Flute Teaching for the Music Educator

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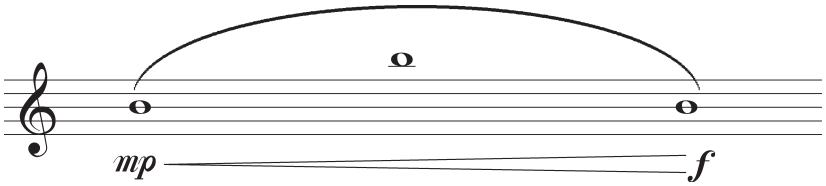
PROACTIVE TEACHING *Teach using direct verbs.*

Use **proactive language and phrases** to instill correct fundamental habits rather than negative language to eliminate faults.

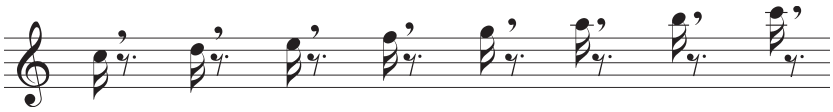
EMBOUCHURE *Create an small rounded aperture between the lips that focuses the airstream downward at a consistent angle.*

- Adjust the size of the aperture by **pushing the corners forward** and **dropping the jaw** (similar to pronouncing "***ooh***" or "***pure***").
- Direct the airstream downward by **pulling the top lip downward**.
- Develop and strengthen the flexibility of the embouchure muscles through lip slurs. Use a mirror to help judge embouchure muscle movement.



BREATHING/PHRASING

- Use the phrase **blow fast air** rather than **support the sound**.
- **Blow** fast air **to the** following **breath**.
- **Inhale** through the aperture (***"ooh"***) rather than through the corners of the lips.
- To inhale quickly, **drop the jaw** and **place the tip of the tongue forward** on top of the bottom teeth.
- Practice quick, deep breaths by playing scales with breaths following each short note – either articulated with the tongue or the air itself.



POSTURE

- Standing: Align the upper body directly with the hips and feet. **Look to the left** and position the flute **in front of the sternum**.
- Sitting: Sit upright from the hips completely against the back of the chair. Look to the left and position the flute in front of the sternum (footjoint to the left of the right knee).

POSITION *Hold the flute without gripping, directly in front of the chest while looking to the left.*

- Arms: With the arms evenly placed in front of the sternum, allow the left elbow to fall beside the rib cage while slightly raising the right elbow.
- Hands: Raise the flute with the wrists allowing the left wrist to arch backward and the right wrist to remain straight and turned clockwise.

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- Fingers: Curve all fingers comfortably so that they do not grip the keys (especially between the right-hand little finger and thumb). Curve the left-hand fingers so that they touch the keys on the tips of the fingers. Curve the left-hand thumb so that it touches the B and B♭ keys on its side.
- Balance the flute between three points: the **chin**, the **base of the left-hand index finger**, and the **tip** of the **right-hand thumb** (turned at a right angle to the tube).

EFFICIENT

Curved fingers, right wrist rotated clockwise, and right-hand thumb placed slightly behind the tube.

NEEDS MODIFICATION

Avoid rotating right wrist counterclockwise, gripping the flute between the right-hand thumb and little finger, and straightening the left-hand fingers.

INSTRUMENT ALIGNMENT

- Headjoint: Align the strike edge of the embouchure hole with the middle of the C♯ tone hole.
- Footjoint: Align the rod of the footjoint with the middle of the bottom key on the main body.

ARTICULATION

Single Articulation

- **Release the air** with the tip of the tongue **immediately after the breath.**
- **Rest the tip of the tongue forward** in the mouth after releasing the air.

Multiple Articulation

- **Double:** Practice both forward and reverse *"Too – Koo"* (*"T-K or K-T"*).
- **Triple:** Exchange accents from double *"T–K–T K–T–K"* or *"T–K–T T–K–T."*

VIBRATO *Create a smooth even variation above and below the pitch.*

- Practice by varying the exhaled air pressure blowing *"Hee–Hee"* or *"Hoo-Hoo."*
- Practice slowly and separated in triplets (♫ = 60 MM) on scales and arpeggios.
- Gradually speed up and run the triplets together (♫ = 90 to 120 MM).
- Use a strobe tuner to check for an even variation above and below the pitch center.

TECHNIQUE *Practice articulated first, then proceed to varying articulations.*

- **Major Scales**, **Arpeggios**, and **Scales in Thirds** played two octaves each.
- **Chromatic Scale** two and three octaves.
- **Minor scales** in parallel (natural minor – harmonic minor – melodic minor).

PRACTICE HABITS

- Practice with a metronome subdividing the beat.
- Articulate these subdivisions using the "Koo" syllable.
- Practice slowly to **avoid practicing mistakes**, maintain accurate pitch, and **reinforce musical interpretation**.

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Troubleshooting: Correcting with proactive language

Problem	Solution	Proactive Instruction
Tone is "airy."	Focus and direct the airstream into the embouchure hole by creating a smaller aperture.	"Push the corners forward." "Pull the top lip down."
Tone is "covered" and pitch is flat.	Expose more of the embouchure hole by rolling the flute outward.	"Roll out."
Tone is shrill and pitch is sharp.	Focus the air downward and create more space in the oral cavity.	"Pull the top lip down." "Drop the jaw."
Tone is weak and player has very little dynamic range.	Allow more air into the flute and control the airflow only with the embouchure.	"Blow!" "Drop the jaw." "Push the corners forward to play softly." "Relax the corners to play loudly."
Articulation is delayed and the tone and pitch are not centered.	Create a smaller aperture and release the air by keeping the tongue forward in the oral cavity.	"Push the corners forward." "Pull the top lip down." "Place the tongue forward."
Pitch of octave slurs is not accurate.	The correct amount of the embouchure is not exposed.	"Roll out." (if the octave is flat) "Drop the jaw." (if the octave is shrill)
Breathing is noisy and shallow.	Allow air in by blowing faster toward the end of the exhalation. Move the tongue out of the airflow path.	"Blow to the breath." "Breathe to end the note." "Keep the tongue forward."
Finger movement is sluggish.	Allow easier finger motion.	"Hold the flute with the three balance points." (not the operating fingers) "Curve the fingers."
Hands are sore or cramp.	Alleviate muscular tension (contraction) in the wrists.	"Curve the left wrist underneath the flute." "Straighten the back of the right wrist." "Keep the right wrist turned clockwise." "Strengthen the hand muscles."

Recommended Pedagogical Sources

Mary Karen Clardy	Flute Fundamentals	European-American
Michel Debost	The Simple Flute	Oxford
Walfrid Kujala	The Flutist's Progress	Progress
Jeff King/Richard Williams	Foundations for Superior Performance	Kjos

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The Flutist's Five Functional Phrases

ROLL OUT

PUSH the CORNERS FORWARD

PULL the TOP LIP Down

DROP the JAW

BLOW!

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