

5-C Clarinet Embouchure

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What produces the sound on the clarinet? Clarinet sound is produced by the reed vibrating against the slot in the mouthpiece activated by the air (see [E-Tip #3](#)). Unlike brass players, the clarinet embouchure is not the sound maker (resonator).

What is the purpose of clarinet embouchure? The purpose of clarinet embouchure is to provide a great platform (or “Happy Place”) for the reed to vibrate. The 5-C embouchure below will help a clarinetist develop a great environment or “Happy Place” for the reed to vibrate.

The 5-C embouchure could be thought of as a single lip version of a double lip embouchure (aka “Single Lip-Double Lip”). 5-C allows the reed to vibrate freely as in double lip embouchure. However, since 5-C is a single lip embouchure with top teeth on the mouthpiece, it avoids the problems of double lip: hard to do, hurts for some, lack of stability for marching/standing, etc.

5-C Embouchure Steps:

1. Circumference (or Circle)
2. Corners to Cheekbones
3. Chin
4. Cover
5. Click

5-C Embouchure Details:

1. **Circumference (or Circle):** Lightly stretch bottom lip flat around lower teeth circumference (or circle).
2. **Corners to Cheekbones:** Use “Smile Muscles” ([Zygomaticus major muscles](#)) to stretch lightly upwards from mouth corners to cheekbones. These muscles are the ones used when smiling. This should also help flatten out the chin.
3. **Chin:** Smooth out chin muscles, focusing the chin to a point. But, DO NOT hinge the jaw forward – use a normal face. NOTE: Steps 1 and 2 will likely flatten the chin just about right – this step could be called “Check Chin.”
4. **Cover:** Put some bottom lip over bottom teeth – “Not too much, not too little, just right.”
5. **Click:** Top teeth rest on mouthpiece. Think, “Click” (See [E-Tip #4](#)). Don’t bite down hard – think of top teeth “receiving” the mouthpiece. IMPORTANT: Upper lip also sits gently on top of mouthpiece and moves upwards toward top teeth with no downward pressure.

NOTE: The embouchure above and embouchure tips below have been heavily influenced by the ideas of master single reed teacher Joe Allard. (This embouchure can be used on all clarinets and saxophones.) See my blog post, [ClarinetMike’s 101 Clarinet Tips: #25 ClarinetMike’s 5-C Embouchure](#) at my ClarinetMike Blog, clarinetmike.wordpress.com, for important acknowledgements, etc.

Clarinet Embouchure: E-Tips for E-Lips SHORT VERSION

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E-Tip #1: Engage. “Keep Lower Teeth Engaged.” Beneath the reed, keep the lower teeth right under the bottom lip – do not allow space between the lip and teeth. Think “Reed, Lip, Teeth.” You want to somewhat feel the reed through the lower lip with the bottom teeth. But, don’t push up too much. Think in terms of creating a good platform for the reed to vibrate upon. Keeping the lower teeth engaged allows for sensitive adjustments to the sound, as there is a close connection to the resonator (reed vibrating against the slot of the mouthpiece).

E-Tip #2: Edges. “Don’t Pinch the Edges of the Reed.” Be sure to keep the lower lip flat against the reed so as not to crimp the sides of the reed. Once past the reed, the lips need to seal to keep air from leaking out. Remember, clarinet sound is produced by the vibration of the reed. The more the reed vibrates, the more sound is produced.

E-Tip #3: Eee’s. “Use ‘Eee’ Syllables.” I’ve found it very helpful to voice [i] these syllables in the specified ranges when playing in different registers on the (Bb soprano) clarinet:

“Teu” low register (below Open G) with a French pronunciation [ii] (see clarinetmike.com/media_clinic.html)

“Tee” Open G up to third space C in the staff

“Dee” C# in the staff and higher

Notice above, that each syllable has a progressively higher “Air Position” than the next. By “Air Position,” I am referring to how high the air goes through the mouth. (I suggest trying this by whispering “Teu, Tee, and Dee” in succession. Notice that the air is higher on each one.) The basic idea is that the higher one plays on the clarinet, the higher the air should go through the mouth. I think it is easier to think “Air Position” than “Tongue Position.”

These voicings help not only with embouchure, but also help greatly with tonguing. It was a big breakthrough for me to finally realize that embouchure and articulation are very closely related. [There is a video of me pronouncing and explaining these syllables available on my website – go to clarinetmike.com/media_clinic.html and watch “Embouchure: Tongue Position = Air Position.”]

