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# THE SAXOPHONE

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## A Clinic by Dale Wolford

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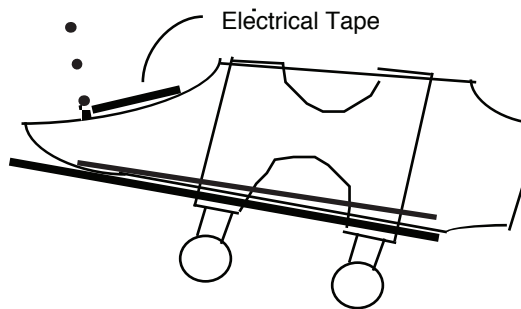


### I. Introduction

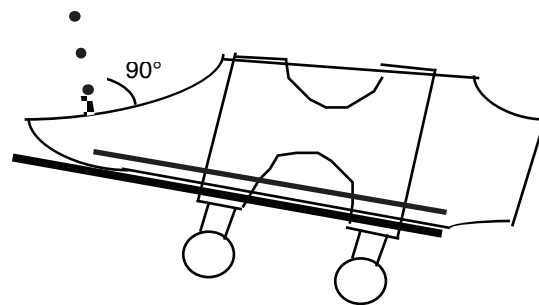
- A. History and origin of the saxophone
- B. The saxophone family

### II. Embouchure

- A. Top teeth on top of the mouthpiece where the reed breaks away. Use index finger to mark where teeth should slide to. I take all of my beginning students' mouthpieces home for one evening, place black electrical tape on top, they slide their teeth to the edge of the tape. (See illustration a.) Once this becomes a habit, after 4-6 weeks, the tape can be removed.

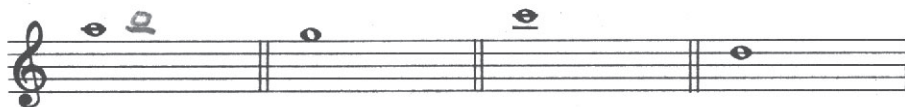


a. Electrical Tape for teeth placement



b. Placement of Teeth on Mouthpiece

- B. Top teeth at 90 degree angle to mouthpiece. (See illustration b.)
- C. Form embouchure by saying "O", keeping the corners in towards the mouthpiece.
- D. Roll fleshy part of bottom lip over bottom teeth slightly. Say "Vuh" as in the word victory (referred to as the "Vuh" position), this gives the correct placement regardless of lip size for the student. This is your "tone controller". Avoid a "smile" position, which is related to the clarinet embouchure.
- E. Tell student that the muscles of the embouchure surrounding the mouthpiece should be very firm. Use the analogy of a small egg between your lips, with the embouchure being very firm and not breaking the egg. The shape of the embouchure should be a "ski jump, not an orange peel".
- F. The upper and lower teeth should be in line; this may necessitate moving the lower jaw forward.
- G. To check proper embouchure pressure, the soprano mouthpiece alone should sound an "C" above the staff, the alto an "B", the tenor should sound a "G", and the baritone a "D" on the staff (concert pitch).



Alto	Tenor	Soprano	Baritone
Saxophone	Saxophone	Saxophone	Saxophone
Mouthpiece	Mouthpiece	Mouthpiece	Mouthpiece

- H. The larger the horn, the less tension in the embouchure.

**Embouchure Goal:** very little change in tension/position of the lips when playing from low Bb to high F.

**Teaching Tool:** Checking for proper reed strength and embouchure pressure



This exercise works best on E, F, and F-sharp. Have the student play the lower octave and get a friend or teacher to operate the octave key. The goal is to hear a very smooth legato between the octaves without adjusting the embouchure or breath support.

