**If you have any follow-up questions to the materials in this handout, please visit the free Clarinet Pedagogy Forum at www.howardklug.com*

"Teach Clarinet As Though You Played It!"

The Midwest Clinic
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Gold Room, Congress Plaza Hotel

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Sponsored by Andino Clarinets, Gemstone Musical Instruments

I. The initial steps for the beginner clarinetist are the most important:

A. Describe the **embouchure** to students in simple terms:
   1. Bottom lip over bottom teeth and top teeth on the top of the mouthpiece (use the chap stick analogy to obtain the right position & pointed chin)
   2. Embouchure grip is round, like an inverted whistle. Teacher can wiggle barrel slightly from side-to-side to encourage proper grip pressure.
   3. Flat/spread/overly large tone – emb. is too loose
   4. Sharp/tight/small tone – emb. is too tight

   Summary: teach embouchure by how it sounds, not so much by how it looks. While we often instill correct embouchure habits in beginners by referring to visual models, we shouldn't change an embouchure in older students just simply because it looks different. BUT, do change it if it sounds bad. Provide good aural models for students…CDs, DVDs, VHS, guest performers or clinicians. *Have students match tones that they hear, rather than pictures that they see.* Play alongs (CDs provided with elementary methods) should be used when the teacher isn't a clarinetist. Encourage the beginning embouchure as a constant, unmoving grip. While artistic level playing requires a flexible embouchure, that discussion can be saved for mid to late high school.

B. Encourage the proper **mouth cavity** through the use of any of the following descriptors:
   Cold air, the Letter E, blowing out a candle at long distance, putting the notes in your nose, arch your tongue towards the roof of the mouth, or, best of all…

   close your mouth and allow your tongue to float upward to its natural position of rest….leave it there….open the front of your mouth and make an embouchure…play the clarinet.
   Summary: the same, natural tongue and throat position of a relaxed, quiet, non-playing student are just fine to play the clarinet. By all means, avoid the excessively open throat and pseudo yawn of a misguided attempt

to create a larger sound. Do not open the throat or drop the tongue; these actions will lead to an unfocussed and edgy tone.

C. Delay **tonguing** as long as possible. When articulation is introduced, stay with legato for a long time before teaching staccato. Use syllable "THEE" rather that "T" or "D." Good staccato comes from good legato. Introducing staccato prematurely often leads to a heavy, slow tongue. **Summary:** Young students often have difficulty transferring the roof-of-the-mouth syllables (T & D) onto the reed. Therefore, give them a syllable (Thee) that both places the tongue properly – between the teeth – and leaves the surface of the reed slowly. Heavy, slow tonguing is the result of jumping off the reed too far and too fast. Correct this by encouraging a firm tongue into the reed and a gentle release…"push into the reed firmly; let go gently."

II. Embouchure variables, how to diagnose, how to fix:

A. **Amount of bottom lip over the teeth:**
Too little – bright/edgy tone, legato is more difficult/disjointed
Too much – dull tone, natural chin indentation missing, muddy projection

More students are guilty of too little lip over the teeth rather than too much. Have them put more 'soft cushion' over the teeth, invert a whistle position, bring corners of the mouth towards the mp. Think of the bottom lip as a timbre adjuster…a softer and fatter bottom lip will significantly warm the tone.

B. **Amount of mouthpiece in mouth:**
Too much – spread tone, unfocussed, a flatter pitch, frequent squeaks
Too little – a small, tight tone, limited dynamic range, sharper pitch

More students are guilty of too little mp rather than too much. Have them Push more mp (1 to 2 mm) into mouth with the right thumb under the thumb rest…this thumb is *also part of the embouchure*. Use a double rubber patch to precisely show where the top teeth should be placed.

C. **Reduce/eliminate movement of jaw** during intervals and while tonguing.

This 'sympathetic chewing' puts a scoop in the tongued notes and it makes melodic playing disconnected. Work from higher speed (where the emb. cannot get involved) towards slower speed to fix. *'Keep the fast note feeling in the slow notes.'* A firmer/pointed chin is also usually missing in these cases.

