

# First Days of School

## **Supplies**

Mirrors

Mouthpiece patches

Pencils grips (for thumb rests)

Link [HERE](#)

## **Logistics**

Chairs set up for teacher movement

One stand per child (stand tags)

Case storage – under the chair or behind them on the chair but they don't touch it with their back if it's on the chair

## **Philosophy of Beginning Band**

No Bad Habits

Top 5 things for a student to learn in beginning band (according to Randy Storie)

1. Kids have a good attitude about band

2. A great sound

3. A great sound

4. A great sound

5. Everything else

Go as slow as possible first semester, as fast as possible second semester.

## **Demonstrating for students (non-clarinetists)**

Play FOR the students when you feel comfortable, lay along with the students when you don't. Stay at least one day ahead. If needed, demonstrate on your own instrument some as well. Every day you play with them will help you improve and give you insight into what students are struggling with.

## **Before playing (especially if waiting for students to receive instruments):**

Check for correct and complete supplies

Names on books & number reed guard (silver sharpies - number slots 1,2,3,4)

Teach parts of instrument (use yours for demo)

Teach parts of the reed

Reed care/rotation

Note name games (Link [HERE](#)),

Posture Chant, Lines & Spaces Chant (Link [HERE](#) and [HERE](#))

Music alphabet forwards and backwards

Foot tap & counting

Individual performances on chants, counting, musical alphabet etc.

# Putting on the Reed

## Opening the case

Place cases on the floor. Be sure latches open up.

## Putting together mouthpiece and barrel

Have them use cork grease, Remind them not to drop the mouthpiece

Be prepared to help students with brand new corks

## Putting on the ligature

Be sure the bigger opening on the ligature goes on the bottom. Be sure the screws are on the right. Point out the guide lines on the mouthpiece

## Putting on the reed

Have them slide the reed down from the top, Flat side of the reed to the flat part of the mouthpiece, Tip of the reed, tip of the mouthpiece, Be sure the ligature is between the guides, Don't over tighten ligature (until it stops, then another  $\frac{1}{4}$  turn)

## 4 things to check for reed placement:

1. Line of black/line of reed (magic!)
1. Center the base of the reed as well
2. Ligature screws are on the right
3. Ligature is within the guides on the mouthpiece

## Reminders for the first day of putting on the reed:

Be sure you have at least 5 minutes left at the end of class to pack up. It won't be perfect the first day. Keep talking them through it for 2 weeks, getting quicker and more picky every day.

Article with more pictures and details [HERE](#).



# The First Sound

## **How I Teach Embouchure - Milkshake Face (Link [HERE](#) and [HERE](#))**

Start teaching milkshake on day 1 or 2 without instruments. Use thumb for demo.

1. Look in mirror
2. Drink a milkshake (Open, Click, Milkshake - add Blow when they have instrument)
3. Look for muscles
4. Milkshake face time at home

## **Ready for the first sound**

Students hold mirror in left hand at eye level, Mouthpiece & barrel in right hand, Embouchure picture on screen (no stands)

## **Words to say between tries**

"Look in your mirror."

"Look in your mirror - Look for muscles."

"Be sure you're clicking on your top teeth."

"Grip the sides of the mouthpiece the corners of your mouth."

"Sit up tall. Take a big relaxed breath"

"Think about your milkshake face."

"Look in your mirror - watch your chin."

## **Individual help**

You hold it for them & anchor/adjust angle

If no sound - Blow more, blow more, blow more

If still no sound - Don't bite (finger between teeth)

If squeaks - It's ok! Try less mouthpiece

If any real sound - even flat - good for today

Walk around and check for anchor, angle - things you can see

Hear individuals for 1) no sound or 2) only squeaks

## **Addressing Squeaks**

Squeaks will happen. All year as you learn new things. My rule - it's fine to squeak on things that are new. It's not ok to squeak on things we've been doing a long time. But the first few weeks, squeaks are welcome. Growth Mindset!

**Day 1 - just get a sound! Day 2 - start working on getting up to pitch**

## **Air**

Use as much air as their embouchure can handle (2 fists analogy)

Cold/fast air - blow on hand

Blow across reed (spot on wall)

Keep mirrors at or above eye level

## **Internal Symptoms**

Tongue too low - Say eee (or hee)

Not anchored enough (wedge up at angle of instrument)

Corners/lips not gripping mouthpiece firmly

### **External Symptoms**

Bunched chin (muscles, too much bottom lip)

Amount of mouthpiece

Angle of head (balance a book)

Angle of instrument

### **Alternate Embouchure**

Smile (EEE) for chin muscles, then EEWW for corners forward

Start with less air and increase (especially for puffed cheeks)

### **Reminders**

Walk around constantly correcting these things:

-Posture/ Angle of head (mirror/stand)

-Angle of instrument (you adjust)

-Anchoring (two finger wiggle check)

-Looking in mirror (pull it higher)

-Chin (muscles)

It's ok for pitch to be a little high, just not a little low.

### **Playing Activities/ Individual Assessment with Mouthpiece & barrel**

Play 4, Rest 4 – adding the metronome is a new challenge

Down the row – a) Straight down the row b) Solo/Soli

### **Open G**

1. Cases on floor, add upper joint ONLY

1. Right hand on barrel, left holds mirror (not in hand position)

2. Bring the instrument to the student

3. Review all embouchure, air, position concepts

### **Taking Instruments Home - email parents**

Include these points in your email

-Moving slowly for good habits

-Students MUST have a mirror at home

-Mouthpiece/barrel and upper joint only (to avoid damage)

-Students should be using lots of air (need a private area to practice)

-Listen to your child perform for you a few times a week

-They have chants, counting, note-names (on-line) to practice as well

-Songs will be coming soon (patience & consistent practice for now)

Encourage them to contact you if they ever want to verify what their child is practicing.

### **Mouthpiece Only**

Start after everyone is up to pitch on mouthpiece/barrel

1. It tells you more than Mouthpiece/Barrel

2. Be sure they keep the angle the same

3. Pitch should be between a C/C#

4. If they are low, use the same tips above to correct them

5. Make a big deal about being up to pitch. Celebrate!





# LOOK FOR MUSCLES



# Hand Position

## Starting Hand Position

No playing - just fingers, Left hand (upper joint) only, Hold at barrel with right hand

## The Thumb

Thumb hovers over the thumb hole. ALWAYS gently touches register key.  
Teach the 3 positions (hole only, hole + key, key only)

## Fingers 1, 2 & 3

The PAD of the fingers cover the holes, not the tip.  
The first knuckle (by fingernail) should not bend up.  
They 'hover' over the holes - as close as possible.

## The Pinky

Touches the C# Key  
Should always touch the key

## Finger Drills

1. Practice GFEDC with note names and positions.
2. Use simple fingering system - Open, Thumb, 1,2,3
2. No playing, only fingers

## Introducing G-F

Metronome on 60-70

1. Name & finger "open - thumb" in half notes
2. Name & finger "G-F" in half notes
3. You play (slurred) while they finger, 4 beats rest, then they play  
Walk behind them to check thumb position!!

## Introducing E

Add E on the 2nd day if they are doing well enough.

1. Name & finger "open-thumb-thumb1" in half notes
2. Name & finger "G-F-E" in half notes
3. You play (slurred) while they finger, 4 beats rest, then they play

## Introducing D & C

This might be the 3rd or 4th day

The C will be terribly out of tune. Make your peace with it. It's worth it in the long run.