1. If the tone of the upper octave is poor, apply a bit more pressure on the reed while playing the lower octave and try again.
2. If the upper octave continues to sound after releasing the octave key, apply a bit less pressure on the reed when playing the lower octave and try again.
3. If you cannot achieve a perfect legato both up and down) without embouchure adjustments, try a stronger reed.
4. Once this is mastered with a teacher or friend operating the octave key, the student should attempt to achieve the same results without help.
5. If the proper reed strength is being used, the student can then work on keeping the embouchure and breath

**III. Playing Position**

**A. Instrument position**

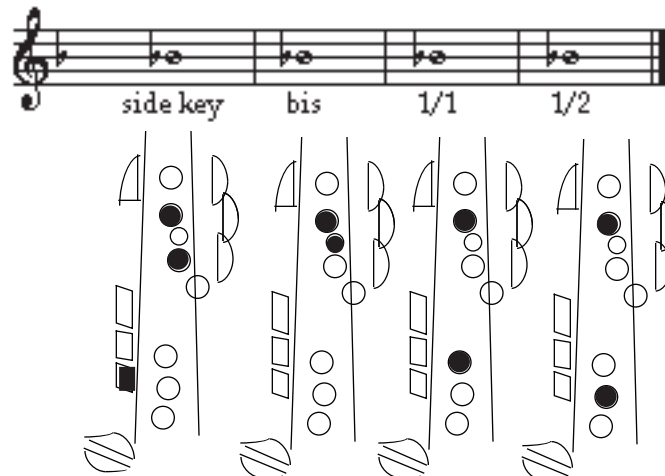
- the soprano should be held between the legs at a 40 to 45 degree angle
- the alto for players tall enough should be held between the legs
- the alto for short players and the tenor and baritone for all sizes should be held on the right hand side near the hip, make sure the mouthpiece is turned on the neck at an angle so the players head is straight up and down. (Avoid having the baritone saxophonist rest the instrument on the floor, usually this results in bad posture. If they cannot hold it up with the strap, sax stands are available.)

***“All instruments should be adjusted to the player, not the other way around.”*** The weight of the instrument should always be born by the neck strap.

**B. Hand Position**

- The left and right hand thumb rests are used to steady the saxophone, not hold it, that is the job of the neckstrap. The left hand thumb should be pointed toward 2:00 on the thumb rest.
- Fingers should curve comfortably and be centered directly above the pearls of the keys, both in open and closed position, and raised no more than 1/4 inch above the keys.
- Keep the wrists in, towards the body of the instrument, which aids in the usage of both the side keys and the palm keys of the left hand.

**C. Fingerings**



All students should learn side key Bb first. Unfortunately, one beginning book teaches the 1/1 fingering, which is

one of the least useful for saxophone. After the student has been playing for 1-2 years I teach the bis Bb fingering. To help the student know which fingering to use, the rule is:

“Side Key by Step, Bis by Skip.”

IV. Articulation • tip of the tongue to the tip of the reed, or slightly behind the tip of the tongue.

- A. Staccato  
 1) Air Release  
 2) Tongue Release

V. Tone and Intonation

support steady while operating the octave key.

B. Intonation

-Yes, a saxophone can be played in tune!

-Notes which tend to be a problem on all saxophones:

Flat      Flat (T-3)      very sharp, lower jaw      very sharp      very sharp

B. Developing a concept of a “good” saxophone tone

- 1) Listening to live performances (bring in guest performers, list concerts on a special bulletin board)
- 2) Listening to recordings of jazz and classical saxophonists
  - make playlists of various performers (all instruments for band classes) which can be played for the class as they put their instruments together. Write 2-3 questions on the board for the students to answer. pertaining to the tone of the performer, style of music, etc.
- 3) Longtones, utilizing both straight tone at *mf*, and from *fff* to *ppp* to *fff*.

VI. Vibrato

A. Importance of

B. Student should begin to use vibrato as soon as embouchure is fully developed (usually 2-3 years)

C. Development of

- 1) Start with measured vibrato
- 2) Without horn, move jaw down and up in rhythm, saying “ah-ah-ah-ah”.
- 3) Strict rhythm without the sax with a metronome tempo of 4 pulsations @ 60. Do not use “wa-wa” or “ya-ya”.
- 4) First tones will probably and should be crude and rough to insure development of proper control. As control develops, vibrato can be refined. Development of vibrato is also good for developing the ability to adjust pitch.
- 5) Begin with sax. (Tempo of quarter note = 60)
  - a) Using a scale

Vuh-vuh-vuh-vuh      Vuh-vuh-vuh-vuh      etc.

b) Using a scale

etc.

c) Quarter Note = 60

Quarter Note = 88



d) Use in a musical setting after control is gained

Wolford demo from Teal, The Saxophonist's Manual

## VII. Altissimo

A. Basic Overtone Exercises and concepts

B. For most students this is a long period of development before altissimo can be used with confidence in a performance (2-3 years). The overtone exercises are also beneficial in the development of tone and embouchure control.

a. *Top Tones for the Saxophone* by Sigurd Rascher, published by Carl Fischer

b. *Beginning Studies in the Altissimo Register* by Rosemary Lang, Published by Lang Music Publications.

