

MMEA 2016
Five Steps to Clarinet Section Success
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In addition to welcoming a new class of single reed majors each year, I visit many school music programs. Through my visits, talks with band directors, and experiences with my first year college students, a consistent set of issues and questions has emerged. This session will contain tips and resources focused on that set of issues, organized into five major areas of clarinet playing and teaching.

“I will also remind teachers that perseverance and persistence are the primordial requirement in teaching. A pupil will learn one thing correctly to forget it immediately when encountering another obstacle in the hard path of learning.” –Daniel Bonade, *Clarinetist’s Compendium*

Five Steps/Areas

I. Embouchure and voicing

“...the most important factor in creating beautiful tone is the ability to form and control the embouchure and to maintain the correct position of the tongue in the mouth while playing – whether tonguing or slurring.” Julie DeRoche, *Clarinet Basics*

II. Hand Position/posture

“The positions of the body and hands have an important influence over the ease with which we play the clarinet. Perhaps the most important teaching we do in this area is with beginners, and the way in which they adopt a physical approach to the instrument is critical for their growth and essential part of the foundation of early instruction.” Howard Klug, *The Clarinet Doctor*

III. Fingerings

“I will not try here to describe every conceivable fingering that occurs in playing clarinet, but I will forewarn some teachers, who are not careful enough to insist on making beginners employ correct fingerings, that they simply will create a lot of inconvenience later on for their students as far as clean playing and fast technique is concerned.” Daniel Bonade, *Clarinetist’s Compendium*

IV. Articulation

“Many clarinetists have a great deal of difficulty with articulation on the instrument. This is because it is one of the most misunderstood aspects of clarinet pedagogy. Students go through tremendous difficulties trying to create a good articulation and, ironically, are often working too hard.” Julie DeRoche, *Clarinet Basics*

V. Equipment

“Most of us who teach have opened our students’ clarinet cases to find broken or moldy reeds, missing screws, dirty, dusty tone holes or bent keys. Often, these problems are the very reasons that our students have trouble learning to perform well.” Julie DeRoche, *Clarinet Basics*

Mouthpiece Exercises for embouchure and voicing

A relatively quick and easy way to assess students' embouchure, voicing and air is to have them play on the mouthpiece alone or on the mouthpiece and barrel. First, match the standard pitches.

Bflat soprano clarinet

Bass clarinet

Musical notation for mouthpiece exercises. The first staff is for Bflat soprano clarinet, showing a pitch on the mouthpiece only. The second staff is for Bass clarinet, showing a pitch on the mouthpiece and barrel. The third staff is for Bass clarinet, showing a pitch on the mouthpiece only.

Voicing Exercise: Start on the mouthpiece pitch and slide down as far as possible, then back up, with an eventual goal of a fifth.

Musical notation for a voicing exercise. It starts with a pitch on the mouthpiece and slides down as far as possible, then back up, with an eventual goal of a fifth.

Advanced voicing exercise: slide with more precision, by half-step.

Musical notation for an advanced voicing exercise. It shows a series of half-step slides, starting from a mouthpiece pitch and moving down and then back up.

OR

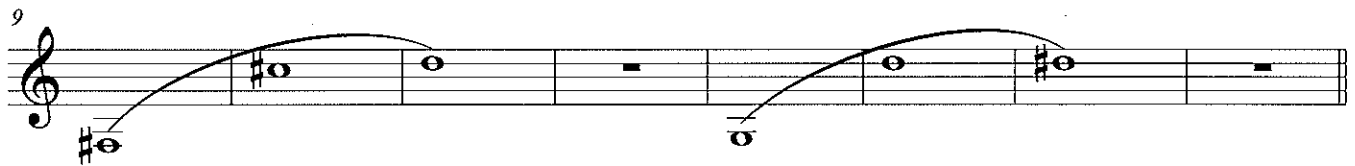
Musical notation for an advanced voicing exercise. It shows a series of half-step slides, starting from a mouthpiece pitch and moving down and then back up.

