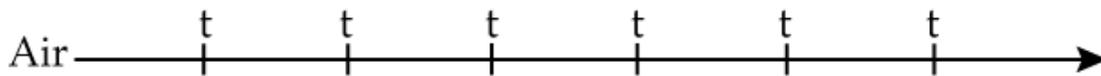


Masterclass: Articulation Calibration

By Heather Rodriguez

Beautiful and clean articulation is one of the most important aspects of playing any instrument. It not only defines your sound, but is also a powerful conveyor of your musical intention.

Although the subject of proper articulation is immense and can seem a veritable ‘can of worms,’ most of us can agree that the foundation of any good articulation concept should be a cool, fast and directed stream of air *on* which you articulate.



The best way to achieve this is to have the required air pressure already at the front of the mouth (literally, already blowing), then use the tongue as a valve to start and stop the flow of air into the instrument.

Beginning with the tip of the tongue on the tip of the reed, release the reed (and thus the air) in order to cleanly initiate a tone. As you articulate, strive to lightly replace your tongue in exactly the same spot at the tip of the reed each time. Using the minimum amount of motion necessary, the tongue quickly interrupts the vibration of the reed without slowing or lessening the air pressure.

As a Northwestern student studying with Russell Dagon, I learned the importance of tonguing not only with the tip of the tongue (which is broad, even with a ‘pointed tongue’), but rather with a *fine line* at the tip of the tongue. (Imagine using a pen to draw a small horizontal line on the very tip of your tongue.)

The following is a simple and effective exercise that you should first play legato (tongued but connected), then staccato (or 'clipped').



For a little variety, try this series of falling fifths (first legato, then staccato).



The next exercise consists of a descending C major scale and is executed a bit differently- first slurred, then staccato. Strive to maintain the same beauty and evenness of each note in both repetitions. Also, consider how the air is fast and spinning in the slurred version, and keep the same for the staccato repetition.

Carefully monitor the arch of your tongue in the throat tones and chalumeau register. Aim for the lowest note of the phrase, but don't allow the pitch to sag (or go flat) in those regions. As always, it is important to maintain the focus of the sound no matter which register of the clarinet you are in!



These exercises are meant as a part of your warm up and should be played slowly and carefully. Try recording yourself from time to time (always a very good idea for anything you are practicing). Also, these exercises are merely for refining your articulation- they should be followed by speed exercises. As in everything you play, let your ear be your guide.

Excerpt from Klosé's Method for Clarinet

The image shows a musical score for a clarinet exercise, consisting of six staves of music. The music is written in 4/4 time and begins with a dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte). The first staff contains the first measure, which starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The exercise features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth-note runs, sixteenth-note passages, and quarter-note sequences. The second staff continues the eighth-note runs. The third staff introduces a more complex rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and quarter notes. The fourth staff features a sequence of quarter notes, including a chromatic descent. The fifth staff continues with eighth-note runs. The sixth staff concludes the exercise with a final measure containing a quarter note and a double bar line.