So you want a better sound?

A Guide to Improving Tone for Wind Instruments

Meghan Fay Olswanger
MUSI 5398: Advanced Studies
Practical Application Project No. 2
American Band College
Sam Houston State University
SO YOU WANT A BETTER BASSOON SOUND?

Let’s answer our question with another question....

What is a bassoon supposed to sound like?

It’s probably difficult for you to describe what you think a bassoon should sound like, but I bet you could offer an opinion of which sound you liked better if you heard two people playing the bassoon.

PART ONE: FIND A ROLE MODEL

Using a critical ear, listen to each performer and fill out the worksheet on the following page. Do not be afraid to listen to recordings multiple times!

These six individuals are accomplished bassoon players who have great tone. However, none of them have the exact same tone. The sound that appeals to one ear might not appeal to another.

Example No. 1: Judith LeClair
Principal Bassoon of New York Philharmonic

Example No. 2: Sol Schoenbach
Former Principal Bassoon of Philadelphia Orchestra

Example No. 3: Bernard Garfield
Former Principal Bassoon of Philadelphia Orchestra

Example No. 4: Klaus Thunemann
Former Member of North German Radio Symphony Orchestra

Example No. 5: Karen Geoghegan
Bassoon Virtuoso

Example No. 6: Per Hannevold
Principal Bassoon of Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra
The adjectives in this word bank are only suggestions. You can create your own adjectives/short phrases in your responses. Some of these adjectives have a positive association and others negative. Listen for both. Remember, we are only considering tone quality and not other elements of performance.

1. Example #1 Tone Quality Description:

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

2. Example #2 Tone Quality Description:

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

3. Example #3 Tone Quality Description:

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

4. Example #4 Tone Quality Description:

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

5. Example #5 Tone Quality Description:

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

6. Example #6 Tone Quality Description:

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

7. Which performer’s tone quality do you like best? Why?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
Record yourself playing the simple exercise provided.

Bassoon

Danny Boy

Old Irish Air

Slowly and freely

\[\text{Music notation}\]

4

8

12

\[\text{Music notation}\]

So you want a better Bassoon sound?

Part Two: Self-Analysis
Using a critical ear, listen to your recording of Danny Boy and reflect on your tone quality, guided by the worksheet below. In question 3, you might find it helpful to replay the recording of your tone role model. Do not be afraid to listen to recordings multiple times!

**Vocabulary Bank:**
- Airy
- Big
- Brassy
- Bright
- Buzzy
- Clear
- Closed
- Cutting
- Dark
- Deep
- Dull
- Edgy
- Focused
- Free
- Full
- Harsh
- Heavy
- Light
- Mellow
- Muffled
- Narrow
- Open
- Pinched
- Relaxed
- Resonant
- Rich
- Ringing
- Round
- Shallow
- Small
- Spread
- Strained
- Strong
- Vibrant
- Weak
- Wide
- Woody

The adjectives in this word bank are only suggestions. You can create your own adjectives/short phrases in your responses. Some of these adjectives have a positive association and others negative. Listen for both. Remember, we are only considering tone quality and not other elements of performance.

1. How would you describe your tone quality?

2. Positive Elements of Your Tone Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Improvement for Your Tone Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Compare and Contrast:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Current Tone</th>
<th>Your Tone Role Model’s Tone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now you have an idea of where you are. You have an idea of where you want to go.

But, how do you get there?

In the next section, you will find some common embouchure problems that result in a decrease in tone quality as well as how to fix them.

**PART THREE: EMBOUCHERE CHECK**

Correct Formation of the Embouchure

1) Place the tip of the reed on your lower lip.

2) Draw the reed into your mouth, taking the lower lip with it.

3) Bring the top lip down slightly over the top teeth.

4) When the reed is in the mouth, the top lip should be almost to the first wire and the bottom lip should be slightly behind it.