D. **Improper grip pressure** (it should be somewhere in the middle):
Too much – a tight, restricted sound with limited dynamic range
Too little – an open, spread tone that lacks tonal center and is flat

More young students are guilty of too little grip pressure rather than too much. A teacher can assess an excessive grip pressure by inserting two fingers between the student's chin and the mouthpiece and slightly rotating them to open the grip (this should open up a tight tone). Conversely, an index finger on the top of the mp and a thumb under the chin can be pinched slightly to see if increased bite is necessary (this should produce a tone with more warmth and center). For a teacher who feels it inadvisable to touch the student, pose experimental questions to them: *"What happens when you bite harder?…What happens when you take in more mouthpiece?"*

III. Tongue position variables, how to diagnose, how to fix:

A. The tongue has three distinct, yet related areas:
1. **Tip** - takes care of the articulation
2. **Middle** - homogenizes and centers the tone
3. **Back** - takes care of the register (it is higher in the low register and lower in the high register)

B. **99% of students are too low** in the middle of the tongue, which causes:
1. Unresponsive tone (it blurts when starting) and disconnected intervals
2. Side-by-side melody notes can have different tone qualities
3. The various registers sound too different from each other
4. Throat tones sound fuzzy
5. Long tube notes don't speak easily
6. Notes above the staff get edgier as the student ascends
7. Squeaks occur in break-crossing intervals

C. **1% of students are too high** with the tongue, which will cause a slight glissando into the tongued notes above the staff…a rare occurrence.
Summary: In addition to the RX's suggested in IB, a more elevated tongue position can be achieved/coached by:
1. Encouraging a noisy inhalation (producing a cold spot on the roof of the mouth) and then blowing back through the instrument with that same feeling
2. Preaching the 'internal stretching' of playing the clarinet, making the student taller on the inside through:
   Lower air support and a higher vocal placement in the head
3. Learning from singing the pitches to playing the pitches…the same oral cavity movements are needed on both
4. Doing upward 12ths from the chalumeau register, which takes the naturally occurring higher tongue position of that register into the upper clarion register. Either have teacher activate register key or have student use right hand to do so. (Learn from one register to fix another)
5. Using the trill fingering for C3 to D3 (side key 3) as a tongue position locater. This trill cannot be accomplished without a sufficiently high tongue; kind of like a *'tongue barometer,'* it shows inside positioning.

Additional thoughts about the clarinet:

A. The dreaded *'under sound'* above the staff at reduced volume is due to the back of the tongue floating upwards during a diminuendo. Reduce or eliminate the under sound by changing the syllable (E towards O) or the temperature of the air (cold towards hot) as one gets softer.
B. Good tonguing is vertical, not horizontal. One should not see articulation in the throat area.
C. Air leaks in corners of the mouth are usually driven by an overly smiley embouchure, an inwardly rolled top lip, and/or lips that are too tight/hard.
D. Work for a large, aggressive sound first, refinement second
E. To get the right idea of breathing (chest down, abdomen out) have the student pull himself down into the chair by holding the underside of the chair with his hands…this holds the chest down and engages the diaphragm.
F. Teach more by ear, less by notation (hearing first, understanding second).
G. A red face is caused by excessive back pressure, which can be due to an overly hard reed, a mouthpiece that has too open of a facing, a tight throat, too much embouchure bite, a leaking instrument, or combinations of these things. Suspect the heavy reed first.
H. Change your articulation nomenclature; have your clarinetists *release* the notes into the instrument rather than *attacking* them.
I. Tongue/finger coordination problems in staccato passages are usually the fault of the fingers. *The tongue may be slow, but it is inherently even. The fingers are inherently fast, but uneven.*
J. Always resort to the slur as your tonal model for staccato. Staccato notes should be short long tones.
K. Follow the Bauhaus design mantra: *less is more.* The smaller the passageway through the mouth and into the clarinet, the bigger the sound. Please do not encourage your students to open their throats. They generally don't come with tight throats and it creates a world of problems for them later on as they seek control and refinement on the instrument.
L. Allow your students to keep tapping their feet in order for them to learn the skill of pulse keeping. The notes on the clarinet must be laid on top of a secure pulse, and we seldom spend as much time developing the skill of pulse keeping that we should. Don't ask students to internalize the beat feeling before they're ready to do so. In my experience, a student's inability to keep a pulse is the most important factor when winning/losing those various goals (first chair, all state ensemble, solo competition, entrance to a university) in their musical lives. It is the international constant.
M. The clarinet needs to be played louder in the lower register and softer in the higher register.

