

# 10 Steps to a Great Clarinet Section

with  
Sean Osborn

## Resources

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Educational essays and other resources, Recordings, Links, Video, Music, Compositions, and **Musician Jokes!**

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Many tips applicable to all instruments - nearly everything applicable to Sax.

**\*\*\*When students have serious trouble, it's often the equipment.\*\*\***

The Clarinet is becoming an endangered instrument. Many schools I visit these days have robust flute, saxophone, trumpet, and other sections, but few clarinets, many with broken instruments, and few taking private lessons. It is my hope that presentations, clinics, and videos can be a resource for educators to strengthen their clarinet sections. I believe that a great clarinet section is vital to every band, and I **know** a great clarinet section is possible.

## Reeds

*Prepare students and parents ahead of time that they will need to spend extra money on reeds!*

### **Moist, not Wet**

Most students play the **wrong reed** - almost always **too soft**.

No one should play a 2 ½ longer than 6 month. Some should switch sooner.

Make sure it's a "real" reed.

Rico, Royal, Mitchell Lurie, and Juno are all a FULL number softer than "real" reeds so a #3 Royal is really a #2 - **DO NOT USE THESE REEDS**

They are marketed for beginners - do not use these reeds!

**D'Addario Reserve** and Grand Concert Select, and all **Vandoren** models are best.

**Too soft?** - buzzy, or flat/flabby sound. Must blow softly/wimpy to get any sound.

**Way too soft?** - reed collapses, no air goes through.

**Too hard?** - airy, woofy sound, difficult to play.

Keep selection of reeds for trial, to find the right strength. Sterilize with mouthwash.

Buy boxes, sell individual reeds.

Discard when dirty, excessively chipped/split, or after 1 month.

Position with only 0.1mm of mouthpiece tip showing. Often too low and/or crooked.

## Mouthpieces

*Most* important equipment!

**Stock mouthpieces** that come with new clarinets *should not be played*.

Bad mouthpieces don't take the air, make playing difficult and no fun.

Students will not believe you until they try one. Buy one for all students to try.

**D'Addario Reserve** is best (several facings - X5 is middle ground) - \$90-110.

**Vandoren** models are very good: **M13, M15, M30, and B45**.

**Backun** models are also good.

## Ligature

Ligatures that come with clarinets are often bad. Inverted (screw[s] in back) are usually better.

**BG, Rovner, Bonade** (inverted), **Vandoren** (several models) - \$25-60

## Angle

For articulation, tone, control.

**60-90** degrees to the face - like the Saxophone. Not close to body - **bells up!**

## Breathing

Top Diaphragm flexes on inhale - all other muscles relax.

Top Diaphragm relaxes on exhale - all abdominals and low diaphragm push

Push harder as you get softer.

Beginning solution: Just play louder - no wimpy-tone.

## Embochure

*Achieve by 1 year.*

**Point chin**, stretch/flatten lower lip, corners in.

**Only a little** lower lip in mouth - not too much. - *Most common problem*

Too much lip prevents pointed chin

Top teeth **on** mouthpiece - no "double lip"

Mirror practice

Jaw firm (unmoving), not tight or loose.

3/16 to 1/4" mouthpiece in mouth

Too much = honk!

Too little = no tone

## Tongue Position

For tone and articulation.

Small opening at end of air stream makes faster air = better tone.

Like the thumb on the end of a garden hose

"SH" for high, forward position, or "eee". Tongue sides will touch sides of teeth.

Maintain when changing registers and dynamics.

Careful not to bite jaw.

Very high needs open throat, tongue will naturally and necessarily drop.

## Articulation/Tonguing

*Tip of tongue to tip of reed/mouthpiece.* Practice legato for position. **Staccato is same motion.**

### **FIVE STEPS**

- Tongue on reed
- Blow (against tongue)
- Tongue off reed (now sound)
- Tongue back on reed
- Stop blowing

*Always* tongue your first note - no airballs.

Tongue stop for short notes - no huffing. Air release for longer notes

Jaw firm - no chewing

***Minimum tongue, minimum distance, minimum reed.***

## Hand Position

Right hand touching **only** at finger tips and thumb rest.

