

III. Equipment

- There are no quick fixes.
- Equipment may enhance good playing, but it will not mask or improve poor playing.
- Go for clarity, not blend.
- Do not give beginners too much resistance, just moderate. Use equipment that requires students to use fast enough air to create back pressure.
- Most common error: Mis-matched reed strength to mouthpiece.

Instruments

Generally speaking, you can expect better materials (wood, springs, pads, etc.) and better tuning from higher priced models. My preferences:

- Buffet Crampon R13 – the industry standard.
- Buffet Crampon E11 – lower cost; lots of ‘zing’.
- Buffet Crampon B12 – Same basic design as R13 - great choice for beginners & marching band (synthetic).



Mouthpieces

Most students will be successful with standard mouthpieces. Beware of mouthpieces that require the purchase of additional barrels to play in tune. My preferences:

- Vandoren M15 (Profile 88, American Pitch):
Crisp & Vibrant – works well for many
- Vandoren M30 (Profile 88, American Pitch):
Rich & Vibrant – less resistant, for players with good control already in place
- Vandoren 5 RVLyre (Profile 88, American Pitch):
Crisp & Vibrant – best beginner/intermediate choice; “in the middle” in every aspect



Reeds

- Too soft =’s spread sound;
- Too hard =’s cloudy and reedy sound.
- Match reed strength to mouthpiece.



My preference: Vandoren Blue Box Traditional Cut – great for humidity challenged environments.

Ligatures

- Ligatures do matter. Metal ligatures create more “zing” for most players.

My preference: Vandoren MO - great flexibility for the reed; slightly different sound according to finish.



paula@clarinetcity.com
www.vandoren.com
www.buffet-group.com

Breaking Bad Clarinet Sounds: when good players do the wrong things!

2/10/2012

Texas Music Educators Association

Paula Corley, Clinician
with
Dripping Springs High School
Wind Ensemble Clarinet Section

With assistance from...

The Buffet Group

Vandoren USA

Dr. Al Corley, Texas State University

The Players

Elisabeth Artz
Michael Cook
Sarah Crowell
Annabelle Gavlick
Ava Mamrosh
TJ Peterman
Abbey Plimpton
Justin Poirier
Allie Wittman

The Directors

Keith Lancaster
Derek Woods
Jason Littleton
Jay Larson
Jana Galloway



Breaking Bad Clarinet Sounds: when good players do the wrong things!

Three elements that adversely affect clarinet sound:

1. Slow Air Speed
2. Incorrect Embouchure Grip/Tongue Placement
3. Mis-matched Equipment

1. Air Speed

- **Fast enough to feel resistance:** Most students do not understand how much air it takes to make the clarinet respond properly. The impact of slow air speed is systemic: it greatly affects tone quality as well as articulation and response.
- **Shout it out:** Use the concept of shouting to help get the air moving. Shouting is a good place to start because the concept is familiar to students. Refining to “ee” with firm corners will get the air moving to the front of the mouth.
- **Work for clarity, not blend:** Slow air speed at the beginning of a note is a common problem. When the air speed is too slow the sound may start with a “scoop” or start fuzzy and undefined. Have students practice starting notes using a reference pitch tuner as a model for clarity. Air is intense at all volumes.

Louder Clear / Softer Clear: Work to make your volume threshold larger without sacrificing clarity and focus.



1. Use a reference pitch tuner.
2. Start the first note at the volume where it is clearest.
3. Use fingers to shade sharp pitch - never oral cavity (voicing).
4. Play each pitch 3 times:
 - Clear
 - Clear, Crescendo, full volume release
 - Clear, Decrescendo, lifted release

- One reason students with good technique fail in auditions: lower and upper registers do not match in quality and have an obvious “break” between them. Incorporate register shifts as early as possible to help students develop a consistently fast air stream between registers.

To refine register shifts, place a slight crescendo at the end of the note preceding the shift. Think of the upper note as lifting out of the bottom note. This technique is essential in playing clarinet.



II. Embouchure Grip and Tongue Placement

Grip: The top teeth and corners are critical elements.

- **Grip, not bite:** The top teeth (grip) affect focus. When the sound is ‘loose’ or ‘flabby’, ask the student to take in more mouthpiece and/or put a little more pressure on the top of the mouthpiece.
- **Corner energy:** Corners affect endurance and overall tone quality. Ask students to direct corners in (towards the mouthpiece) and use the energy to keep the embouchure firm. Weak corners reduce endurance, diminish overtones in the sound, and may encourage biting for control.
- **Straw Principle:** Avoid saying “make your chin flat.” Use the ‘straw principle’ instead. Bottom lip should be firm but not stretched outward (smile).



- **No Ducks:** The angle of the clarinet is in close proximity to the knees when sitting. Do not allow students to “duck” head when sitting.

Tongue Placement

- **At the front:** The clarinet sound happens at the front of the mouth.
- **“EE”:** The entire range of clarinet can be voiced with “EEE”. Ask students to keep the tongue high and forward, close to the front of the mouth.
- **Compact:** Nothing about the oral cavity is relaxed. Embouchure is firm
- **Squeaking?** A sure sign that the tongue is too low in beginners – open G is a high D.
- **Undertones?** Tongue placement determines shape of the oral cavity. Undertones can be caused by a “relaxed” oral cavity and slow air speed – HAH shape. Tongue is too low in front and floats up high in the back shutting down the air.