Baffoni

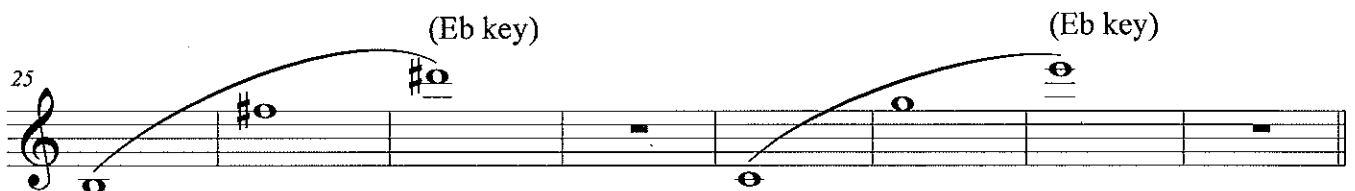
Recommended clarinet long tones

Each of these exercises should be executed with a focus on steady embouchure and fast air, as well as attention to the amount and angle of the mouthpiece. Recommended tempo of quarter = 60.

1. Twelfths warmup

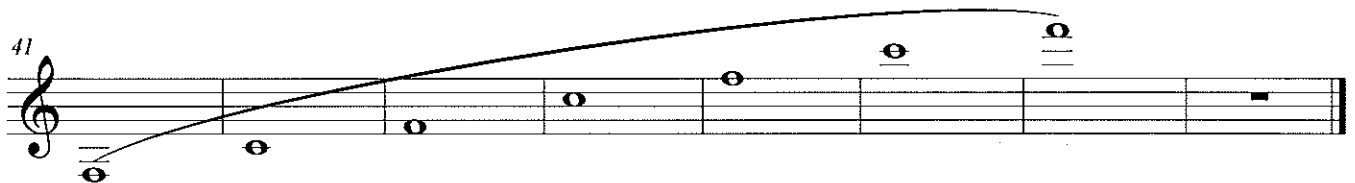
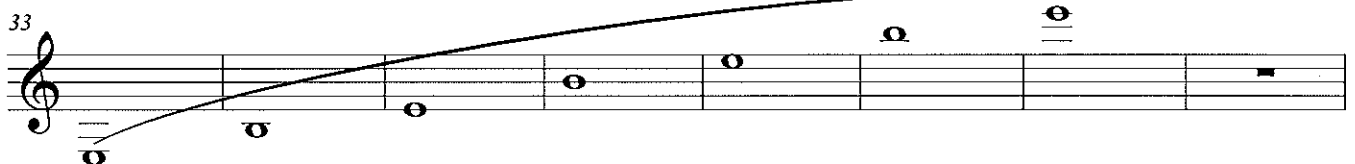


2. Altissimo



use chromatic
B fingering

3. Tonic and dominant



(...starting on F#, G, etc)

Fingering Exercises

Consistent and thoughtful practice of scales, arpeggios and etudes is of course the foundation for the development of solid technique and fingerings. We've discussed resources for this type of material in today's session. Here are two additional exercises, introduced to me by my undergraduate clarinet professor Dave Seiler, that had a significant impact on my own clarinet technique.


1. Little Finger exercises for the right and left hand. Strive to maintain independent little finger movement.

Use all right hand fingerings



A musical staff in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. It contains a sequence of 12 eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3. The notes are grouped into three measures of four notes each. A slur covers the entire sequence. The piece ends with a repeat sign and a final 3/4 time signature.


4 Use all left hand fingerings



A musical staff in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. It contains a sequence of 12 eighth notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2. The notes are grouped into three measures of four notes each. A slur covers the entire sequence. The piece ends with a repeat sign and a final 4/4 time signature.

2. Left hand exercise for limited wrist movement. Anchor left hand little finger on B/E key.

7

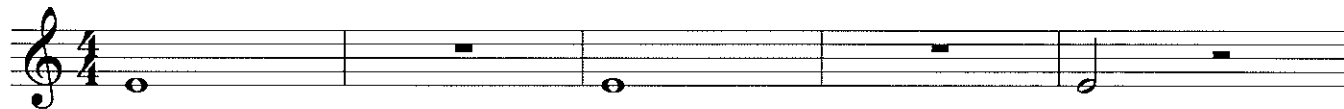


A musical staff in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. It contains a sequence of seven notes: G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2. The notes are grouped into three measures: the first measure has G3 and F3, the second has E3 and D3, and the third has C3, B2, and A2. A slur covers the entire sequence. The piece ends with a repeat sign.

