

# Switching to Oboe Product Showcase

## How to teach Oboe Embouchure:

1. Discuss the qualities of a good embouchure BEFORE giving the student a reed
  - Protect the reed from the top and bottom teeth.
  - Funnel the air to the center of the mouth with your cheek muscles.
  - Hold the reed gently with the lips - too much pressure causes sound to stop!
  - Blow straight ahead, across the reed. NOT DOWN.
  - Put the top 1/3 of the reed in the mouth.
2. How to teach embouchure:
  - Soak the reed in water for at least 30 seconds before trying to teach embouchure. Water should come up to the thread
  - Always hold the reed by the cork.
  - With student(s): inspect the reed first. Notice how tiny the opening is. If you squeeze with your lips the opening will be squashed and no sound will come out!
  - Ask the student to roll their lips over their teeth, take a big breath, put just the tip of the reed in their mouth and blow straight ahead without puffing their cheeks.
  - Adjust the shape inside the mouth so the air is more funneled towards the tip of the reed by the cheeks.
3. Troubleshooting
  - Pinky Check: This step helps students squeeze the reed less, it's especially helpful for single-reed players who are more likely to have a too-firm embouchure.
    - Make your embouchure on your pinky. Observe your mouth pressure and shape. Remember that you want to use even pressure around the circumference of your pinky (and the reed). Once you've achieved even pressure around your pinky, go back and make that same embouchure on your reed, then try playing again.
  - Air issues: It takes higher air pressure to create sound on oboe, but I suggest NOT using the words "higher air pressure" with students because they only hear the word pressure and then end up pressing on the reed. Work on producing a narrow, cold, fast airstream.
    - Work on a narrow, cold, fast airstream: Raise a hand in front of your face with the fingertips at eye level. Blow into your hand, shaping the airstream so it's hitting one tiny spot on your hand and feels cold. Try using this kind of airstream while playing on the reed.
  - Soaking issues (too wet or dry): There is a "Goldilocks" amount of time to soak the reed, and this changes based on humidity, temperature, and density of the cane used to make the reed. A good rule of thumb is to soak the reed for 30-60 seconds.

## Oboe Reed Troubleshooting

1. Soaking problems: Soak reeds 30-60 seconds. Ensure that water covers the whole reed, and some of the thread.
  1. Under-soaking means the reed hasn't absorbed enough water to be flexible. An under-soaked reed can:
    - feel hard
    - sound very bright/not characteristic
    - play sharper than normal
    - can crack easily if mouth pressure is applied to it.
  2. Over-soaking makes the reed swell. This results in:
    - the reed feeling very hard/resistant
    - playing flatter than normal
    - the opening being super large and uncomfortable.
2. Age of reed: Student reeds last anywhere from 2-4 weeks, longer with proper care and storage. Students should break in reeds BEFORE using them in a lesson, rehearsal, or concert. Breaking in a new reed takes 3-4 30 minute practice sessions.
  1. Reeds that are too old will:
    - Respond poorly (take a long time for sound to come out), and be hard to play during fast articulated passages,
    - Lack reliable intonation and full dynamic range.
  2. Reeds that are new will:
    - Feel hard/resistant until broken in.
    - Lack reliable intonation and full dynamic range (specifically soft will be hard)
3. Hardness: All new reeds are hard at first, they need to be broken in. Upgrading to a harder (and often more costly) reed is appropriate as students age and their playing skills advance.
  1. Students playing too-hard reeds tend to:
    - Play quite loud and struggle to play softly.
    - Use a lot of embouchure pressure.
    - Play flat.
  2. Students playing too-soft reeds tend to:
    - Struggle with playing loudly.
    - Use a lot of embouchure pressure.
    - Play sharp.
4. Storage: Always store reeds inside a reed case.
  - The tubes/boxes that reeds are shipped in are NOT adequate storage boxes. They don't allow moisture to evaporate, frequently break apart if dropped, and aren't made to withstand a lot of pressure.
  - In very dry climates or when the heat/AC is on a lot, I recommend keeping reed cases in a DIY humidification system. You can find a how-to document on creating a humidification system on my website!

## Reed Sources (Annotated)

Note: "Medium Soft" reeds are only for beginners/small statured students for the first 2-3 months of playing. Encourage students to develop their air by upgrading to "Medium" reeds around October

**Beginners** have played oboe for under 1.5 years, AND/OR haven't established a regular weekly practice schedule AND/OR do not play any other wind instrument. Some students who have been playing oboe throughout middle school may be considered beginners if they don't practice at home.

1. Chemical City Handmade Reed (Beginner/Middle School): Medium
  - These are VERY consistent handmade reeds that my beginners have been having success with for the last year or so. They are typically easy enough for students to play them right out of the box, or with minor tip thinning which could be done with fine sandpaper.
  - These reeds are rarely out of stock, and the company is quite responsive to messages via email and/or Facebook.
2. Forrest Green Label Oboe Reed: Medium
  - These reeds are reliable, inexpensive, and play fairly in tune right out the box. The openings tend to get smaller over time, so these reeds are inappropriate after the first few years of playing when students will need a more reliable opening.
  - These are very popular, so they go out of stock around typical concert times: December, March, May.

**Intermediates** can play all their major scales fluently and without mistakes. They can play the full range of their instrument (low B/Bb to high D or Eb) easily. They are working on expanding their dynamic range without squeezing, and starting to incorporate vibrato.

1. Bocal Majority Intermediate Oboe Reed: 4, 5, 8, 9, 10
  - These reeds are made by oboists and checked for intonation before being sent out. They are generally consistent between batches and play mostly in tune right out of the box. They are harder, but provide a greater depth of tone quality because of the resistance.
  - These are very popular, so they go out of stock around concert times: December, March, May.
2. Chemical City Handmade Oboe Reed (Intermediate)
  - This line of reeds is also quite consistent. They tend to be easy-blowing, so perfect for middle school students and beginning high schoolers. Students should switch to a harder reed after 1-2 years of playing this reed.
  - They have been sold out around early December, so students should purchase in advance of typical concert times: December, March, May.

**Intermediate cont'd:**

## 3. Forrest Green Label Oboe Reed: Medium

- These reeds are reliable, inexpensive, and play fairly in tune right out the box. The openings tend to get smaller over time, so these reeds are inappropriate after the first few years of playing when students will need a more reliable opening.
- These are very popular, so they go out of stock around typical concert times: December, March, May.

**Advanced** students can play major and minor scales in different subdivisions fluently with few mistakes. They play up to high E or F with little difficulty, have full control of their dynamic range, and play in tune consistently once their reed is broken in and/or adjusted. They incorporate vibrato into their repertoire.

## 1. Reeds that I make and sell

- My reeds are best suited to students who can adjust their own reeds. I prioritize response and stable intonation which requires a consistent and supported airstream.
- I'm only selling to students I know personally right now, but hope to expand to offer reeds more widely in the next 6-8 months.
- Staple return discount available. Orders filled in 1-2 weeks.

## 2. Wildflower Reeds Oboe Reed: medium (Either Intermediate or Pro)

- These reeds are quite consistent, and close to the reeds I make myself, so are easy for my students to adjust. They are made of high quality cane and have a longer useful lifespan. They have a lovely, consistent sound, and offer slightly more resistance than the Intermediate reeds listed above.
- These reeds typically ship in 1-2 weeks but can be delayed or backordered around typical concert times: December, March, May.

**English horn reeds**

Generally students should purchase English horn reeds from the same maker they purchase oboe reeds from. Wildflower, Bocal Majority, and Forrests RSB reeds have performed well for my students.