Name & finger "open-thumb-1-2-3" in half notes

Name & finger "G-F-E-D-C" in half notes, then play

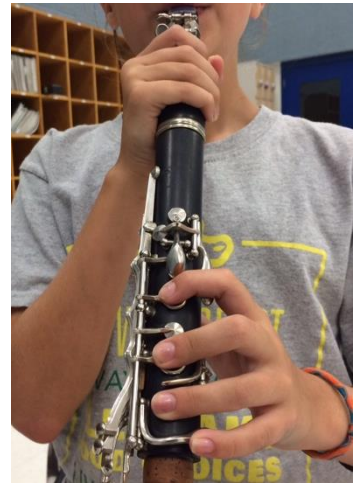
Expect squeaks - it's new!

Some kids find it easier to do quarter notes with a half note at end because of running out of breath. I switch to that as quickly as possible.

## Earning the Lower Joint (don't let them earn it yet)

GFEDC - quarter notes, half note at end.

EVERYTHING is great - air, embouchure, posture, hand position (I+)



# Note Name 1 C-B

Tamarie Sayger

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

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# Music Reading

## When/How to start Reading Music

Students 90% of class correct 90% of time

Books start with tonguing too soon for clarinets

Use a supplemental page similar to "Getting Started" (Lesson 4/5 in the supplemental.)

Spend 80% of your time on class routine/20% on reading music

## Music Stands

Must be 'ridiculously' high (must have excellent discipline)

Keep the stands completely down for as much of class as possible. Raise ONLY when they start reading music

## Playing Supplemental Page

This is much easier than the rote exercises

Have them name/finger & position/finger each line first

They should move fingers at the beginning of the rest to prep

## Why Stay on the Upper Joint

1. Beginning band priority #1 is tone.
2. You only need half the clarinet to learn to play with a good sound, embouchure, breath support and left hand position.
3. You only need half of the clarinet to learn lots of early songs.
4. Less awkwardness of holding the instrument
5. No bad right hand position, bad thumb or hooking pinkies under
6. More secure anchoring
7. They can focus on left hand position and embouchure and when they move to the whole instrument it's less change and more secure.
8. They can *earn* their instrument - it's a 'pride thing'.

## Earning the Bottom Joint: Play GFEDC (Waterfall)

Play GFEDC in in 4 quarter notes/1 half note

Slur (they should not be tonguing anything yet)

Try to have before or after school time available

## To Earn It They Must Play With:

1. Perfect posture
2. Head up
3. Right hand on barrel - anchoring really well
4. Perfect hand position (fingers very close and pinky touching key)
5. Foot tap
6. Metronome (60-70)
7. TONS of air. Lots and lots of air. As much as they can without blowing out their embouchure or squeaking.

## Make It a Big Deal!

Keep track, Recognize accomplishment

Tell them not to put it on until you teach the whole class how to do it



# Tonguing

## Face Your Fears

If you have a weakness in your teaching, keep working on it, ask for help  
Make yourself face your fears so you can get better

## Opening the Can of Worms - Tonguing

Can mess up all your work if you're not careful  
They can start bunching chins, quit anchoring, drop their tongue, lose their pitch, start 'chewing'

## Start on mouthpiece and barrel

Then move to mouthpiece one week later.  
Then have them tongue open G a few days after that.

## Day 1

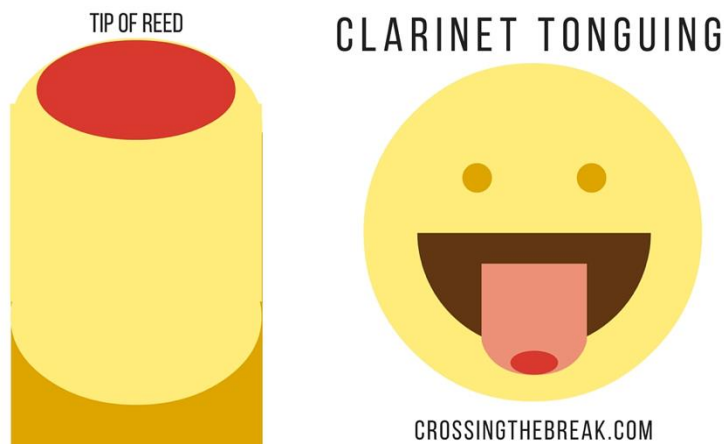
1. Compare to talking (articulate)
2. Top tip of the tongue to the tip of the reed
3. One taste bud (Say this a lot)
4. Say "Look at your mirror - nothing moves" a lot
5. Give them a sound signal to tongue
6. Keep the signal OUT of rhythm so they can't stop the air

## Day 2-5

Day 2 - Speed of tongue - snake tongue  
Day 3 - Lightness of tongue - tinkerbelle  
Day 4 - Take tongue off reed, don't put it on (release, not attack) - hot stove  
Day 5 - Hear them down the row - address pitch, think eee

## Other things to say

Look like a photo not a video (look at mirror)  
Look like a statue (look at mirror)  
Chin doesn't move (look at mirror)  
Top tip of the tongue to the tip of the reed  
Fast air, think eee, head up - other normal reminders



### Prepare with "The Trick"

Do all of this page WELL before they reach an "A" in the book!

Mark a dot on the left index finger with a pen or marker

It should be on the side of the 1st knuckle (not side of the nail)

### Introduction to Rolling

Teach it by rote first

Play E (Thumb1) half note, roll to A half note, back to E half note

Do just this for 2-3 days - just have them concentrate on the motion

Watch that they keep the tip of their index hovering over the 1st hole

When they play A you should not be able to see the 1st hole

### Words to Use

Rotate from the 1st knuckle

Press the A key with your knuckle not the side of the first finger

It must be one motion

There is not 'up' and then 'down'. The finger just moves down

Do not hop

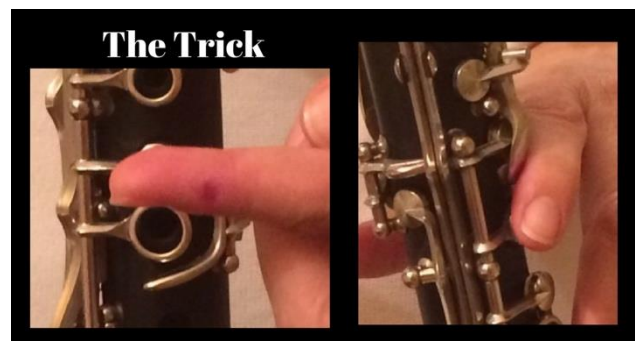
The thumb still stays in contact with (or very near) the register key

Be sure you are still anchoring to your top teeth

Pinkies on the dots, fingers hover over the holes

### 'Rolling to A' Daily Exercise

1. E half note - A half note- E half note
2. D half note - A half note- D half note
3. C half note - A half note- C half note



# Adding the Bottom Joint

## Continue Earning the Bottom Joint

1. Consider having only those that have earned it put on the bottom joint at the when playing upper joint. (The Ds & Cs will sound awful. It's ok.)
2. Have everyone add the bottom joint to work Bb & A
3. Try to get everyone on bottom joint within a week of starting Bb & A

## Adding the Bottom Joint

Bridge key - Hold down 2nd ring - Stare at it.

