

# Teaching Clarinet from the Podium for the Non-Clarinetist

By Sherry Miller

Have you ever wondered why your clarinets seem to sound the same or show little improvement even though you constantly remind them to “sit up, use more air, firm up, and flatten the chin?” Here are some tips for the non-clarinetist to teach clarinet in a rehearsal setting.



## THE REED

- Young players will play on a bad reed.
- Have a “reed check” day. Give them a grade or some type of reward as motivation.
- Insist on these requirements:
  - 1) 3-4 reeds, not chipped or brownish in color; and
  - 2) appropriate strength. Strength 3 is a good choice for younger players while more mature players may need a 3.5 or 4 as strength builds in the embouchure.
- Check reed placement. It could be too high or too low.
- The ligature should be even with the line on the mouthpiece.
- The ligature screws should be firm not too tight. Check to make sure the screws are actually present!

## TUNING

Quick Check: Have the student play 1<sup>st</sup> line E for two counts followed by 2<sup>nd</sup> line G for two counts. Look at the tuner for the 2<sup>nd</sup> line G. (E is not a good tuning note but helps the player to prepare the embouchure and get the air moving.)

- Flat Pitch: Embouchure is too loose. Make sure the barrel joint is pushed in.
- Sharp Pitch: Student may be playing too softly and not using fast air. Tell the student to ‘play louder’ and/or pull the barrel out slightly from the top joint.

Additional Tuning: Play middle C, followed by first-line E, open G and then 3<sup>rd</sup> space C - all two counts each. If middle C is sharp, pull out between the top and bottom joints (known as the “middle”). If 3<sup>rd</sup> space C is sharp, pulling the bell out slightly may help. Again, first-line E is not for tuning but used to complete the arpeggio.

## TONGUING TIPS

If you don’t like the sound your students make when tonguing, check for **anchor tonguing**. Anchor tonguing occurs when the tip of the tongue rests behind the teeth allowing the middle of the tongue to touch the reed.

Have the student perform 4 quarter notes at a metronome marking of 80 on first-line E. Ask the student to think about where the **tip** of the tongue is touching. If the student confirms the tongue is touching the back of the teeth instead of the reed, they may be anchor tonguing. Tell the

student to touch the tip of the tongue just below the tip of the reed – not behind the bottom teeth. It should be noted that some players can “anchor tongue” successfully.

### **EMBOUCHURE AND POSTURE**

- Head up and clarinet down.
- Feet flat
- Bell of clarinet even with knees.
- Chin flat, corners firm.\*

\*A loose embouchure can cause squeaks as well as flatness. You can do a quick check by touching the barrel of the clarinet while the student is playing. The student will react by making a firmer grip on the mouthpiece.

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