Drawing from Primary Handbook for Bassoon by R. Polonchak courtesy of Meredith Music Publications, P.O. Box 24330, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33307
# Common Embouchure Issues & Remedies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sounds Like</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Remedy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High pitch crow with too few sounds.</td>
<td>Reed is too stiff, closed off.</td>
<td>Check thickness of reed, balance in cane.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Embouchure is too tight, pinched.</td>
<td>Decrease pressure in embouchure, more relaxed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low pitched crow.</td>
<td>Lack of support.</td>
<td>More support to dampen the reed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reed too long and/or wide.</td>
<td>Change length and/or width of reed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsupported sound on low F.</td>
<td>Lack of support from lower jaw.</td>
<td>Slightly increase lower jaw support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of air column support from diaphragm.</td>
<td>Use faster airstream. More support from diaphragm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Learn from the Masters

Take a tone quality lesson from some of the best! Look at videos 7 and 8 for brief tone quality masterclasses.

## Did you know?

- Crow on the reed pitch = F or F#
- Crow on reed and bocal pitch = C

If yours doesn’t line up, something may be wrong with the set-up of your reed!
Play these tone exercises daily to improve tone quality. Always listen to make sure that you are producing your most beautiful tone possible. Slow intentional practice is what develops a better tone!

**VOICINGS**

The shape and placing of the oral cavity has a huge effect on pitch and tone for the bassoon. The voicing for bassoon changes with register, as is indicated below. Practice your chromatic scale, **slowly**, while focusing on the shape and placement of the vowel.

1) Say these to get the feel of the voicing shapes in your mouth:

- "Ah” as in “Rickshas from Oz”
- “Oe” as in “Roast Toast”
- “Ew” as in “To Do”
- “Ee” as in “She Sees Me”

2) Now get the feel of the voicings in your mouth with the reed and bocal and observe the differences caused in pitch and tone:

3) Now get the feel of the voicings in your mouth with the full instrument set up and transferred to the bassoon:

Etc.
Play these tone exercises daily to improve tone quality. Always listen to make sure that you are producing your most beautiful tone possible. Slow intentional practice is what develops a better tone!

**LONG TONES**

Long tones should be played on the full chromatic range of the instrument, with careful attention to the tone quality produced. When playing long tones, the goal is consistently beautiful tone quality. Focused practice and listening is essential. Make sure to play these for the full chromatic range of the instrument (see below). For simplicity’s sake, only a small demonstration pattern is listed here.

---

**RECHTMAN LONG TONE EXERCISE**

You can also do “long tones” while keeping moving fingers, like in the exercise below. In this exercise, make sure you are doing each phrase in one breath. Play this pattern for the full chromatic range of the instrument (see below). For simplicity’s sake, only a small demonstration pattern is listed here.

---

**MOVING LONG TONE EXERCISE**

You can also do “long tones” while keeping moving fingers, like in the exercise below. In this exercise, make sure you are doing each phrase in one breath. Play this pattern for the full chromatic range of the instrument (see below). For simplicity’s sake, only a small demonstration pattern is listed here.

---

**BASSOON RANGE**

---

American Band College of Sam Houston State University

Fay Olswanger 36
SO YOU WANT A BETTER **SAXOPHONE** SOUND?

Let’s answer our question with another question....

**What is a saxophone supposed to sound like?**

It’s probably difficult for you to describe what you think a saxophone should sound like, but I bet you could offer an opinion of which sound you liked better if you heard two people playing the saxophone.

**PART ONE:**

**FIND A ROLE MODEL**

Using a critical ear, listen to each performer and fill out the worksheet on the following page. Do not be afraid to listen to recordings multiple times!

These six individuals are accomplished saxophone players who have great tone. However, none of them have the exact same tone. The sound that appeals to one ear might not appeal to another.

**Alto Example No. 1:**

**Eugene Rousseau**
Professor of Saxophone at University of Minnesota

**Alto Example No. 3:**

**Frederick Hemke**
Professor of Saxophone at Northwestern University

**Alto Example No. 5:**

**Claude Delangle**
Saxophone teacher at National Superior Conservatory of Music, Paris

**Alto Example No. 2:**

**Marcel Mule**
Former Saxophone Teacher at Paris Conservatory

**Alto Example No. 4:**

**Jean-Yves Formeau**
Saxophone Soloist for Berlin Philharmonic

**Alto Example No. 6:**

**Otis Murphy**
Professor of Saxophone at Indiana University

---

**American Band College of Sam Houston State University**

Fay Olswanger 37
SO YOU WANT A BETTER SAXOPHONE SOUND?

PART ONE: FIND A ROLE MODEL

It can be rather difficult to find recordings of solo classical tenor saxophone and baritone saxophone. In addition to careful study of the alto saxophone recordings, listen to these examples for tone quality in the lower saxophone instruments!

