IS IT TIME FOR A CHECKUP?

GIVE YOUR OBOE BASICS A BOOST

ALICIA CHAPMAN
MARIAM CANNON HAYES SCHOOL OF MUSIC
APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

EMBOUCHURE

The most important "basic" of oboe playing is teaching the young player a stable, supportive embouchure that allows the reed to vibrate freely.

Easy-to-find syllables put the facial muscles in the best position for making a good embouchure:

1. "ooo" (as in "food") pushes the lips forward.

2. while lips are forward, "errr" firms the embouchure around the reed.
   a. corners of the mouth stay forward and drawn inward (think "drawstring purse").
   b. the chin now flattens and appears pointed, not rounded or "bunched."

3. "mmm" rolls the lips a natural amount over the teeth. Remember that lips vary in size and thickness, so this is the point where all embouchures do not look the same. They will, however, share the features of the flat chin and a cushiony grip around the reed.

Embouchures function most effectively when:

- oriented forward, not as in smiling
- cushioning the reed
- the chin remains flat, firm, stable

Tone quality, intonation, and articulation clarity are directly influenced by the embouchure. It is well worth the time it takes to shape the student's understanding of the necessity of a correct embouchure.

4. Make sure the reed is not too hard.

embouchure pressure this way:

not this way:

ARTICULATION

The tone is begun by releasing the tongue from the reed, not by the tongue striking the reed. Oboe students must develop the awareness of where the tongue hits the reed within the mouth. Most often it requires moving the tongue further back than one realizes, so that the tip of the tongue has contact with the tip of the reed.

Tonguing too far down on the reed results in the "tha" or "thwa" articulation, undermining clarity and speed.

The air column must stay fully engaged behind the reed, supporting not only the tone, but the action of the tongue while articulating.

Remember:

1. The tip of the tongue on the tip of the reed for a clear, secure start to a note.

2. **"Tah"** keeps the tongue low and the inside shape of the mouth open for a good combination of clarity and resonance. Keep the tip of the tongue on the tip of the reed. **"Tee"** raises the tongue inside the mouth, making the resonance area more compact, and it best used for tonguing faster passages. Keep the tip of the tongue on the tip of the reed.

3. **"Dah"** softens the low note entrances and helps keep a smooth legato in softer passages. Keep the tip of the tongue on the tip of the reed.

4. "Tha" or "Thwa" results when tonguing below the top 1/4 of the reed.

5. Make sure the reed is not too hard.

Embouchure pressure will influence the quality of articulation

this way:

not this way:

INTONATION

Encourage the young oboist's understanding that they are responsible for the quality of their intonation; the reed cannot do it all!

The quality and resonance of the tone will have a direct impact on the student's ability to play in the center or "core" of their tone, which is essential for reliable, consistent, and correct intonation. A very challenging "basic" in conjunction with learning to control the reed.

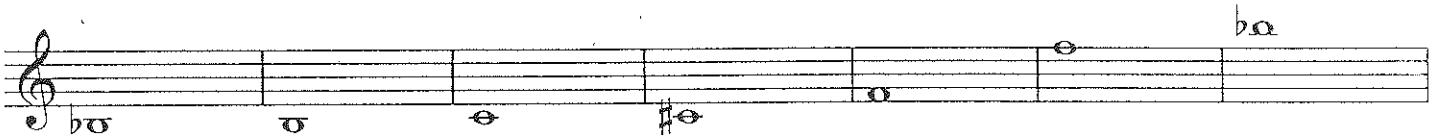
Here are some quick tuning tips:

Slight adjustments made with the embouchure can make a big difference. Here are some quick tuning tips:

1. for sharp notes:

   a. use less embouchure pressure
   b. magnify the shape of the syllables "ooo" and "errr"
   c. open the teeth about 1/4 inch
   d. shift the reed out of the mouth slightly (a millimeter makes a bit difference!) - this "lengthens" the oboe. In addition, the student will be playing on the tip of the reed where they will have greater control, away from the bark on the back of the reed
   e. replace the reed with one that has a bigger opening

