

Start Your Beginner Flutes with Confidence

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Embouchure

1. Make a slightly sad, pouty face to practice rolling out the bottom lip.
2. Use one finger to feel the indentation in the chin where the lip plate of the flute goes.
3. Using the finger as a practice flute, start with the lips together and blow through the center of the lips.
4. The air stream should be directed at an approximately 45-degree angle. Students should practice blowing air at their palm.

Adding the Headjoint

1. Students should hold the headjoint similarly to how they will hold the complete instrument.
2. The lip plate should be placed in the indentation in the chin, **below** the bottom lip.
3. The bottom lip should cover 1/3 of the tone hole.
4. Do **NOT** use the “kiss and roll” method. This will doom your flutes to a lifetime of sharp and airy sound.

Inside the Mouth

1. If the student is still having difficulty producing a sound, the problem is often originating inside the mouth.
2. Say “ahh” like at the doctor’s office in order to get the tongue flat in the bottom of the mouth and out of the way of the air stream.
3. Measure the space in between your teeth by placing your thumb in between your front upper and lower teeth. If the teeth are too close together not enough air will get through the lips.

Learning How to Change Octaves and Control the Air

1. The flute does not have an octave key. Instead, the octave is controlled by the angle and speed of the air, similar to singing.
2. To produce the lower octave note on the headjoint, the air should be angled toward the inside of the left elbow.
3. To produce the higher octave note on the headjoint, the air should be angled farther across the headjoint and the air speed should increase. The bottom lip (not the jaw!) will move forward to adjust the angle of the air and make the tone hole smaller, increasing the air pressure.
4. The headjoint should NOT be rolled in and out to change octaves. The lips and air should produce the changes.
5. Students should practice until they can easily switch back and forth between two octaves on just the headjoint.

Common Sound/Embouchure Problems

1. Tone hole is too large/Overbite
2. Puffing the cheeks
3. “Kiss and roll”
4. Tight corners
5. Every student’s face is unique, so every embouchure will look slightly different.

Troubleshooting Unusual Embouchures

1. The teardrop: Students will not be able to produce a focused sound with the flute centered on the lips and will need to develop an embouchure off to one side.

2. Extremely thick lips: Students will most likely have to place the lip plate slightly higher on the bottom lip.
3. Extremely thin lips: Students will need to exaggerate the pouty shape of the bottom lip and work to elongate the top lip.

Troubleshooting Articulation

1. Students begin notes with puffs of air rather than the tongue.
2. The tongue “floats” too high in the mouth in between notes and blocking the air stream.
3. The tongue comes too far forward and is visible in between the lips.
4. The tongue placement is inconsistent.

It is very important that the students master the above skills before they put the whole flute together

Putting the Flute Together

1. The tone hole in the headjoint lines up with the first key on the body.
2. The rod on the footjoint goes in the middle of the keys on the body.

Common Hand Placement and Posture Problems

1. The angle of the head should be neutral, with the chin neither too high nor too low.
2. The left hand index finger bottom knuckle should make contact with the instrument. If this does not happen the student will not be able to balance the flute.
3. The right wrist is bent.
4. The right thumb is not underneath the right index finger.
5. The fingers hang over the keys. This will prevent students from sealing the open holes and will greatly inhibit the speed of their technique.
6. Students are using the tips of their finger rather than the fingerprint pads to cover tone holes.

What Notes Should Students Learn First?

1. Begin with a series of notes that are easy to balance on the instrument and easy to relate to one another.
2. I recommend starting with E, F, G, A, B.
3. Save C and D for the last notes as these are the most difficult to switch between.

The Three Bb's

1. All three Bb fingerings are created equal. They all have the same exact pitch and tone quality.
2. Thumb Bb should be taught first and used most often. It is the most efficient fingering in flat key signatures and what students will use the most often.
3. 1&1 Bb should be used for accidentals in C Major and sharp key signatures.
4. Lever Bb is best for trills and chromatic passages. This fingering will be used the least often.

Correcting Intonation

1. Young flute players are notoriously sharp.
2. The cork in the headjoint should be aligned so that when you insert the cleaning rod, the notch is in the middle of the tone hole or very slightly higher.
3. The headjoint should be pulled out $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch. Never more than $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch.
4. In order to correct sharp playing, the lip plate must be placed *below* the pink part of the lip and approximately 60% of the air should be aimed down into the tone hole.
5. The teeth should be a thumb's width apart and the tongue should be low and out of the way.
6. When young flutists are flat, it is almost always due to a lack of consistent air support.