...gradually increase speed.

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Articulation Exercises

1. On any comfortable note, start with a breath attack ("hee" or similar), then after a few seconds stop the reed with the tongue. Keep the air support constant, so that when the tongue is released, the air resumes instantly. Continue with this pattern, gradually gaining speed until tonguing is rapid and even.



"Hee"stop reed, keep air.....release air.....stop reed.....release...etc.



...increasing speed.

2. Bursts: descending F Major scale is a comfortable place to start, but this type of pattern can be used throughout the range, in a variety of keys.



3. Gradual slur-legato-staccato warm up: connects air to staccato and reinforces tongue/finger relationships, especially when used in a range of keys.



When comfortable in the chalumeau register, this exercise can be repeated up the twelfth for an added challenge:



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Selected resources with annotations
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The following list of resources is by no means exhaustive, but includes the sources discussed in today's presentation. I feel that each contains exercises or information that would prove useful to any educator whose goal is superior clarinet instruction. As specifics on equipment and pedagogical ideas evolve, there remains one vital resource not listed below: clarinet players and teachers in your area. As one of these, I am happy to offer any assistance I can, and can be reached at gbaffoni@semo.edu.

Books

Albert, J.B. *24 Varied Scales and Exercises for Clarinet*. Carl Fischer.

This scale book presents all major and melodic minor scales and arpeggios in short, varied patterns. The player must make a choice of left or right fingerings in many cases, reinforcing the use of both sets of fingerings. Of special interest are the scales in groups of seven, and half step exercises (second and third from the bottom of each page).

Bonade, Daniel. *Clarinetist's compendium*. Leblanc Educational publications.

Daniel Bonade was a huge influence on the American clarinetists of the twentieth century, including Anthony Gigliotti, Robert Marcellus and Mitchel Lurie. This brief text illuminates Bonade's perspective on various topics relating to playing and teaching clarinet. I have found the sections on staccato articulation and reeds to be especially useful.

Klosé, H. *Celebrated Method for Clarinet*. Carl Fischer.

Though this is a comprehensive method and not likely to be used in a general band setting, there are several short "Practical Exercises" that may prove very useful. As discussed, these one-measure excerpts isolate issues of hand position and fingering choices, often with opportunities to alternate left and right little fingers.

Klug, Howard. *The Clarinet Doctor*. Woodwindiana, Inc.

Indiana University clarinet professor and pedagogue Howard Klug has compiled a comprehensive guide to approaching the teaching of the clarinet, including precollege and university level information. He includes a wealth of troubleshooting information and even includes a quiz at the end of the book to test your pedagogical knowledge. I find his approach to describing embouchure characteristics and issues particularly useful.

Ridenour, Thomas. *Clarinet Fingerings: A Comprehensive Guide for the Performer and Educator*. www.ridenourclarinetproducts.com

Though much of this text concerns altissimo fingerings, there are sections devoted to throat tone fingerings and to “homogenizing the middle break” that will be of particular interest to teachers of younger students. In addition, each fingering from B² onward has an annotation with particular strengths or weaknesses of the fingering and suggested repertoire uses.

Recommended Online Resources and Blogs

www.bretpimentel.com

Dr. Bret Pimentel, woodwind professor at Delta State University, provides resources and insight into the issues facing the playing and teaching of woodwind instruments, including the handout on voicing used in today’s presentation. He addresses topics of interest to music students as well.

www.wfg.woodwind.org

Woodwind Fingering Guide: includes fingering choices for standard and extended ranges for all woodwinds, in some cases including descriptions of where and when the fingering will be useful. Also includes trill fingering suggestions and some multiphonic fingerings.

www.dominicmusic.com – Julie DeRoche Clarinet Essays

Dominic’s Music is an Arizona music store that has on its website articles from Julie DeRoche’s essay series that first appeared in the Leblanc Corporation’s magazine, the *Leblanc Bell* between 2001-2003. The first six of these essays was compiled into a booklet titled *Clarinet Basics: Practical advice on mastering crucial aspects of clarinet instruction and performance*. Of particular interest to me has been the essay on mastering articulation, which focuses on the tendency of students to overthink tonguing and end up working too hard.