

# Improving Articulation in Young Oboists

*Timothy Hurtz, Clinician*

Sponsored by Fox Products Corporation



*Alabama Music Educators Conference*

Friday, January 22

4:00 p.m.

---

## Daily Reed Exercises

Playing on the reed alone is the best way to develop, build, re-establish, and fine-tune your embrochure. Long hours of muscle-building practice are not necessary and are usually detrimental to gaining control in your playing. Reed exercises enable you to regain control of your embrochure after time away from your instrument. You should always remember:

1. The tip of the reed should be placed on the bottom lip (like your head on a pillow).
2. Saying the syllable "O".
3. Bring the top lip down.
4. Not rolling the reed in too far.

"Finding" the tip of the reed will enable you to stop and start a pitch without using the tongue. The exercises below should be performed in order. Don't go on to the next exercise without mastering the one before!

### The "Siren"

After placing the reed in your mouth, hold the cork of the reed with your thumb and first finger. Start the sound by dropping the jaw and change the pitch by moving the jaw up and down. Work for as wide a pitch range as possible, always maintaining a forte dynamic.



### The "Start and Stop"

After achieving a very irritating siren, separate notes at the end of the siren by starting and stopping the sound with your jaw opening and closing the tip of the reed. Maintain a forte volume.



### The "Pitch Bender"

After placing the reed in your mouth, hold the cork of the reed with your thumb and first finger. Find a "C" (8va c1) on the reed; now slur between a C and a D-flat back and forth by moving your jaw, without accenting. Look for a consistent tone quality without losing volume while changing pitch. After this is achieved, accent the bottom note (C) and diminuendo while slurring up to D-flat.



## Daily Oboe Exercises

All of the following exercises should be played in order! Start by playing the notes with lip articulation only. Your volume should be forte and the articulation precise.



Play this G major exercise using a lot of jaw motion. Watch yourself in the mirror as you play! Work for a consistent, fast stream of air. Make smooth connections between the notes. The idea is to warm up; so start with a crude sound and then refine it.



Use this exercise as a way to really get your air moving! The E-flat acts as a stabilizer for your hand position. All the other notes should be almost totally unsupported. Use the left over air from the E-flat to play the rest of the phrase.



Test your embouchure by playing a few upper G's with just your lip articulation. Once you have an easy response and a good sound quality, then begin this g minor exercise. Try for more expression on the F#. Adding the low "b" key to the middle "f#" sometimes helps stabilize the pitch on that note.



Bend your embouchure to play all the intervals smoothly. The note "G" is a fundamental of high "D", so the note really is easier to play than you think. If you are blowing properly, your whole instrument will vibrate and ring.



## Articulation

Good articulation on the oboe begins with a proper embouchure, good breath support, and a well-balanced reed. Along with all these, some basic facts about articulation will help you to understand how to approach it.

The oboe acts like an amplifier or bull horn to whatever happens when a tone begins at the reed tip. What might seem to be a very light articulation may sound like an accent, an explosion or even a squawk. At times the beginning oboist's tonguing is described disparagingly as sounding like a "duck". Indeed, articulating beautifully is probably the most difficult of all playing techniques. To solve the problem of this amplifying affect, work on articulating on the reed alone with a jaw response. See "Daily Reed Exercises".

What could be referred to as the "threshold of sound" happens when the jaw drops to allow the tone to start. This "threshold" response permits the sound to start in the easiest, most unaccented way possible on the oboe. When you add the tip of the tongue to this action, more clarity is heard in the tone. In general, the least amount of tongue motion is the best. Directing the air through the tongue as if the tongue is being pushed by the air, helps to reduce the amount of tongue used. Most tonguing problems stem from poorly directed air. As the speed and support of the air increases, the tongue moves and gets out of the way faster, allowing for better tonguing.

Most fast tongued passages can be practiced more successfully on the reed alone because the physical action of tonguing is concentrated on, without finger positions to worry about. Typical articulation patterns, like the one below, can be practiced to make tonguing faster and more agile.



The use of accents can help the tongue relax allowing it to move quicker and freer. Accents also help increase the amount of air behind the tongue at the beginning of phrases with rapidly tongued notes.



Legato tonguing is more of a challenge for air use than tongue use. Again, fast air speed and good support make legato tonguing more connected and facile. This "Mozart" exercise will help the air/tongue coordination.



Finally, the use of "jazz"-type patterns can help loosen up the tongue for legato tonguing passages.