2. for flat notes:



   a. increase the "support" or grip around the reed, not down upon the reed. *no biting*
   b. shift the reed into the mouth; a slight amount makes a good difference
   c. replace the reed with one that has a smaller opening

BREATHING

Oboists must learn to exhale. A good intake of air is required to start, support, and sustain the tone on the oboe. The young student must learn to exhale, releasing the stale, de-oxygenated air that remains in the lungs.

Encourage a beat of exhale before a beat of inhaling, i.e. for a piece or solo in 4/4 time: exhale on 3, inhale on 4, play on beat 1, etc.

In some instances it is essential that breathing be planned, for example: in a quarter rest an exhale/inhale pattern takes place in one beat. Or, exhale on that particular quarter rest, or natural break in the phrase, and inhale on the subsequent rest or natural break.

The air column stays fully engaged behind the reed.

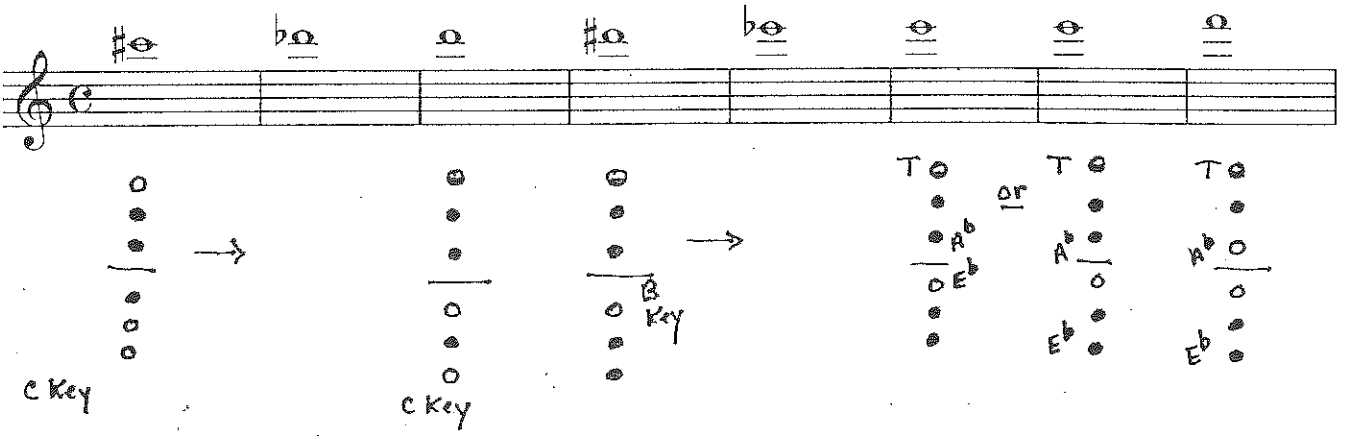
HAND POSITION BASICS

The stretch between the fingers, especially of the left hand, can prove challenging to young hands. The tendencies to watch from the start:

1. 4th finger (ring finger) in both hands that are straight and locked.
2. Index fingers that are basically straight, with the first knuckle (behind fingernail) locked.
3. Locked pinkies, also pinkies that are attempting to "hold up" the instrument.

The 3 contact points are the right thumb at the thumb rest, the left thumb resting on the oboe just under the octave key, and the reed while resting on the bottom lip. The oboist's left hand and arm are be free to move, and do not carry the weight of the instrument.

CORRECT HIGH NOTE FINGERINGS



THE RELIABLE OBOE REED

Buying oboe reeds without the opportunity to try them is a process of trial and error over time while the young player is learning to discern what will and won't work for them. Additionally, what is comfortable, easy to articulate, and produces an acceptable tone may vary greatly between players. Reeds are as individual as the oboist's preferences are.