Tenor Example No. 1: Eugene Rousseau
Professor of Saxophone at University of Minnesota

Tenor Example No. 2: James Houlik
Professor of Saxophone at Duquesne University

Baritone Example: Eugene Rousseau
Professor of Saxophone at University of Minnesota

American Band College of
Sam Houston State University

Fay Olswanger 38
Vocabulary Bank:
Airy  Big  Brassy  Bright  Buzzy  Clear  Closed  Cutting  Dark  Deep  Dull  Edgy  Focused  Free  Full  Harsh  Heavy  Light  Mellow  Muffled  Narrow  Open  Pinched  Relaxed  Resonant  Rich  Ringing  Round  Shallow  Small  Spread  Strained  Strong  Vibrant  Weak  Wide  Woody

The adjectives in this word bank are only suggestions. You can create your own adjectives/short phrases in your responses. Some of these adjectives have a positive association and others negative. Listen for both. Remember, we are only considering tone quality and not other elements of performance.

1. Example #1 Tone Quality Description:
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
2. Example #2 Tone Quality Description:
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
3. Example #3 Tone Quality Description:
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
4. Example #4 Tone Quality Description:
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
5. Example #5 Tone Quality Description:
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
6. Example #6 Tone Quality Description:
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
7. Which performer’s tone quality do you like best? Why?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
_____________________________________________________________________________________
Record yourself playing the simple exercise provided.

**Alto Sax**

**Danny Boy**

*Old Irish Air*

```
Slowly and freely

4

8

12

rit.

a tempo

rit.

Slower

Copyright 2004 by MakeMusic, Inc.

MakeMusic, Inc. grants permission to the user of SmartMusic to print and make additional copies of this printed music as needed.

American Band College
Sam Houston State University

Fay Olswanger 40
```
So you want a better saxophone sound?

Part Two: Self-Analysis

Record yourself playing the simple exercise provided.

Tenor Sax

Danny Boy

Old Irish Air

Slowly and freely

Slowly

Slower

rit.

a tempo

U

Copyright 2004 by MakeMusic, Inc.

MakeMusic, Inc. grants permission to the user of SmartMusic to print and make additional copies of this printed music as needed.
SO YOU WANT A BETTER SAXOPHONE SOUND?

PART TWO: SELF-ANALYSIS

Record yourself playing the simple exercise provided.

Baritone Sax

Danny Boy

Old Irish Air

Slowly and freely

\[ \text{\#} \]

\[ \text{\#} \]

\[ \text{\#} \]

\[ a \text{ tempo} \]

\[ \text{rit.} \]

\[ \text{Slower} \]

Copyright 2004 by MakeMusic, Inc.

MakeMusic, Inc. grants permission to the user of SmartMusic to print and make additional copies of this printed music as needed.

NOT FOR RESALE.
Using a critical ear, listen to your recording of Danny Boy and reflect on your tone quality, guided by the worksheet below. In question 3, you might find it helpful to replay the recording of your tone role model. Do not be afraid to listen to recordings multiple times!

**Vocabulary Bank:**
Airy Big Brassy Bright Buzzy Clear Closed Cutting Dark Deep Dull 
Edgy Focused Free Full Harsh Heavy Light Mellow Muffled 
Narrow Open Pinched Relaxed Resonant Rich Ringing Round 
Shallow Small Spread Strained Strong Vibrant Weak Wide Woody

The adjectives in this word bank are only suggestions. You can create your own adjectives/short phrases in your responses. Some of these adjectives have a positive association and others negative. Listen for both. Remember, we are only considering tone quality and not other elements of performance.

1. How would you describe your tone quality?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

2. Positive Elements of Your Tone Quality
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
Areas of Improvement for Your Tone Quality
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

3. Compare and Contrast:
Your Current Tone
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
Your Tone Role Model’s Tone
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

American Band College of Sam Houston State University
Fay Olswanger 43
Now you have an idea of where you are. You have an idea of where you want to go.

**But, how do you get there?**

In the next section, you will find some common embouchure problems that result in a decrease in tone quality as well as how to fix them.

---

**PART THREE: EMBouchure Check**

**Correct Formation of the Embouchure**

1) Place upper teeth on mouthpiece.

2) Think exaggerated “A” to firm up lips to the teeth.