Clarinet Problem Check List

What you hear/see:	*What to suggest to the student:*
<u>Outer Embouchure</u> (lips, teeth, chin):	
Cheeks are puffed out	Make dimples, have lips hug the teeth, no air detours
Emb. moves while tonguing	Take fast note tonguing feeling & slow it down
Emb. corner air leaks	Think of the lips as a double rubber band, circle the mp, hold sides of reed, inverted whistle
Tone is bright	Stronger reed, more bottom lip over teeth, higher tongue
Tone is dull	Lighter reed, less bottom lip over teeth, point chin
Tone is tight/small/sharp	Open bite, relax embouchure, take in more mp
Tone is spread/unfocussed/flat	Firm up bite, take in less mp
<u>Inner Embouchure</u> (tongue, throat):	
Motion in throat while tonguing	Use syllable *THEE*, go back to legato, fix from the end of the note
Register crossing squeaks	Throat is too open, tongue has dropped; suggest cold air, letter E, nasal placement
Altissimo register is edgy	Throat is too open, tongue has dropped; suggest cold air, letter E, nasal placement, put notes in front teeth, NOT back of mouth
Tone is spread/unfocussed	Center of tongue too low; same fix as above
Tone is tight/small/sharp	Closed throat (very rare); suggest warmer air
<u>Articulation</u>:	
Tongue is slow	Relax tongue, stay closer to the reed, play legato
Tongue sounds heavy	Tongue is jumping off the reed, use softer touch, stay closer to reed when off
Tone changes during articulation	Emb. has changed (relaxed), grip more firmly
High register tonguing is edgy	Middle of tongue has dropped, use cold air
Anchor tonguing (not using tip)	Can be slow and noisy (thuddy), but not always - re-orient if noticeable or a limitation
Scoops in tongued notes	Emb. is moving sympathetically; use fast note feeling
<u>Hand/Finger Position</u>:	
Knuckles behind nails are bent in	Very young players may have to collapse these knuckles just to cover the holes; change the hand shape when they are 13 - 15 years old
Fingers extend beyond tone holes	Re-orient thumb positions
Index finger (RH) is under side Eb	This is created at beginner stage when the RH is not used early on; use neck strap
Squeaks in crossing break (upwards)	Cover holes, pay attention to R4 and L4
Squeaks when changing fingerings	Arch fingers, don't bump into side keys
Left hand collapsed	Do not align thumb with register key (place diagonally)
Right hand collapsed	Thumb rest hits too far up the thumb and/or R2 is tucked under side Eb key (use neck strap)

Clarinet Aural References for Teachers/Students

Elementary Book/CD combinations:

Hal Leonard. **"Play Clarinet Today!"** Hal Leonard, 2001, $9.95. An excellent, characteristic clarinet tone. All tracks start with an announcement about the materials to be covered. Book can be used in a clarinet class or as a self-tutor for beginners to use at home.

James O. Froseth. **"Do It! Play Clarinet."** GIA Publications, Inc., 1997, $15.95. Designed for either mixed or like-instrument classes, the clarinetist has a fine sound to copy. The piano and guitar accompaniments are attractively arranged and
fun to play along with.

James O. Froseth. **"Clarinet Home Helper."** GIA Publications, Inc., 2005, $7.95. From starting a tone on just the mouthpiece/barrel combination through introducing tonguing, this book might make an excellent home resource for the beginner. Mostly beginning 'how-to' lessons without printed exercises/songs.

Jonathan Rutland. **"Abracadabra Clarinet."** A & C Black, London, 2002, $19.95. Simple, verbal count-offs (1,2,3,4) to all the tracks with a piano accompaniment. Clarinet is prominently recorded.

Stand Alone CDs:

Howard Klug. **"Elegie,"** RIAX (www.woodwindiana.com), 1998, $15. Presents a variety of repertoire (Sarasate, Debussy, Phillips, Prinz, Fauré, Schumann, Reinecke, Templeton) for both Bb and bass clarinets.

David Shifrin. **"Brahms/Schumann Soirée."** Delos DE 3025, 1988. Brahms Clarinet Sonatas in f minor, Op. 120 No. 1 and Eb Major, Op. 120 No. 2, plus the Schumann Fantasiestücke, Op. 73. A fine, tonally dark example of the American School of clarinet playing.

Stanley Drucker. **"Music Minus One, Intermediate Level."** MMO Music Group, Inc., 1995, $19.95. These Grade III to V solos are presented in an attractively printed edition by the solo clarinetist of the NY Philharmonic. Excellent training for the late junior high and mid-level high school student.

Larry Combs**. "Brahms, Scriabin & Prokofiev."** Summit, DCD-125. These musical 'borrowings' from other instruments (Violin, Piano, Flute) work very well on clarinet, and are sold convincingly by the solo clarinetist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Larry also has another Summit release **("Orchestra Pro"** DCD-161) on which he plays/teaches the basic orchestral audition repertoire.