## VIII. Importance of equipment

A. Classical Mouthpieces (listed in Recommended Order)

Soprano: Rousseau NC 5 New Classic  
Selmer S-80 D

Alto: Selmer S-80 C\*\*  
Vandoren AL-3, AI-4  
Selmer S-90 facing #170 or #180  
Selmer Soloist (short barrel)  
Yamaha Custom Series Mouthpiece (beginners only)  
Yamaha 4C

Tenor: Vandoren Optimum TL-3, TI-4  
Selmer S-80 C\*\*  
Selmer S-90 facing #170 or #190  
Yamaha Custom Series Mouthpiece (beginners only)  
Yamaha 4C

Baritone: Selmer S-80 C\*\* or C\*  
Yamaha 4C

It is critical for developing embouchures that moderate facings and openings be used. As each student matures, other mouthpiece options can be explored.

B. Ligature

- Rovner ligature. ("Dark" or Vesta model)
- Vandoren Optimum

C. Reeds —

- Beginners should start on a size 1-1/2 (least expensive) reed
- Advanced should use size 2-1/2 to 3-1/2 depending on embouchure strength -

**Classical /Contemporary Performance or Study**

Vandoren Blue Box 3.0 – 3.5  
Gonzales 3.0, 3.25, 3.5, 3.75, 4.0  
Rico Reserve "classic" size 3.0, 3+, 3.5

**Jazz Performance or Study**

Vandoren Java Box 2.5 – 3.5  
Vandoren jazz ZZ Box 2.5 – 3.5

D. Instruments

- Student models include: Yamaha YAS , Bundy II, Jupiter, Vito
- Intermediate models: Yamaha YAS 52
- Professional: Yamaha YAS 62, Selmer Mark Super Action, Yanagasawa

E. Maintenance

- Saxophone pads tend to get out of adjustment very quickly. "Leak checks" should be done every 3-6 months by a qualified technician.

- Frequent Sax problem
  - a) PROBLEM: Student “Squeaks” when playing middle “D”, but okay on high “A”. Octave key on neck is opening. Note that there are 2 octave keys, one for D-G# and another for A-F. Simply grasp the neck alone, bend key and have student play G-A.

X. The Saxophone Section in the Jazz Ensemble

A. Concept of a “section sound”

- 1) Using all Meyer mouthpieces

XI. Saxophone Publications

Saxophone Journal, [www.dornpub.com](http://www.dornpub.com) - a wonderful bi-monthly journal which features three saxophonists each issue (one classical, one pop and one jazz), as well as information on playing techniques, record reviews, upcoming performances in your area, etc. They also sell sheet music, videos and saxophone recordings. An excellent source of information.

XII. Recommended Methods

Modern Course for the Saxophone - Arthur Hegvik, Henri Elkan Music

Daily Studies for the Improvement of the Saxophone Technique - Larry Teal; Etoile

158 Exercises - Sigurd Rascher; G. Schirmer

Three Octave Scales and Chords - Joe Allard; Charles Colin Publishing

48 Famous Studies for Oboe or Saxophone - Ferling, Southern Music

Top Tones for the Saxophone - Sigurd Rascher; Carl Fischer Music

Saxophone High Tones - Eugene Rousseau; MMB Music

Beginning Studies in the Altissimo Register - Rosemary Lang; Lang Music Publications

Jazz Conception for Saxophone (in three volumes: Basic, Intermediate and Advanced) - Lenny Niehaus; TRY Publishing Co.

The Technique of the Saxophone - Joseph Viola; Berklee Press Publications

Patterns for Jazz - Jerry Coker, J. Casale, G. Campbell, and J. Greene; Studio PR

XIII. Saxophone Books

The Saxophonist’s Manual - Larry Teal; Encore Publications (an excellent handbook of basic concepts and exercises for beginning through intermediate levels)

The Art of Saxophone Playing - Larry Teal; Summy-Birchard Company

Developing A Personal Saxophone Sound - David Liebman; Dorn Publications