

Improving Tone Quality

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What does it take to make good tone?

Teacher's priority

- Has to be a priority every day
- A developing process over time (responsibility at every level of teaching)
- Use one good note as a model for matching other pitches
- Make students aware: beginning of the note—middle—end of note

Equipment in good shape

- Parts of the instrument closer to your head affect tone to a greater degree (mouthpiece, reeds, bocal, etc.)
- Pads, water key corks must seal
- Percussion in working order with appropriate heads and beaters

Posture

- As close to standing as you can be while seated
- Head up, neck tall, shoulders down, body soft/relaxed, back straight, feet flat
- Instrument position/angle should not disturb posture—instrument comes to body, not body to instrument

Air

- Fast, concentrated, steady
- Exercises to help students know what their air does
- Breathing should be natural, no tension created
- Breathing should be part of the music that follows

Embouchure

- An acceptable embouchure can and MUST be taught from day one, then it develops and is refined for several years (with guidance)
- Say little, do much while teaching embouchure (do it in steps)
- Teacher must know what to look for and what to listen for
- Learn to teach embouchure in an additive manner rather than subtractive

Good models

- Recordings of outstanding performers
- Live performance by people with good sounds

Miscellaneous

Articulation should not change or damage tone. (Maximize tone, minimize tongue)

Players must be on task for any of this to work

Exercises which help tone:

Any tone-matching exercise, if teacher applies a high standard of listening

Any long tone exercises, if the teacher applies a high standard of listening

Lip slurs (brass) if the teacher applies a high standard of listening

Flow-type studies, if the teacher applies a high standard of listening

Chorales, if the teacher applies a high standard of listening

When tone becomes a teacher's first priority, the teacher will begin to discover tone exercises everywhere, in rhythmic and technical music as well as lyrical music.

Individual Embouchures

Flute

Forehead parallel to wall, embouchure plate parallel to the floor

It's all about air direction! Flute playing is about "out and up"

Say "pure" or "pooh," with top lip flat on teeth

Close lips and blow one grain of rice out the lips to create a small circle of air

Find "sweet spot" by moving left/right, up/down in/out

Inner edge of lip plate contacts face about 1/16" below where lip and skin meet

Bottom lip relaxed, covers about 1/4 to 1/3 of the opening in the embouchure plate

Focus air where the wet and dry meet (inside the mouth)

Use corners of embouchure to adjust for range/intonation (NEVER roll in/out)

Oboe

Correct angle approximately 45°

Biggest problem: too much top-to-bottom pressure: strive for roundness with corners forward

Bassoon

Instrument position should put bocal into mouth naturally, slight downward angle

Biggest problem: too much top-to-bottom pressure: strive for roundness with corners forward

Clarinet

Correct angle approximately 30°

Must have good reed (mouthpiece, ligature)

Biting a common problem

Find sweet spot: take in mouthpiece until it overblows a 12th, then back off a bit

Work with mouthpiece and barrel to achieve concert f# (top line on staff)

Index finger on top teeth, push down with top lip
Top lip is so overlooked! It helps make center and resonance if firm
Corners in to third tooth (fang); corners forward
Push up with thumbs to wedge mouthpiece in place

Bass clarinet

Should have same angle as Bb clarinet
Drop jaw: "suspended" feeling help focus clarion register and frees altissimo
Corners in and forward like Bb: top lip firm like Bb
Should use strap and peg for best support of instrument

Saxophone

Sax comes to student, not student to sax: adjust neckstrap
Right thumb does not push the sax forward
Strive for roundness of embouchure, corners forward

Brass

Teeth apart
Mouthpiece sounds build ear-training and flexibility
Lip slurs (downward first before attempting upward)
Pitch bends
Face still when note starts and stops

Trumpet

50/50 (generally) for top and bottom lips
Angle close to 90°, but less than (overbite may dictate somewhat)
Say "M" and blow lips apart
Strive to keep top lip flat

Horn

2/3 upper lip, 1/3 lower lip
Angle close to 45°
Say "M" and blow lips apart
Hand position in bell for proper tone quality

Trombone/Euphonium

50/50 (generally) for top and bottom lips
Angle close to 90°, but less than (overbite may dictate somewhat)
Say "M" and blow lips apart

Tuba

50/50 (generally) for top and bottom lips
Angle close to 90°, but less than (overbite may dictate somewhat)