Remind them to watch the bridge key every day for a month during assembly time

## Right Hand Position

Hang right hand down by side

Fat PAD of the finger covers hole

Right pinky on home key (C key)

Practice right hand finger drills without playing first

## Right Thumb

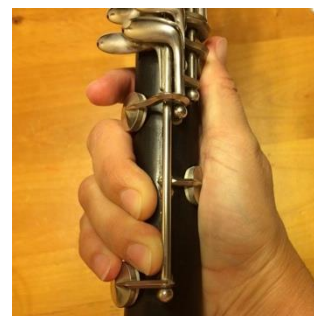
Pad of the thumb touches the wood

Fingernail is half under thumb rest - no knuckle

Walk behind them a lot

After 2-3 days give them a thumb-saver (pencil grip)

After a week give them a band-aid for a day.



## Things to Watch for

1. Thumb -1/2 nail and 1/2 skin/pad on wood
2. Pinkies on home keys
3. PAD of fingers hovering over the holes (very close)
4. Index finger not touching side keys
5. Embouchure - anchoring - must push up with thumb now
6. Instrument angle - keep head up



## Adding Bottom Joint

Have all students add the bottom joint for about 5-10 minutes daily

Be sure they have the 2nd ring down and watch bridge key

Have them move right hand up to barrel often to be sure they are still anchoring

Use the 2 finger wiggle check often

Head up - blow cold fast air straight across the reed

### Adding Bb & A

Teach it by rote for now

Check right hand position - thumb - walk around behind

Don't let them hook right index finger under side keys - pinkies touch

### Adding G

Have them look at the holes - compare hole 1 to hole 6

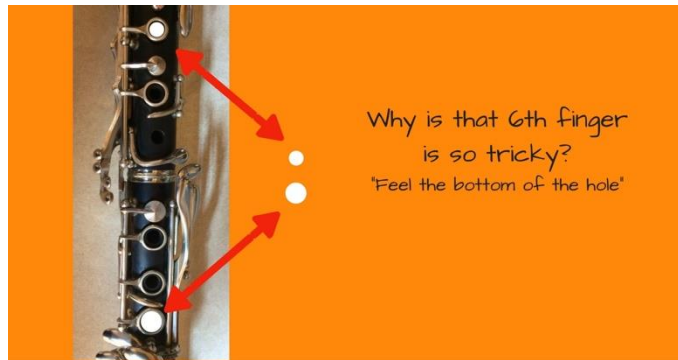
PAD of the finger

"Feel the bottom of the hole"

"Push your 6th finger down toward your pinkie"

Be sure pinkies are on the keys

They are going to squeak. A lot. Don't get frustrated or they will too.



### Right Hand Finger Drills

C, Bb, A in half notes

C, Bb, A in quarter notes, then hold G for 4 beats

C, Bb, C, B in quarters. Bb, A, Bb, A in quarters. A, G, A, G in quarters.

All slurred at this time

### Left Hand Finger Drills

G, F, E, D, C, D, E, F, G - in eighths - hold last note

G, F, G, E, G, D, G, C, G - in quarters, then eighths

Slightly tougher - start on C - C, D, E, F, G, F, E, D, C & C, D, C, E, C, F, C, G, C

Start tonguing waterfall and other easier rote drills.

Do some ear training - tell them 1st note and they figure out pattern

### Earning the Bell

Play C, Bb, A, G, F, E

Teach by rote now and add note names on upcoming warm-up

6th finger is critical - seal completely, push to the bottom of the hole

Keep heads and air stream up/level

Evaluation for this time of year - Link [HERE](#).

# Starting in the Book

## **Starting in the book**

Make it a goal - have them earn it

When you get in the book it replaces Getting Started/More Lines to Play

## **Things to Say**

1. You guys already know this.
2. Does this line have any notes you don't know?
3. Does this line have any rhythms you don't know?
4. Should we be able to play this really well the first time?

## **Build Trust**

1. Wow, how do you guys already know all this? You must have an awesome band director!
2. Show them you know where they are going and what they need to get there.
3. Teach things before you get to it in the book so they can have great success sight reading and so they trust you.

## **Physical vs. Cognitive**

Rote teach the physical - embouchure, finger drills, tonguing, foot tap

Fully explain the cognitive - note names, counting rhythms

Try to approach from both ways before putting together

## **Ways to Use the Book**

1. Cognitive understanding
2. Sight-reading
3. Review lines
4. 2 measure assessments
5. Show them their progress
6. Student choice reward days (students pick lines)



# The First Warmup

The warm-up (daily exercises) should be played EVERY day. They are the most important things to touch on consistently.

## **Exercise 1 - Tonguing**

Mouthpiece first, Then open G

Monitor posture, focus, embouchure, pitch

## **Exercise 2 - Waterfall with Tonguing**

Big air, good hand position (both hands)

Oral reminders during rests

## **Exercise 3 - A Exercise**

More information in Episode 18

Compare student fingers to pictures in the show notes links from 18

## **Exercise 4 - Right Hand Descending Scale**

Conduct each note

All in one breath - slowly enough to cover carefully

## **Exercise 5 & 6 - Beginner Register Studies**

- Make it look easy when you introduce it
- Possibly demonstrate with 1st chair or yourself
- Have student hold low A, you add register
- Troubleshooting
  - Left thumb position - should always touch register key
  - Be sure they don't lift the thumb off the hole
  - tell them to keep the air going fast
  - Anchoring, tongue position, flat chin
  - More in episodes 5 & 6 about getting up to pitch

## **Exercise 7 & 8 - Chromatic Scales**

See the outline about the Chromatic scale.

## 6

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# The Chromatic Scale

To introduce to the chromatic scale, I use the Beginner Fall Warm-up - lines 7 & 8.  
I have a long-time love for the Chromatic Scale.

## Take aways from my 'Love of the Chromatic Scale' story

1. Hearing students individually daily increases the odds that they will practice daily.  
Change up the routine.
2. Challenges/Extra credits can affect different students in different ways.
3. Try to let every student be first chair (legitimately) - at least for a day.
4. Kids who are in the middle/bottom of the section in beginning band may become some of your best band kids once you inspire them.

## Introducing the chromatic

Make it a big, FUN deal!

Have them write the milestone on their calendars.

The way we reach long term goals in band is one step at a time.

## How to start

It's not what note you start on as much as teaching methodically & slowly

Teach 1 new note (and 1-2 old notes) per day, starting as early as possible

Teach in half notes with half rests in between so you can name/fingering

Take out half rests when they are ready, then speed up later

Teach them to look ahead and get fingers ready early

They must READ every note - no memory in beginning band (yet)