No resting on side keys, no gripping key rod

Practice open-G balancing with no left hand and open right hand. **Proper angle helps.**

Side of tip bone of thumb. Not knuckle, not nail.

Relaxed hands.

Small students should begin on E-flat clarinet. Play in organum, or Alto Sax parts.

## Private Lessons

*You know how important it is.*

Price is biggest barrier. Low- or No-cost **is** possible.

Funding/Scholarship from organizations or businesses

**Study with more advanced student** - High School or University

Mentoring program

Occasional lessons with you

Invite private teacher to volunteer with your sections once or regularly.

Free, or small stipend (band boosters)

**Reed, Mouthpiece, Instrument makers supplement cost**

## Additional Tips

Beginners - Put the clarinet together bottom up

- Start them out right (reeds, equipment, tonguing, hand position)
- SWABS, not brushes
- Get them in the right hand as soon as possible
- Get them *across the break* as soon as possible

Festivals - Check nearby Universities for clarinet events and master-classes

Clarinetissimo - FREE annually, Seattle, first weekend in October - 25<sup>th</sup> year

International Clarinet Association

Check concerts near you for clarinet features - chamber music, orchestra, band, etc.

Online - [osbornmusic.com](http://osbornmusic.com)

International Clarinet Association website and Facebook page

International Clarinet Association FOR YOUR STATE Facebook page  
other Facebook pages - Instagram pages - YouTube pages  
Vandoren's *WAVE* newsletter (but don't buy their Juno reeds!)

### Repertoire

*My First Scale Book*, by Sean Osborn

The Rubank - *Advanced Method Book, Vol. 1 and 2*

Lowrey/Weber - *Studies and Melodious Etudes and Clarinet Student*

Jettel - *Klarinettenschule Vol. 2 (Advanced Scales)*

Rose - *32 Etudes and 40 Studies (Dover Edition only)*

Cavallini - *Caprices*

Jean-Jean - *18 Etudes*

Rubank - *Concert and Contest Collection*

Osborn - *Three Miniatures*

Carl Stamitz - *Concerto No. 3 in B-flat  
Major*

St. Saen's - *Sonata*

Weber - *Concertino, Concertos*

Finzi - *Five Bagatelles*

Rabaud - *Solo de Concours*

Hoover - *Set for Clarinet*

Osborne - *Rhapsodie*

Messenger - *Solo de Concours*

Bernstein - *Sonata*

Stravinsky - *Three Pieces*

Shaw - *Concerto*

Debussy - *Premier Rhapsodie*

Brahms - *Sonatas*

Mozart - *Concerto*

Copland - *Concerto*

Bassi - *Concert Fantasia on Motives from  
Verdi's Opera "Rigoletto"*

Nieslen - *Concerto*

Martino - *A Set for Clarinet*

**Sean Osborn** has traveled the world as soloist and chamber musician, and during his eleven years with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. He has also appeared as guest principal clarinet with the New York Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, Seattle Symphony, and others. The New York Times dubbed him "...an excellent clarinetist," the Boston Globe called him "...a miracle," and Gramophone "...a master." With over forty concertos in his repertoire, Sean has also recorded dozens of CDs for London, Deutsche Grammophon, Sony, Albany, and others.

Osborn has taught students from 8 to 80, has presented over 100 master classes around the world, developed many multi-media educational series, and served on the faculty of the University of Washington and the Cornish College of the Arts. Students from his home studio annually participate in the All-State and All-Northwest Orchestras and Bands, play in Youth Symphonies, and compete in the State Solo Contest. Former students are members of the Detroit Symphony, Pershing's Own Army Band, North Carolina Symphony, and many more groups, and have taught at Southern Oregon University, University of North Florida, and other schools.

Sean is also an award-winning composer whose works have been played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and members of the New York Philharmonic, Metropolitan Opera, Marlboro Music Festival, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic among others. He composes in multiple styles and genres and his compositions include several concertos, works for Band and Orchestra, educational pieces, and much chamber music. [osbornmusic.com](http://osbornmusic.com)