

Teaching the Clarinet Embouchure

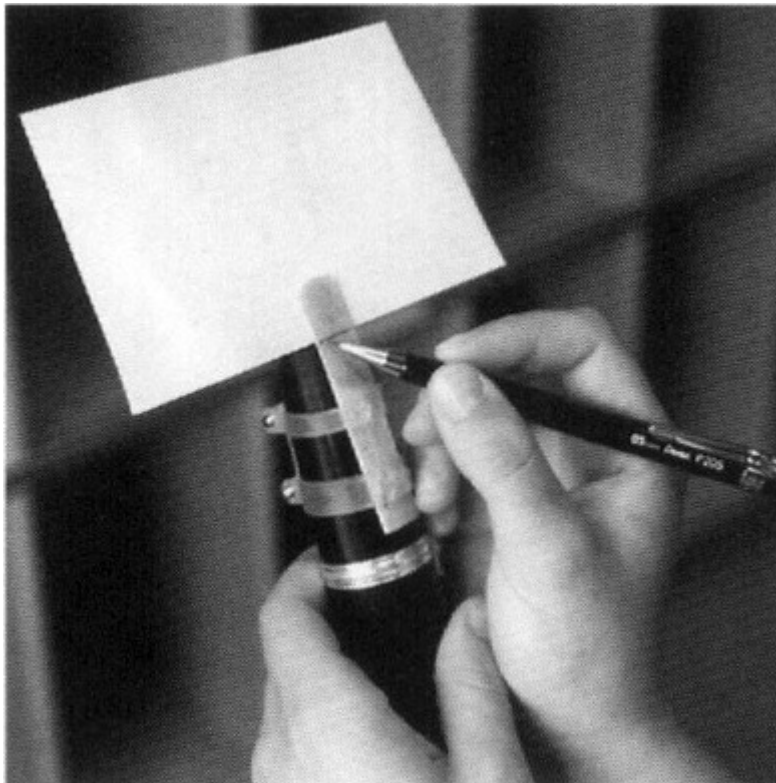
Everyone agrees on the importance of a good embouchure for good tone production. Embouchure, along with air support, determine the tone quality that is produced on a wind instrument.

Experienced teachers know that the first lesson is, perhaps, the most important in the playing career of a student. This is certainly true when it comes to clarinet playing. Embouchure muscles have a tendency to return to their habitual position. If the clarinet student's embouchure is not formed properly from the beginning, his or her tone production potential may be impeded.

Assist students in forming and developing their clarinet embouchure by having each be responsible for providing a small mirror that can be placed on the music stand. This will allow students to see that their embouchure is being formed properly.

Ensure a good formation of the embouchure by having each student do the following:

1. Put the mouthpiece and the barrel together and secure the reed with the ligature. Slip a piece of paper between the reed and the mouthpiece and slide the paper down toward the barrel until it stops.



2. With a pencil, draw a light line on the reed connecting the two sides of the paper. This line will indicate where the lower lip should be placed.

3. Hold the assembled mouthpiece and barrel in one hand and place the tip of the thumb just under the line that was drawn on the reed.



4. Remove the paper from behind the reed with the other hand and shape the mouth as if saying “whee-too.” Hold the mouth in the “whee” position while saying “too.”



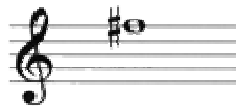
5. Cover the bottom teeth with a small amount of the lower lip.
6. Place the mouthpiece in the mouth so that the lower lip touches the thumb that was placed just below the line. The thumb should serve as a “stop” allowing just the right amount of mouthpiece in the mouth. Too much mouthpiece in the mouth will cause a harsh, raucous tone. Too little mouthpiece in the mouth will cause a tight, constricted tone.

7. Rest the top teeth directly on the mouthpiece. Close the mouth in a drawstring fashion with equal support on all sides of the reed. The chin should be flat and pointed. Using the mirror, check to see that the embouchure is formed properly.



8. Firm-up the top lip. This will open the back of the throat.
9. Take a full breath of air (filling the back of the throat) and play a long, steady tone.

If the embouchure is formed properly, the following pitch should sound:



Many young clarinetists play a pitch lower than this resulting in an immature, non-centered tone. To raise the pitch, have the student pull in the corners of the mouth as if saying “oo.” If the pitch is too high, which is rarely the case, the student should relax the embouchure as if saying “O.”

To ensure a well-established clarinet embouchure, have the student play long tones daily.

By following these simple steps, students will learn to form a good clarinet embouchure that will be important to the development of a beautiful clarinet tone.

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