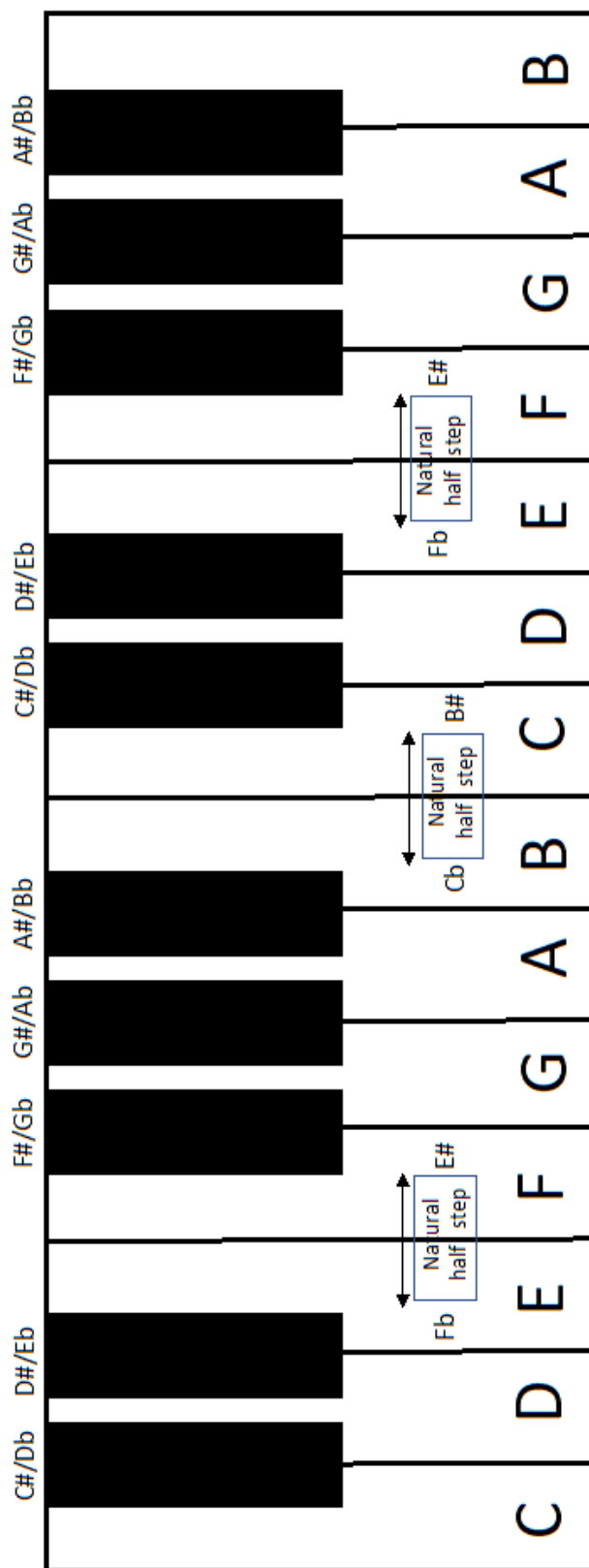
## Fingerings

- C# - only 1 - let pinky
- D# - either banana or bottom sk (I prefer banana for chromatic)
- F# - MUST teach thumb & bottom 2 side keys (DO NOT TEACH TOP)
- Low G# - only 1 - top top right
- Low A# - explain the enharmonics (briefly or in detail)
- Low B - MUST teach thumb 1,2,3,4, banana. (DO NOT TEACH MIDDLE)



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Instrument \_\_\_\_\_

## The Keyboard



**Interval:** the distance between two notes

**Half step:** the smallest possible interval

**Flat:** lowers a note a half step

**Sharp:** raises a note a half step

**Natural:** cancels a flat or sharp

**Natural half step:** B-C & E-F

**Enharmonic:** 2 names for the same note

**Chromatic scale:** a scale progressing by half steps

**Whole Step:** two half steps

**Tetrachord:** a four note pattern consisting of whole step, whole step, half step

**Major scale:** two tetrachords joined by a whole step --- W W H W W W H

# Starting Scales

## What are tetrachords? (as related to major scales)

Four note chunks of scales - whole step/whole step/half step

Ex. Concert Ab scale/Clarinet Bb scale - Bb, C, D, Eb & F, G, A, Bb are the two tetrachords that make up the Bb scale when played together.

## Why tetrachords?

Four note sections are easy to learn

When you learn one tetrachord You've learned half the scale

Kids get used to the whole, whole, half steps & hear wrong notes

You can easily isolate the trickier half of the scale (or newer half)

## Drawbacks of tetrachords

They take lots of time (consider this when planning pacing/start time)

They don't cover the middle interval (between 4th & 5th degrees)

Band directors must be committed to tetrachords for it to work

## Favorite parts of scales (1st octave)

Concert Eb - super easy (too easy to really know if they get it)

Concert G - middle B natural (and the top F#)

Concert Ab - have to understand key (Bb/Eb)

Concert Bb - crossing the break, like the warmup line 1 on spring warmup

Concert C - teach coolio C# and trading pinkies

Concert G - easy but have to understand key (F# / C# / G#)

Concert Db - crossing the break, understanding key, Eb top top

## Key Signature

You must really teach key signature for students to get the point of scales.

- Purpose of scales - play in different keys and learn those finger patterns.

- Scales are all the same except for the starting note and key signature

## Key Chant

I teach this by rote before introducing key signatures/scales

I also do a unit on "Keyboard" around this same time

It all comes together and starts to make sense when they start reading scales

Then you can relate it to songs in different keys (Kookaburra - later in this handout)

# Crossing the Break

## What to Say (and not to say)

NEVER say “crossing the break” to middle school students

Say - Going from A to B or going from Bb to C

Say - Going from no fingers to all fingers or lots of open holes to lots of closed holes

## Four Objectives to Master:

1. Great hand position
2. Start on low E consistently
3. Completely comfortable with register key with minimal thumb motion
4. Have left index finger position and motion down perfectly

## Starting on Low E

Play descending scale (C, Bb, A, G, F, E) then breathe, E, breathe, E

Play E 10 times without squeaking (possibly before the winter break)

Play B 10 times without squeaking (possibly right after winter break)

Play “drop out” (see link on [CrossingTheBreak.com](http://CrossingTheBreak.com))

## Introduce Playing from A to B

Write on board: whole note G, whole rest, whole note A, rest, whole note B

Ask students “Where have you seen that note before?” (on warmup #6)

Play the whole notes/rests from the board

A couple days later add C, A couple days after that take out the rests

Encourage them to do this in one breath (adjust metronome if needed)

## Right Hand Down

“Super glue” your right hand down for the whole GABC line

Be sure that the right hand is truly covering the holes

## Visualization for a Little Bit Later

Air has to go from the A key to the bell in 0.000 seconds (laser fast air)

6.5

The image shows two staves of musical notation. Staff 1, labeled '1', is titled 'Right Hand Down' and shows a sequence of whole notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, followed by a double bar line and then G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2, labeled '2', is titled 'Going Lower' and shows a descending eighth-note scale from G4 to E3, followed by a 2-beat rest, then an ascending eighth-note scale from E3 to G4. A second 2-beat rest is followed by an ascending eighth-note scale from G4 to C5, labeled 'Going Higher'. The piece ends with a double bar line.