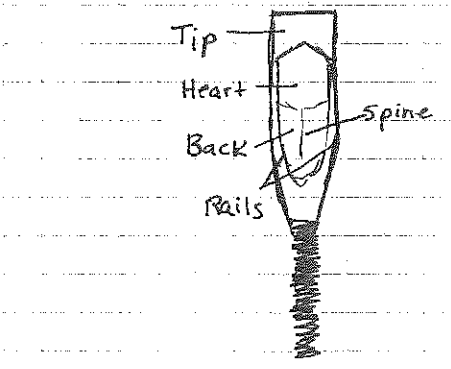
When choosing a reed at the store, ask the salesperson to remove the reed from the tube or case, if possible, so that you or the student may look at the size of the opening. Young players should be starting out on MS reeds. The advancing student will have the best results on MS or M reeds. The MH reed should be reserved for players who are able to produce a quality tone with a well-established embouchure.

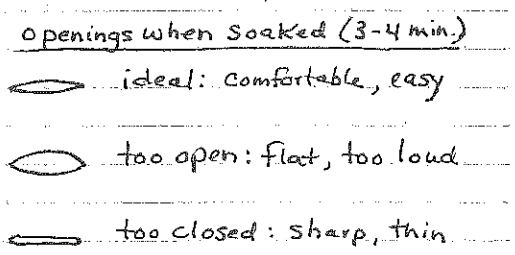
When buying reeds online, go with softer reeds to start. Try several different brands to and see what feels best to the student, while producing the qualities you are looking for in the ensemble.

*** Remember: the reed will only do so much of the work. It is most important to instill the understanding that the student him or herself is very much responsible for discovering what it takes to make the reed play.

The opening of the reed when dry is an important indicator, because after soaking the opening will open in size. Here are the basic, three choices of reed opening. Different students will handle reed size in varying ways. One size in this instance will never fit all.

But, generally:





(reeds, continued)

1. Reeds crow in the vicinity of C. This is a general rule of thumb. There are exceptions, but most often, a reed that crows excessively sharp will play sharp, and a reed that crows excessively flat will play flat once in the oboe.

2. Response: the number one criteria of the reed test. The reed must respond easily and immediately. Otherwise the reed is too hard for the student.

3. Articulation and dynamics: the reed alone must articulate easily and clearly, and dynamic flexibility must be evident. Reeds lacking these qualities are magnified once in the oboe.

4. Oboe reeds are "played out" much more quickly than bassoon reeds. The oboist should not play on the same reed every day if the life of the reed is to last past a week or two. Alternating between 3 reeds will dramatically lend life to the reed, and replacing reeds need only happen once a month or every six weeks. By alternating, oboists begin to develop the ability to make more than one reed sound good.

Prolong the life of a reed by:

1. Alternating reeds.
2. Keep food out of the reed.
3. Blow excess moisture out of the reed before putting away.
4. Store in a ventilated reed case – mold will ruin a reed in an airtight container.
5. Take care against chipping, or hitting the reed by accident.

And, an important last thought:

Replace reeds that do not function well. Oboists will be much more comfortable, and they will blend into the ensembles much better.

QUICK REFERENCE SHEET
For school directors

- Carefully align bridge keys when assembling the oboe.
- Soak the reed only 3 – 4 minutes.
- The reed alone crows easily around "C " and responds immediately to articulation.
- Form the embouchure in front of the teeth by saying "ooo" (as in food), "errr" and then "mmm" around the reed.
- Lips cushion the reed.
- Teeth are generally ½" apart.
- Articulate with the tip of the tongue on the tip of the reed.
- Press the air stream (air column) directly behind the reed to support the sound.
- Open the teeth and use faster air for forte.
- Slightly close the teeth and maintain air support for piano.
- Fingers curved, knuckles toward the ceiling, palms close to the instrument.