

Tone Production Master Class

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The Three Components of Tone Production: Air, Embouchure and Tongue Position

Some Thoughts on Air Support

1. Air support is not keeping firm stomach muscles. Air support is not produced through physical effort or muscle control.
2. Air support begins with air. The use of your muscles is a secondary factor used to keep the air support consistent.
3. Air support is the consistent pressure that occurs at the embouchure and mouthpiece. This pressure is created when a free-flowing air stream comes into contact with the natural resistance of the mouthpiece and reed.
4. An awareness of the body and supporting muscles is necessary to help maintain this pressure.
5. Air support can be compared to the pressure needed to control the accelerator on a car. The pressure of the foot is consistent and comfortable and can push or release the accelerator without any physical restrictions.

The Mechanics of the Air

1. The diaphragm muscle should remain out and relaxed during the entire exhalation process.
 - a. To experience this, take in a large breath and let it out like a sigh. Let the muscles sag down and outward.
 - b. Next, put your lips in a “ooo” shape and imagine you are blowing through a small straw. Push the air through this tiny opening and keep your stomach muscles out and relaxed. If you make the hole small enough it will be similar to the natural resistance you experience when you are playing.
 - c. This shape is actually a good model for your embouchure.
2. The upper wind pipe should remain open at all times

- a. The use of the diaphragm muscle is a common focus when talking about air support, but the upper wind- pipe is rarely mentioned.
 - b. Become aware of the openness in the windpipe in the area of your collarbone. When you inhale feel this part of your lungs expand and try to keep it expanded through the entire exhalation process.
3. Some exercises for development awareness of proper air usage
- a. Play a low E with a good strong volume. Notice how open the lungs need to be to do this. Be aware of the diaphragm and upper windpipe.
 - b. Play long tones and slow scales with this openness. Do not let yourself close up. (Refer to the TTU Clarinet Daily Routine for specific exercises, or use materials that you use for your private lessons).
 - c. Use a breathing bag to help find the relaxed openness of the lungs and the fast free air stream that is required for good tone production.
 - d. Before playing a phrase, completely fill your lungs with air so that the upper wind-pipe completely opens to the point of being a little uncomfortable. Without holding the air in the lungs, let the air flow naturally and play with a big sound.

Embouchure Basics

1. The basic embouchure shape is a firm and forward “oooo” shape.
2. If the muscles are in a firmly forward “oooo”, the upper and lower jaws naturally separate, the chin flattens and points down, and there is a proper 360° grip around the mouthpiece.
3. The embouchure should be firm but not clamped tight. Think of a solid hand shake or an inflated inner tube.
4. Imagine or acquire a small straw, and blow cool air through it with this forward “ooo” shape.
5. Never start with a flat chin, or have the flat pointed chin be the primary focus of your embouchure. If you start with a flat chin, the corner muscles go backwards in the wrong direction. The flat chin should be formed using the above method.

Some tricks for finding your ideal embouchure

1. The most effective refining strategy is to move your corners more forward than they normally go. Even with the most advanced college student, most

refinements occur when the student pushes their embouchure sides a little bit further forward.

2. To get a firmer more focused tone, acquire a straw and with a firm forward embouchure, blow through the passage you are playing. Then immediately play through the passage on the clarinet. See if it helps.
3. If the focus is good and you want more depth in the tone, try keeping the “ooo” shape with more relaxed lips. Feel as if the bottom lip under the reed is fleshy and relaxed.
4. Put the mouthpiece in your mouth and touch the spot where the top and bottom lip touch the sides of the mouthpiece. Concentrate on the muscles, and the skin that is actually touching the mouthpiece. Think of pushing these muscles a little more forward.
5. Pucker as far forward as you can and then relax your lower jaw. This should result in an opening your lips big enough to put the mouthpiece in. Even though it will feel strange, try inserting the clarinet and playing without adjusting the muscles so it “feels right”. See if the sound opens up and is more responsive.
6. Play double lip. To get a full free sound that is pure, try rolling your top lip over your top teeth just as you do on the bottom. This double lip embouchure is good for reducing excessive jaw pressure and training the lips to grip the mouthpiece in a 360° fashion.

The double lip tone should be the best tone one can produce on the instrument. However, the pain and fatigue after playing a few measures frequently can cause problems. For most people, double lip is best used as a model. One should play a passage and then immediately play the passage with the normal single lip embouchure and try to get the same sound. With a little practice one can match the best qualities of double lip playing but have comfort and stamina of single lip playing.

7. Once you have explored these many types of adjustments, use a long D as a reference for the embouchure shape. One should feel the roundness of the embouchure and try to get a D with as much depth as possible.

Tongue Position

1. Unlike the other woodwind instruments, the tongue should be in an “eee” position at all times, from the highest note down to the bottom of the chalumeau register.
2. To find this position, say “he”. Notice where the sides of the tongue come into contact with the molars. This contact must remain intact at all times while playing.

3. Tongue position must work in conjunction with a firm and forward embouchure. It is very difficult to keep a high tongue with a loose unrefined embouchure. In fact, it is common for tongue to be already in the right position if one has a well-formed embouchure.

Some exercises to try:

1. With the clarinet, play a good forte high E to F. This usually puts the tongue in the correct position.
2. Before playing a passage, say “he” or “knee, knee, knee” to feel the tongue arched high and the mouth. Then play the passage. When doing this, we might need to focus on keeping a firm “ooo” embouchure with it. One can combine the two by saying “Deee-oooo” and holding this shape for moment before playing.
3. Another trick is to sustain a high C without the register key and diminuendo. Try to keep the C going as long as possible before it drops to the thumb F. If you know any special trill fingers, such as high C to D, try sustaining the note on the fake fingering. All of these require the correct “ee” tongue position.
4. Try putting the mouthpiece in the mouth. Relax and say “he”, keeping the tongue locked in this position, push your lips forward in the “ooo” position. Wait a few seconds and feel like the embouchure sets. If possible breathe in through your nose slowly and fully and then play a simple passage. See if this feels different. This should not be a preparation for every time you play, but it can give you an idea of how different it feels from your normal embouchure and where you might need to go for refinements.

Find Your Tone

There are many variables and factors in developing a great sound. Try some of the following exercises to see if you can find an adjustment to help your tone. Much of our development is through trial and error and experience.

While playing a relaxed C scale, try experimenting with the following exercises:

1. Tighten your diaphragm inwards, push it out as hard as you can, keep it out without excess tension?
2. Play a scale with your voice tight, play with it open.
2. Play a low E with a forte volume so you feel your windpipe vibrate. Play a scale with this feel. (depth of sound)
3. Play a high E above the staff so it is strong and stable. (voicing)

4. Play with a tight embouchure with corners back (smile). Play with a tight embouchure with corners forward (ooh)
5. Play with a loose embouchure with corners back (smile). Play with a loose embouchure with corners forward (ooh)
6. Repeat 4 and 5 with articulation, slur 2 and tongue 2
7. Roll more bottom lip over your teeth
8. Roll less bottom lip over your teeth
9. Take in more mouthpiece
10. Take in less mouthpiece
11. Play with the angle in, more vertical
12. Play with the angle out more, more horizontal.
13. Play with your tongue in an “ah”, “o” and “ee” positions while playing a 3 octave scale, or any passage.