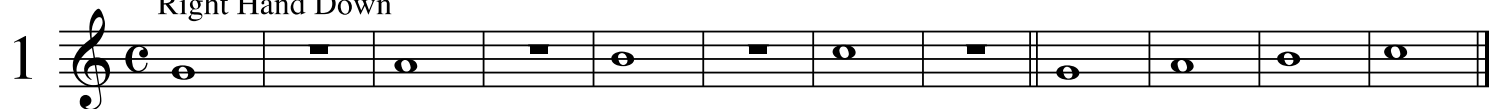


# Clarinet Warm-up Level 2

Tamarie Sayger

6.5

Right Hand Down

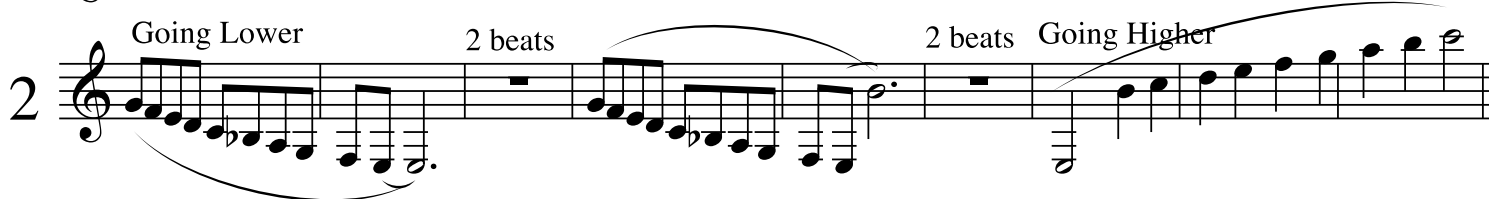


Going Lower

2 beats

2 beats

Going Higher

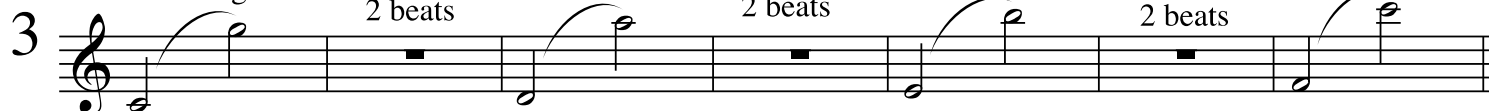


2 Note Registers

2 beats

2 beats

2 beats



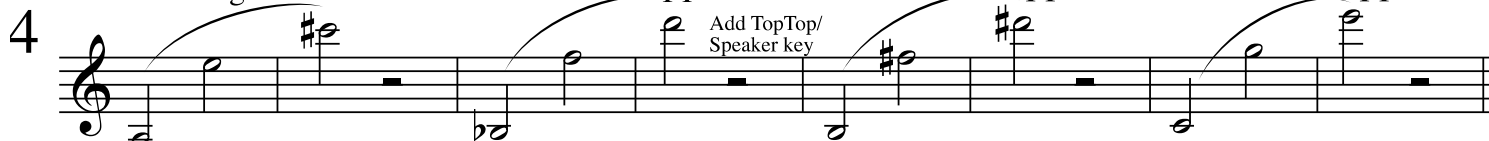
3 Note Registers

TT

Add TopTop/  
Speaker key

TT

TT



banana



Tongue/Finger



4 Note Drill

Right Hand Down



Finger Wiggles Low (Practice slurred and tongued)

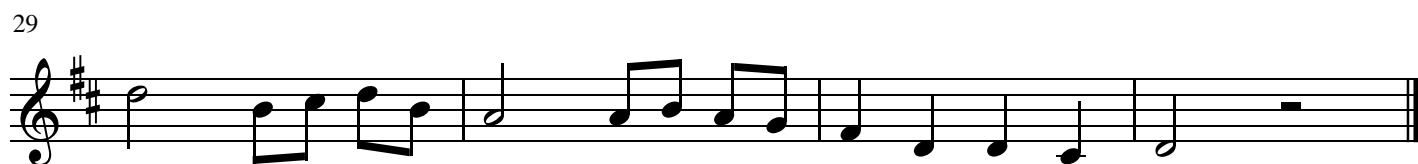
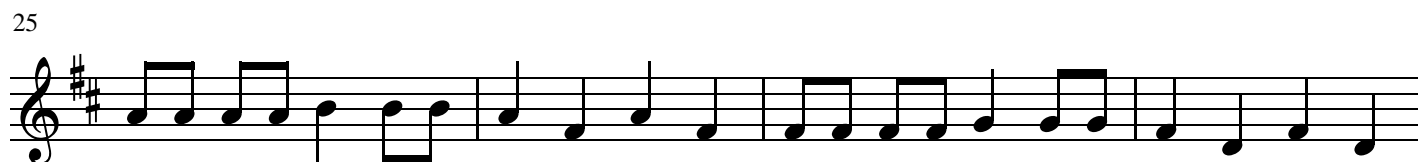
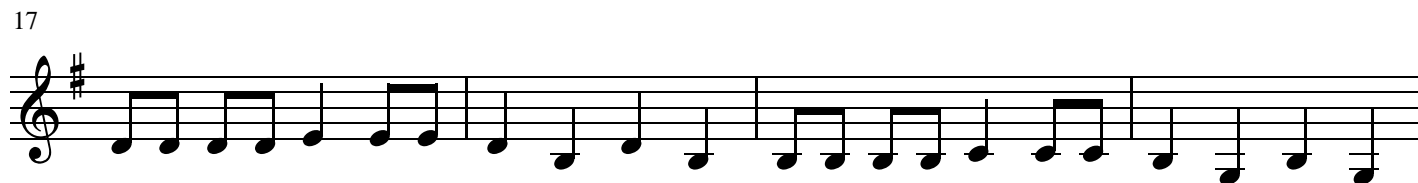
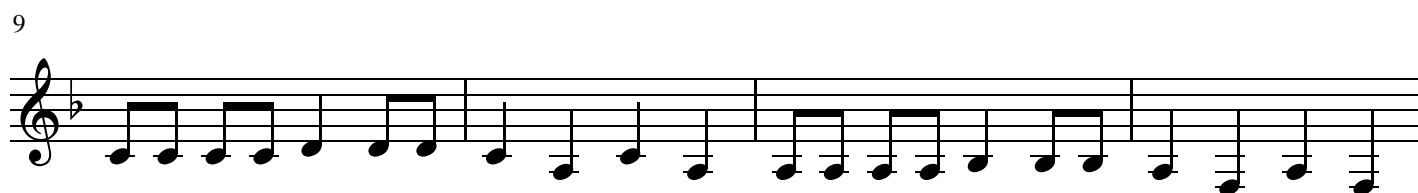


Finger Wiggles High (Practice slurred and tongued)



# Kookaburra

Key Exercises-Clarinet



# Let's Go Band!!

BandDirectorsTalkShop.com



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# 4 Leveled Clarinet Warmups

Ready to Print  
Full teaching procedure available in podcasts at [CrossingTheBreak.com](http://CrossingTheBreak.com)

As presented at TMEA 2019

[CrossingTheBreak.com](http://CrossingTheBreak.com)  
A CLARINET TEACHER'S RESOURCE

These resources are available FREE at [TeachersPayTeachers.com/Store/BandDirectorsTalkShop](http://TeachersPayTeachers.com/Store/BandDirectorsTalkShop) or at this shortlink: <https://goo.gl/aoDV9A>

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# 4 Rules To the Best Clarinet Fingerings

Simple to Understand

Ready to Print!

**4 Rules to Choosing the Best Fingering on Clarinet**

- Rule #1 Don't slide.**  
No sliding from one fingering to the next. If you must, use a "bridge" fingering.
- Rule #2 Don't Flip.**  
No flipping fingers - when you move from 4 to 3, keep your finger on the key.
- Rule #3 The Top/Top Key is King.**  
The top/top key is the best key to use on the top/top key. Use the top/top key for the top/top key. Use the top/top key for the top/top key.
- Rule #4 Law of Minimal Motion**  
The less motion and finger movement the better. The less motion you have, the more efficiency and speed you will have.

For more information, specific examples and advice about choosing the best fingering and the use of Minimal Motion, visit [www.BandDirectorsTalkShop.com](http://www.BandDirectorsTalkShop.com) and search "Fingerings".