Another important and useful syllable is “Hee.” It has a very high air position and works really great for me for voicing Super High G (fourth ledger line above the staff). However, it is not usable in the same way as the others because it is not good for tonguing. (In warm-ups, I’ll whisper “Hee” a few times to set the voicing and then play a Super High G with a “Dee” articulation.) “Hee” is also very useful pedagogically in explaining to a student about voicing and “Air Position.” (Have the student whisper “Teu” or “Tee” and then have them whisper “Hee.”)

E-Tip #4: Ex. “Say syllable ‘Ex’ – Lower Teeth Give, Top Teeth Receive.” Don’t bite down hard on the mouthpiece with the top teeth – i.e. don’t push down with head. Think in terms of top teeth “receiving” the mouthpiece from the lower teeth as when saying the syllable, “Ex.” As with all of these concepts, it’s important to personalize this to a clarinetist’s unique physiology, equipment, etc. Also, be sure to say “Ex” and not “X.” They’re very slightly different.

E-Tip #5: Eat. “Use ‘Chewing Muscles’ Up High.” Starting about High E (third ledger line above the staff) and higher, put molars and back teeth very slightly closer together as if chewing something. Be sure to use “Dee” voicing (see E-Tip #3). The higher the note, the more “chew” is needed. The key to playing up high is to find the best spot in your air position, embouchure, mechanism (i.e. your body), etc. for each note. Or, as Joe Allard used to say, “Every note has its own special feeling.” (This is true for all notes in all registers, actually.) As with the other E-Tips, this concept will take some experimentation.

[i] “Voicings” such as these are used to help with the position of the air, tongue, embouchure, mouth, etc. A clarinetist should be careful to not move the jaw the same amount s/he does when actually speaking these in normal conversation.

[ii] On “Teu,” do not drop the bottom teeth away from the bottom lip (See Tip #1 above).

Clarinet Practice Routine

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Warm-up/Basics

Relaxation/Air/Balance

Tone (Emb. & Voicing/Articulation)

Long Tones (Sound Projection)

Tonguing

Various Exercises (Over The Break, Overtones, High C, High Notes, Legato Fingers, Tuning, Reeds, etc.)

Scales

Chromatic

Major & Minor plus Arpeggios

Fully Diminished 7th Chords

Others (Whole-tone, Octatonic (a.k.a. Diminished), related to a work, etc.)

Music

Sight-reading/Transposition

Etudes/Studies

Solos

Excerpts (Band, Orchestra, Chamber, etc.)

Improvisation/Jazz

Doubles

[NOTE: This practice routine and other handouts are available at clarinetmike.com/resources.]

Practice Tips A to Z
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- A.** Always ARTC (Approach, Relaxation, Tone, Counting – “Artsy!”).
- B.** Breaks. Practice in several short sessions (30-45 minutes) with breaks.
- C.** Counting-Aloud Technique. See Lesson 5 of Leon Russianoff’s Clarinet Method, Book I.
- D.** Double Articulation. Put two articulations of equal duration on each note of a passage.
- E.** Enjoy your metronome, but don’t get addicted.
- F.** Fingers Ahead. See Daniel Bonade’s short book, The Clarinetist’s Compendium.
- G.** Go Slow at first (with ARTC), then Go Faster. Go SLOW!
- H.** Hands! “If you can’t clap it, you can’t play it.”
- I.** Intensity. Learn to stay focused. (“Relax in your body./Concentrate in your mind.”)
- J.** Judge your playing soberly. Know what is “really going on” in your practicing.
- K.** Kinko’s. Make study scores of piano part and old versions of your part.
- L.** Listen to CD’s, etc. for insights, but not too much (don’t just copy!).
- M.** Make MUSIC!
- N.** No distractions or interruptions while practicing.
- O.** Organize your practice. Follow a good practice routine.
- P.** Patterns. Look for patterns in the music. Find and mark scales, chords, etc. on your music.
- Q.** Quit if it hurts or you get overly upset.
- R.** Record yourself and listen to it. Use Smart Phone App! Find out how you actually sound (and look).
- S.** Sit and Stand during practice.
- T.** Tuning. Pay Attention to Pitch and Tuning. Get a tuner and use it!
- U.** Understand the words, symbols, etc. on the music. Look them up in a GOOD music dictionary.
- V.** Variety. Spice up practicing by changing the routine (add jazz, etc.)
- W.** Work on hard parts first. Break the music into sections.
- X.** Examine the larger form. Notice what phrases, sections, etc. repeat.
- Y.** Yodel or SING the music.
- Z.** Zero in on Rhythm (pattern & pulse). “Rhythm First, Notes Second”