3) Add “Q,” which will bring in corners of lips and result in even pressure of lips from top, bottom, and sides.

4) Almost 1/2 inch of reed will be inside mouth.

5) Direct air parallel to neckpipe (into mouthpiece.)

---

So you want a better *saxophone* sound?
# Common Embouchure Issues & Remedies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sounds Like</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Remedy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choked Sound</td>
<td>Too much pressure from lower lip.</td>
<td>Say “A” and “Q;” lip firm to teeth with pressure from jaw structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too little mouthpiece in mouth.</td>
<td>More mouthpiece in mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lay of mouthpiece too close.</td>
<td>Try mouthpieces that blow easily for student’s mouth structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reed too thin. Closes.</td>
<td>Get reed with more heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wobbly Sound</td>
<td>Upper lip touching mouthpiece instead of teeth.</td>
<td>Always anchor teeth to mouthpiece first.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rough Squak</td>
<td>Too much mouthpiece.</td>
<td>Less mouthpiece in mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reed too stiff.</td>
<td>Make sides and heart of reed lighter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blows Hard or Leaks</td>
<td>Poor pads and/or keys.</td>
<td>Check octave keys; look for bent keys and bad pads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak and Nasal</td>
<td>Air stream is too slow.</td>
<td>Faster air with resistance from mouthpiece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Intonation</td>
<td>Tenseness in throat.</td>
<td>Sing and match tones using “Ah.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconsistency in adjustments in pads.</td>
<td>Check thickness of opening when pads are open on various notes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Did you know?

Alto Mouthpiece Pitch = A  
Alto M.P. + Neck Pitch = Ab  
Tenor Mouthpiece Pitch = G  
Tenor M. P. + Neck Pitch = E  
Bari Mouthpiece Pitch = D  
Bari M.P. + Neck Pitch = E/F*  
*Halfway or 50 cents in between the two pitches.

If yours doesn’t line up, something may be wrong with your embouchure!
So you want a better **Saxophone** sound?

Play these tone exercises daily to improve tone quality. Always listen to make sure that you are producing your most beautiful tone possible. Slow intentional practice is what develops a better tone!

**MOUTHPIECE PITCHES AND SLURS**

The first note listed is the pitch that the saxophone mouthpiece should sound. If it's higher or lower naturally, work to memorize the feel of the correct pitch with your embouchure. What follows the pitch for each saxophone mouthpiece is a basic mouthpiece slurring exercise which will help with flexibility. The top note is essential to be played correctly; the bottom pitch is a suggestion. Work to make your slurs as smooth as possible.

**ALTO SAXOPHONE**

![Alto Sax Mouthpiece Slur]

**TENOR SAXOPHONE**

![Tenor Sax Mouthpiece Slur]

**BARITONE SAXOPHONE**

![Baritone Sax Mouthpiece Slur]
Play these tone exercises daily to improve tone quality. Always listen to make sure that you are producing your most beautiful tone possible. Slow intentional practice is what develops a better tone!

OCTAVE KEY EXERCISES
This exercise will make sure that the octave key is functioning properly and there is proper oral cavity shape and placement. Do not use vibrato on this exercise; focus on the raw saxophone tone. Initially focus on how quickly the octave key functions. If the fundamental does not respond when the octave key is released, do not force it down, but rather focus on a low tongue position within the oral cavity.

When you have successful accomplished all of these exercises (achieving the low tongue/oral cavity and letting the octave key do the octave jump), reverse the pattern and start on the upper octave and play down then back up on all the pitches listed above.
Play these tone exercises daily to improve tone quality. Always listen to make sure that you are producing your most beautiful tone possible. Slow intentional practice is what develops a better tone!

LONG TONES
Long tones should be played on the full chromatic range of the instrument, with careful attention to the tone quality produced. When playing long tones, the goal is consistently beautiful tone quality. Focused practice and listening is essential. Make sure to play these for the full chromatic range of the instrument (see below). For simplicity’s sake, only a small demonstration pattern is listed here.

You can also do “long tones” while keeping moving fingers, like in the exercise below. In this exercise, make sure you are doing each phrase in one breath. Play this pattern for the full chromatic range of the instrument (see below). For simplicity’s sake, only a small demonstration pattern is listed here.

SAXOPHONE RANGE