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# 14 Supplemental Clarinet Lessons

Ready to Print  
Detailed advice for teaching clarinet at [CrossingTheBreak.com](http://CrossingTheBreak.com)

As presented at TMEA 2019

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# CrossingTheBreak.com

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### **Articles Available:**

[Putting on a Clarinet Reed \(with 30  
beginners\)](#)

[Why My Beginning Clarinets Only Need 1/2  
Their Instrument the First 6 Weeks of  
School](#)

[Clarinet Deodorant \(#1 Clarinet Exercise\)](#)

[Bass Clarinet - Switching the Right Kids](#)

[Right Hand Down \(or not\) on Clarinet](#)

# How I Teach Clarinet Embouchure

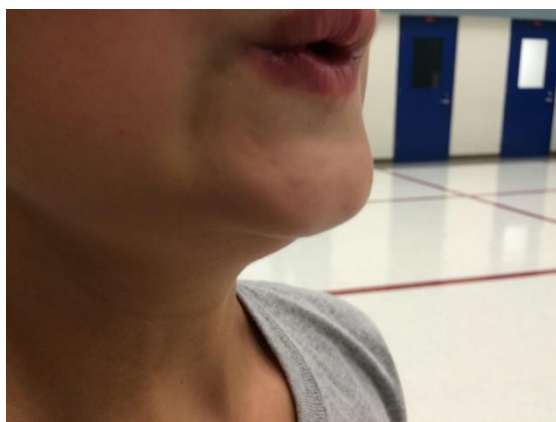
Originally published on [BandDirectorsTalkShop.com](http://BandDirectorsTalkShop.com)

Students MUST have a mirror to watch so they can see what I'm talking about on their *own* face.

I teach clarinet embouchure with a story. This is what I say to the kids:

**“Ok, so how many of you have ever had a milkshake in your life? Raise your hand. So almost everyone – if you haven’t you can use your imagination. Imagine you are at a restaurant that has really great milkshakes. And you’re dying for a milkshake and you order one and their machine is a little out of whack so it makes it extra thick. So imagine this yummy milkshake. It’s really thick and you’re so thirsty. But here’s the catch. They’re out of spoons and regular straws and the only thing they have there for you to drink it is a coffee straw. So imagine you have this really thick, yummy milkshake and you’re drinking it through a coffee straw. Show me what that would look like.”**

Then the students try it and most of the time they make a perfect clarinet embouchure – chin, corners, lips – everything on the outside. When they make the milkshake face I tell them to freeze and hold that face for 5 seconds. Then I have them do it again and look in the mirror.



Once they are looking in the mirror I say **“Now we’re going to do it again but after you take your big sip of your milkshake I want you to freeze your face muscles in place – don’t let your face move – but breathe in and out. Watch me demonstrate.”** That way they can hold the milkshake face without the tension of holding their breath. They should focus on how they need to be relaxed everywhere except their lips/chin. The milkshake analogy can make their body tense up if you’re not careful, so be sure they are only firm on their embouchure and everything else is relaxed.

At this point I have not said a word about “flat chin, corners, bottom lip” anything. They’ll start doing all kinds of weird stuff if you tell them flat chin. They don’t understand that yet. Just have them make the milkshake face. If they are doing it wrong. Say, “Look at my milkshake face. Now look in your mirror and make your face look like mine.”

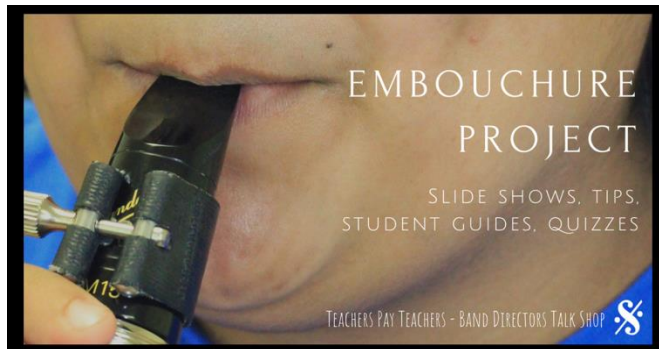
Once they all seem to be freezing pretty well (maybe on the second or third day) I start to point out what they are doing in more “clarinet embouchure” terms. I tell them that **embouchure is the way we set our face to play our instrument**. When they are frozen in milkshake face, they are making the clarinet embouchure.



Here's what I should see for clarinet embouchure:

**The muscles of the chin** – For most students, when their chin is really flat will have tiny little muscles on the front, bottom edge of their chin (and often on the side edges of the chin too) as those muscles pull down. That's how I know they are using their muscles correctly. A few kids don't have those muscles, and if their chin is super flat, and against their bottom teeth, it's probably ok. But most can find the muscles.

**Corners** – The corners should be forward, not pulled back. This is one of the reasons I like the milkshake analogy. I tell them if they pull their corners back they are going to bite the straw closed and not get any milkshake. Keep the corners forward. You can say "grip the straw."



I don't talk about the bottom lip or the top teeth at this point because nothing is in their mouth. This simplifies the whole thing and lets me focus on just chin and corners at first.

### Fun Idea

Use an iPad that is hooked up to a projector to show students their embouchures 'live.' Just set the iPad to video (don't actually record) and it will live stream the picture to the front screen/white board. Students can see their own faces and their classmates' faces and look for the muscles in the chin and see if the corners are forward.

They can practice their milkshake face at home. It can be in the car, as they are doing homework, fixing their hair, going to bed, texting, watching Netflix, anything. If they can be in front of a mirror, even better. They should just make their milkshake face and hold it a little longer each time.

To find out what the next step of beginning clarinet class is (moving to actually playing their first sounds) [listen to this episode of the Crossing The Break Podcast](#). If your clarinets are already playing and you need help getting them up to pitch on mouthpiece & barrel, [listen to this episode of the Crossing The Break podcast](#).

# Why My Beginning Clarinets Only Need 1/2 their Instruments for the First Few Weeks of School

Originally published on [CrossingTheBreak.com](http://CrossingTheBreak.com)

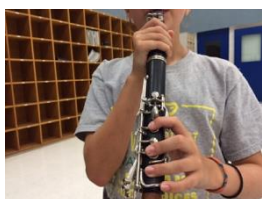
Many of us would agree that when teaching new concepts, it can often be helpful to isolate the idea we want the students to think about the most. The “new” part. Teaching a beginning clarinet player the first few weeks includes a TON of new things. Posture, air, embouchure, hand position, rhythm, foot tap, reading music, etc. (Notice I don’t mention tonguing. I hold off on teaching tonguing as long as possible.)

Again, I feel many of us would agree that tone is the most important concept – not just in the first few weeks, but the entire first year. Tone. Tone. Tone. Everything else is secondary.

It is common to start beginning clarinetists on mouthpiece and barrel. I do this as well. I strongly, *strongly* encourage you to continue to have students play on mouthpiece and barrel ([to check pitch](#)) at the beginning of class for many weeks.

Then most directors go from the mouthpiece and barrel to the entire instrument. This requires that – all at the same time – students must try to master both left and [right-hand position](#), finger motion and, fairly quickly, note reading/music reading. They must also deal with a whole new level of resistance when blowing through the instrument and a strong support from the right thumb at the same time. That’s asking kids who are still developing the muscle memory for embouchure to add many different things all at once.

