

PROBLEMS SAXOPHONIST-DOUBLERS HAVE
(Try Not to Sound Like a Saxophone Player, Okay?)

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FLUTE

- Embouchure. And by embouchure, I mostly mean *aperture*, the opening in your lips. It needs to be smaller. If you have any of the following problems, then your aperture is probably too large: airy or anemic tone, running out of breath halfway through a phrase, inability to play loudly in the lowest octave, inability to play softly in the highest octave, general out-of-tune-ness. Sound familiar? I thought so.
- Fingerings. Keep that right hand pinky down. And lift the left index finger for second-octave D and E \flat . I mean it. You think it doesn't make any difference, but it will when you get that aperture thing worked out and your tone starts to improve. And, for the same reason, make sure you are using the right ring finger for F \sharp , not the middle finger.
- Ledger lines. Learn to read them. It's time. Lock yourself in a room with a book of flute etudes.

OBOE

- Reeds. Store-bought, mass-produced ones are great if you love bright, buzzy sounds, unstable pitch, and short reed life. Contact the oboe professor at your nearest reasonably-large university music program, and see if he/she will sell you some of their reeds or refer you to a talented graduate student. Reeds need to be adjusted to your embouchure, instrument, climate, playing style, and even the demands of the specific gig. A skilled reedmaker can sell you a reed, let you try it out, and, with a few flicks of a sharp knife, make it fit you like a glove. Buying handmade reeds over the internet costs more, takes longer, and usually eliminates the possibility of custom adjustment.
- Fingerings.
 - Don't fall into the trap of using the forked F fingering all the time. Treat it like an alternate fingering to be used only when absolutely necessary (although in some key signatures it's necessary most of the time). Right-hand F should be first choice, and if you can afford an instrument with a left F key, it will help you out of a lot of difficult situations.
 - One other thing about the forked F: use of the E \flat key is required if you *don't* have an F-resonance mechanism (like many student instruments), but if you *do* have the F-resonance, you *shouldn't* use the E \flat key. (Press with your right hand index and ring fingers, and if a small pad opens near your pinky, you have the F-resonance.)

CLARINET

- Embouchure/voicing. You know the sound of a saxophonist playing the clarinet. It's tubby, flabby, unfocused, and flat. Don't be that guy. Support with your abdominal

muscles, blow super-fast icy-cold air, and remember that the embouchure is firm but not as firm as you think. Hear that clear, ringing, up-to-pitch sound? Nice work.

- Fingers.
 - At least 90% of clarinet squeaking comes from a failure to completely cover the toneholes. Use the large, flat surface of the first joint of the fingers (not the tippy-tip), and stay relaxed.
 - Get good and comfortable with the pinky fingerings. ALL of the pinky fingerings. The Klosé “68 Exercises of mechanism” from the *Celebrated Method* are great—practice them using all possible fingering combinations.
 - Crossing the dreaded “break” is all about finger timing and precision—keep the airstream and embouchure steady. The left hand index finger just needs to tilt a little to open the A key; it shouldn’t hop or slide onto the key, and the fingertip stays close to the tonehole/ring.
- Angle. Keep the clarinet fairly close to the body, at something less than a 45-degree angle. The mouthpiece enters your mouth with the reed surprisingly close to vertical. It should look a little like you are trying to pry your front teeth out.
- Mouthpieces. Please, I beg of you, get a good, standard, middle-of-the road mouthpiece that will take a medium or medium-hard reed. Getting a tip opening as big as your tenor piece might give you extra volume, but why play that loud if nobody is going to want to hear it?

BASSOON

- Intonation. This creature is full of quirks. You need a good, stable reed (my advice on buying oboe reeds applies here, too) and unshakable breath support. Oh, and preferably an instrument that costs as much as a nice car, but a good bassoon teacher may be able to help you pick out a quality bocal (neckpipe) that will improve the situation with a lesser instrument.
- Fingerings. Bassoon fingerings are very flexible—this is good and bad news. See that you are very conscientious about them—a slightly erroneous fingering might still produce approximately the right pitch, but may lack resonance, may not slur cleanly, etc. Don’t develop bad and hard-to-break habits out of laziness.
- Accessories. A neckstrap seems like an obvious choice to a saxophonist, but using one for the bassoon is an advanced technique. The easiest and most stable way to balance this awkward thing is to sit down and use a seat strap. A crutch (right-hand handrest) is totally optional, but, depending on your hands, may provide a little extra control and security.
- Clefs. If you’re not up to speed on your bass clef reading, you’ll need to get serious about that pretty quickly. Oh, and there’s more bad news: for orchestral parts, solo literature, and even musical theater books, you’ll also need to be fluent in tenor clef.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Visit me at www.bretpimentel.com for tons tips on woodwinds and doubling.