cover 1/3-1/2 of the embouchure hole with the lower lip
- Lips parallel to embouchure plate

THE FLUTE IS BALANCED, NOT HELD Look for good contact at each of the 4 balance points.

- Thumbs: Prevent the right hand thumb from poking out too far underneath the body of the flute. (use the right hand "C shape" ex. to find each student's custom thumb position). Play with a straight/not curved left hand thumb.
- Wrists: left hand/ "4pm" position; right hand/reaching up to lay a book down flat on a high shelf (angle slightly smaller than 180°)

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MOVING PARTS: MODEL T OR MERCEDES

Except for thumbs, aim for all fingers to be curved, close to the keys and move *smoothly*
Encourage the use of the two, principal speed and mechanical facilitators: Thumb Bb key and Side Lever Bb key

- Thumb Bb key:
 - * Eliminates complex finger combos in flat keys.
 - * Best to transition to Thumb Bb key use *after* a note NOT using the standard thumb key mechanism [e.g. middle register C/Db (C5/Db5); high C/Db (C6/Db6); high G/Ab (G6, Ab6)] rather than *sliding* over to the Thumb Bb key.
 - * The only note incompatible with the Thumb Bb key is high F# (F#6)
- Side Lever Bb key:
 - * Allows the smoothest combination between B and A# *in a chromatic scale or in a chromatic motivic context.*

THE TONGUE IS A VALVE, NOT A HAMMER Be on the lookout for the “creative” ways that flutists often articulate:

- “TUT” / Slap Tonguing (hear the tongue stop the note with a “thud”)
- Tonguing beyond the aperture (lizard looking!)
- Throat/Glottal articulating (excess throat noise)
- Air articulating (“Hoo, Hoo, Hoo”)
- Excess jaw/lip movement (chewing motion)
- Anchor tonguing (the most subtle—lacks the ability to achieve a clear, precise note beginning)

*Articulate using “TA” or “TOO” syllable and *tongue tip placement compatible with register (and best sound)*

General Rule for Tongue Tip Placement:

Low Register: (C4-C5) tongue just behind the front, top teeth (where teeth meet gum)

Middle Register: (C5-C6) tongue a bit more forward (think “between the teeth”)

High Register: (C6-C7) tongue between the teeth or a bit more forward, still!

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THE FLUTE AND THE “I” WORD (intonation)

Low Register -- C4 (middle C) through C5

C4-F#4: Long air column notes = sluggish in vibrating, so can tend flat

G4-Bb4: Moderate length air column notes are most stable

B4-C5: Short air column notes = vibrate easily, so can tend sharp

Middle register -- C5 through C6

D5-F#5: Long air column notes = sluggish in vibrating, so can tend flat.

G5-Bb5: Moderate air column notes are most stable

B5-C6: Short air column notes = vibrate easily, so can tend sharp

High register -- C6-C7 = overall, this register is sharp, but I didn't need to tell you that!

The grand prize winner for worst intonation tendency (sharp!!!): C#/Db5 and C#/Db6

COPING WITH PITCH ADJUSTING

This is a good time to reference the opening phrase, “All Roads Lead To Tone.” When the jaw is very relaxed and open, and the top lip is supple, the embouchure can flex enough to accommodate all registers.

Tempering Sharpness: Create more space inside the mouth by forming the vowel AH or OH and aiming the airstream more downward.

Tempering Flatness: Create less space inside the mouth by forming the vowel EH or EE and aiming the airstream only slightly upward (too far up and not enough air energy is entering the instrument, so won't provide the “voltage” necessary to keep the air column vibrating and the note responding)

NOTES MOST COMMONLY MIS-FINGERED BY FLUTISTS

Hands-down, these are:

D5/Eb5: Be sure left hand index finger is *vented* !

E5: Be sure right hand pinky is down (esp. in ascending combos with D5)

*Ironically, mis-fingering these three pitches results in the same challenges:

Diffuse tone quality and slight sag in pitch (both of which are subtle, so often go undetected, and then become reinforced into a strong habit)