So, about 15 years ago, I started wondering why we have clarinet players add the entire instrument so ‘early’. Students only use the top joint for their first 5 notes. (I don’t have my students add right hand down as standard fingerings on open G. Post explaining why is [here](#).) They can often play many pages in the beginning band book with just upper joint.



Clarinet has a perfect, built-in way to simplify the process of moving from mouthpiece/barrel to the full instrument in a much more gradual, natural way. It can avoid all kinds of bad habits. As you know if you listen to the [Crossing The Break](#) podcast, one of my big [beginner band mantras](#) is “No bad habits!”

## **Only have your students only add the upper joint. For quite a while.**

Here are some reasons why:

1. It is much less awkward. Most beginners, especially small ones, find holding the entire instrument very awkward and uncomfortable.
2. There is less resistance when blowing through upper joint only. It is still considerably more than mouthpiece/barrel, but less than the entire instrument. So their embouchure muscles are gradually strengthened by adding small amounts of resistance.

3. This allows them to use their left hand to hold a mirror and look at their embouchure as they play open G.
4. When they add the **left-hand position**, they can concentrate much more on keeping their fingers perfect. Here's what I tell them with regards to finger position:
  - Thumb barely touching the register key and very close to the thumb hole.
  - Fingers 1,2,3 are hovering as close as possible – PAD of the finger over the hole (not tip.)
  - Left Pinky key is touching the 'upper joint pinky.' (some directors call it the C# key)
5. Their right hand is on the barrel and can help them to **anchor** on their top teeth firmly. When they move to the right thumb pushing up from the thumb rest they will have a better concept of what it should feel like if they have experienced it for a long time on upper joint.
6. They will have less squeaks and greater success on the first songs they play. For all the reasons listed above, everything will feel less frustrating.
7. You are eliminating the option for untold bad right-hand positions. By the time they add the bottom joint, the left hand and embouchure should feel so natural, that they can then focus much more attention on the right hand. Plus they will be actually using the right hand to play Bb, A etc. so it will have to be in the right place.

Here are a few more additional benefits that aren't a big deal, but are a nice bonus. The first few weeks of school are chaotic in any beginning class, but especially in clarinet class. Anything you can do to limit chaos is a plus.

- It doesn't take students as long to get their instruments out and ready
- Easier to monitor assembly as a group
- Less corks to grease daily
- Less chance of students breaking something due to assembly or awkwardness
- Less time taking instruments apart

All of this translates to more order and more teaching time.

**For heterogeneous classes** – the open G should be ok with just upper joint and the F as well. As you get to E, somewhat D and absolutely C, you will have to either add the bottom joint or have the clarinets play alone. The C is basically a C# and the D is very sharp. See what you can come up with, (and let me know if you have a great solution!) but even if it's just one week that they can play on upper joint, that's certainly better than nothing.

\*\*\***Also for heterogeneous classes**, the students can put the bottom joint on but still hold the barrel with their right hand. That takes care of the D & C but still allows them to not have to add right-hand position and helps them continue to anchor correctly.

Remember the saying, *"The most dangerous phrase in the English language is 'we've never done it that way before'."* Maybe this is one new idea you can try out this year.

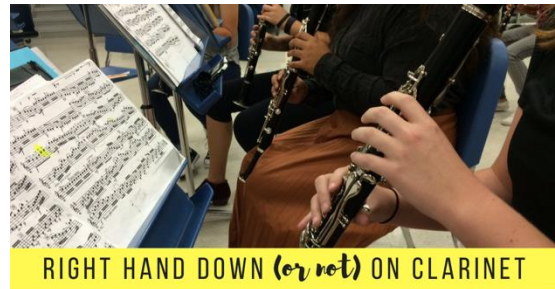
# Right Hand Down (or not) on Clarinet

Originally published on BandDirectorsTalkShop.com

Clarinet teaching has a number of controversial subjects – and this is one of them. Hopefully, this post will help you look at both sides and come up with your own decision of how you want to teach this. Most importantly, you'll know WHY you choose to teach it the way you do.

## What is “Right hand down?”

In general it means that on throat tones (G, G#, A, Bb in the middle of the staff) clarinet players can put down some or all of the fingers in the right hand.



## Reasons TO put down the right hand?

- For pitch
- For resonance (tone)
- For technique

## Reasons NOT to put down the right hand?

- As a crutch (to help hold the instrument)
- It often causes you to break the “Law of Minimal Motion” in technical passages

## Pitch/Resonance

Throat tones – G#, A & Bb – can be bad notes on clarinet. Some instruments are worse than others, but most of the time if a young clarinet player plays those notes with a decent embouchure, they are still gross. They are often sharp (sometimes very sharp!) and the Bb specifically has a thin, pinched tone. What makes it worse is that they are very common notes on clarinet and are often prominent in repertoire for young bands.

One more consideration is that the notes A & Bb are often right next to a B or C right above which are much more stable, resonant notes – making the discrepancy even more noticeable.

## Technique

Keeping the right hand down in *some* passages can help greatly with technique, especially in what people call “[Crossing the Break](#)” or going from ‘no fingers to all fingers’ type fingerings. It can eliminate many unnecessary finger movements and help facilitate smoother transitions from throat tones to notes like B, C, or D.

## As a Crutch

The biggest reason to **not** teach right hand down is that it can provide a crutch to beginners. I think some teachers do it the first few weeks of school to help stabilize the instrument when students are learning open G. However, this often results in students feeling that every G they ever play must have the right hand down. ([Read an alternative here.](#)) This can create huge technical problems later and if you include the right pinky in the fingering, it can create major pinky problems later as well. The right pinky must be free to move to all 4 pinky keys easily, not locked into the home position.

It can also be a crutch that keeps student from ever *truly* [crossing the break smoothly](#). Although most advanced clarinetists tend to add fingers early *sometimes* when going from a throat tone to a higher note, I think most would also tell you they don't have to add them. If students don't learn how to just put down all the fingers and have the note come out, it can become a technical and musical problem down the line.

## “Law of Minimal Motion”

When students are taught that the fingering for open G is 4, 5, 6, R Pinky, they have a hard time breaking that habit when they advance enough to realize that's really not true. So a student that has a fast DEFGFED type pattern all in the left hand will put down the right hand on the G, involving 8 finger motions and an entire hand that have no business being involved. That pattern is a simplified example, but this is one of the habits I have had the hardest time getting high school students to fix. The most difficult cases can cause hundreds of extra finger motions in their all-state music because they want to put down their right hand on every throat tone. Read more on the “[Law of Minimal Motion](#).”

## Let's look at examples dealing with “A”

When you add the right hand – fingers ‘4,5,6, R pinky’ – the pitch goes down. The tone often improves as well. If you add pinkies (the low F and/or Low E) the pitch should go down a hair more because you're closing holes. However, I don't use either of those fingerings for A. If it's a long note I usually finger it with finger 3, 4 & 6 down. Why? Because when I've tried many combinations of fingerings and that one works best for me on *my* instrument. Another very popular option (possibly the most popular) is to add fingers 2,3 & 5,6.

