

On Top **NOTE!**

Building successful clarinet foundations



Correct embouchure and breathing skills are the foundation of successful clarinet playing.

When teaching a beginner clarinettist it is important to give very clear direction in the first lesson on correct embouchure formation. Perseverance in reminding the student to maintain this embouchure in subsequent lessons is vital to ensure that the correct habit is formed early to save later unnecessary angst.

The student can be encouraged from day one to produce a strong sound and to incorporate long “loud” notes into their practice routine. To avoid boredom setting in, make it a “time challenge”, encouraging the student to beat his/her last note-holding record and in a group lesson those of others. It can be fun!

Breath capacity is extended enormously in this way and teachers should not be afraid of boring the student by “nagging” on the above points during early lessons. It can be done in a light hearted fashion and most students will appreciate the difference in their sound and will feel more satisfied and confident when producing a bigger and more supported sound.

Once a secure embouchure and sound are formed, there is a firm foundation on which to build a more successful clarinet playing technique. Upper register notes will be less challenging with greater air flow, as will articulation. Students will often “blow” less to avoid squeaking, when in fact well supported tonguing is far less likely to squeak if the embouchure is secure. In most cases a well formed embouchure will also ensure little or no flatness in pitch, even in a beginner.

Once a student advances to the stage of being able to play technical work, even in the simplest form, they can be encouraged to play scales etc., with a strong and focussed sound. This consolidates breathing and tone and helps to further develop a reliable embouchure and evenness of sound across the range of the instrument.

Most students thrive on clear direction and a stricter regime, especially when they recognise the progress they are making. As a teacher it can be tedious continually picking up on all these points, but doing so will reap rewards for the student. Establishing correct playing habits from the very start eases the path to a more advanced playing technique.

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