## Long A – example of where I would use resonance fingering





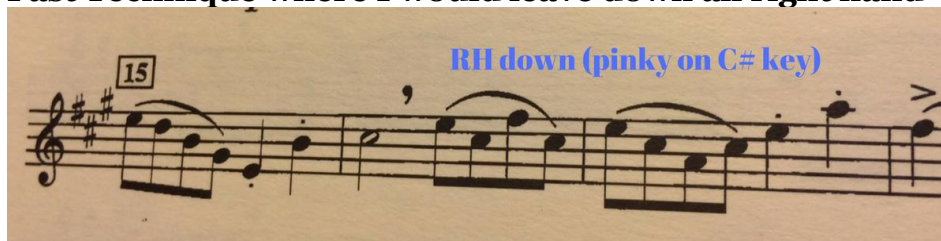
Now, if I am playing a fast, technical passage that has an “A” that never “crosses the break” to go to B or C or anything involving the right hand, I would not add anything. The small amount of improvement on a fast “A” is not worth the technical tradeoff of violating the Law of Minimal Motion.

#### **Fast technique where I don't add anything (until needed for C)**

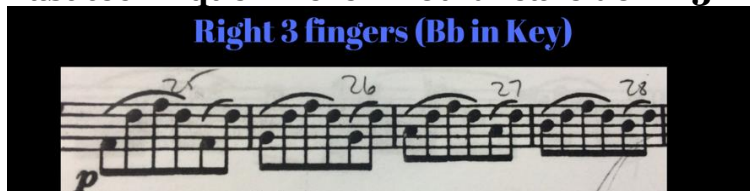


However, if I'm playing a fast technical passage that has an A that goes back and forth to B or C and involves the right hand being down a lot, I would leave down as much as finger 3,4,5,6 and both pinkies depending on the passage.

#### **Fast Technique where I would leave down all right hand**



#### **Fast technique where I would leave down 3 fingers or some fingers down.**

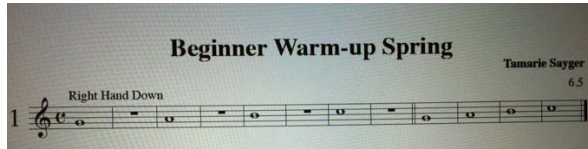


Hopefully, the examples above show you why there can't be a 100% correct answer to whether or not you should teach right hand down. Let me tell you what I do.



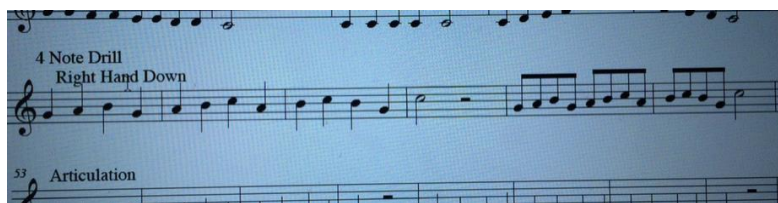
**I do NOT teach right hand down when I first teach the throat tone notes. I teach the true basic fingering only.**

Around January, I introduce this exercise on the beginner Spring Warm-up:



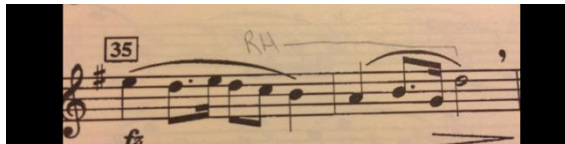
I INSIST that students put down their right hand on this exercise. I remind them every day and check it obsessively.

Around March, I introduce this exercise, also on the beginner Spring Warm-up:



Again, I INSIST that students put down their right hand. Before we start I tell them to “super-glue” the right hand (3 fingers and pinky) down and don’t let it move the entire line. I check it daily and include that heavily in grades or chair test scores. (for more about this topic, listen to [this podcast on crossing the break.](#))

As we find places the book or music where having the right hand down is helpful, I mark it on their music like this:



I continue to have them mark ‘RH down’ spots as long as needed and for most students that seems to be about 2-3 years.

I also explain *why* I’m doing it. Is it for technique (law of minimal motion) or for resonance? Letting them know *why* we are using it allows students, as they mature, to make the call for themselves about when to use right hand and when not to. This is how I help students learn make good technical and musical choices on their own, without relying on me every time.

# WTAMU Band Directors Workshop

**Band Directors' Workshop** is a band director clinic held every summer at West Texas A&M University in Canyon, TX. It takes place during the middle of July (July 7-19, 2019) in conjunction with one of the largest student band camps in the country. This camp hosts between 800-1000 students in 9 bands learning from some of the best band directors in the state of Texas. While the students are attending their classes, band directors attend their own classes, known as Band Directors' Workshop.

## A sample schedule includes:

7:30 – 8:30 – Free donuts and coffee in the directors' lounge  
8:30 – 11:00 – Rehearsal observation and discussion  
11:10 – 12:15 – Instrumental pedagogy classes  
1:30 – 3:20 – Talk Shop sessions (first week only)  
3:30 – 4:20 – Directors Band  
4:30 – Band Director Workshops



**Continuing Education documentation is provided!**

## Evening & Weekend Activities include:

- Access to the Virgil Henson Activity Center (basketball, swimming and workout center)
- Band Concerts (all day Saturday of the 1st week and Friday of the 2nd week)
- Some evenings have additional band rehearsals/activities you may observe.
- If you have students attending the camp you can check in with them at any of the numerous student evening events.
- Canyon is located 12 miles from Palo Duro Canyon State Park, the 2nd largest canyon in the US, and 20 miles from Amarillo, TX.

## The cost:

**It's FREE. Really. Completely. Totally. Free.**

You can attend all the rehearsals, classes, and activities above at NO charge.

You (or your school) are responsible for paying for your own meals and housing. However, most directors stay in campus housing which is very reasonably priced. [Sign up for the updates here if you'd like more information on campus housing prices when available.](#) For meals, most directors just buy food at the local fast food places around campus or prepare meals in their rooms (which are equipped with basic kitchen amenities). (updates email link - <http://eepurl.com/ciUcMf>)

**'Free Room Scholarships' are offered by WTAMU for ALL directors with 5 or more students from a single school attending camp.**

**[BandDirectorsTalkShop.com](#) will be providing a number of HOUSING scholarships for the 2019 Workshops. Click [HERE](#) to apply! (<https://goo.gl/eguV6S>)**



## FREE Resources (click on the image)

Find all these resources at  
[TeachersPayTeachers.com](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com)

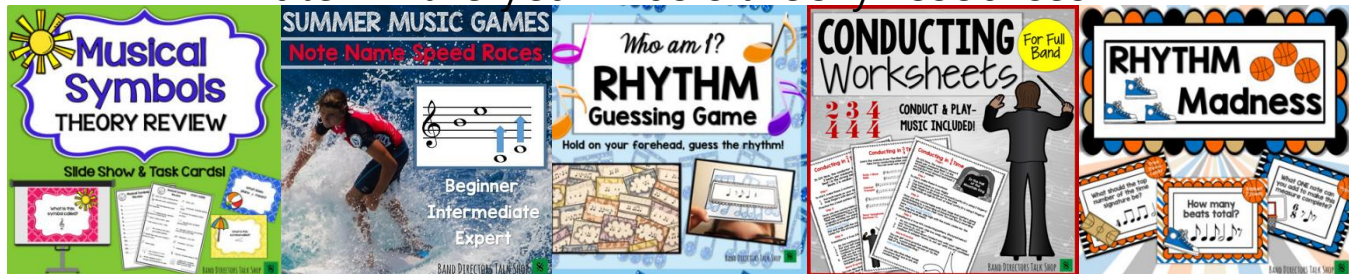


Resources for purchase

Early in the year music theory resources



Later in the year music theory resources



Rhythm Fundamentals

Clarinet Fundamentals

