

Troubleshooting: Tips for Improving Your Clarinet Section

by Shawn Royer

<u>What You're Hearing or Seeing</u>	<u>What Clarinetist is Probably Doing</u>	<u>How to Remedy the Problem</u>	<u>Tips to Implement Remedy</u>
Tonguing sounds 'heavy' or 'plosive'	Using middle of tongue to articulate Using "k" syllable in back or roof of mouth	Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate	Feel tip of reed with tip of tongue; Bumble-Bee exercise Feel tip of reed with tip of tongue; Bumble-Bee exercise
Hearing vocalization when articulating	Using throat to articulate	Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate	"Hoootooooootooooo" for uninterrupted airstream; Bumble-Bee exercise
Can't articulate quickly	Using middle of tongue to articulate Using "k" syllable in back or roof of mouth Using throat to articulate Tongue is moving to far from the reed	Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate Focus on keeping tip of tongue closer to reed	Feel tip of reed with tip of tongue; Bumble-Bee exercise Feel tip of reed with tip of tongue; Bumble-Bee exercise "Hoootooooootooooo" for uninterrupted airstream; Bumble-Bee exercise Experiment with keeping tongue too close to the reed, then find a happy medium
Sound is 'winey' and flat	Reed is too soft or too old Puffing cheeks Tongue position is too high	Use a harder or newer reed Make corners strong Think "oh" while playing	If new reed's not available, move reed up on the mthpc so tip of reed is just above tip of mthpc have student see puffing by looking in a mirror
Sound is 'thin', 'reedy', and constricted	Not enough mouthpiece in the mouth Too much lip in mouth	Push up with right thumb Roll bottom lip out a bit	try gently pulling instrument while student's playing; try gently pushing instrument up while student's playing Make sure that about half of the fleshy part of the bottom lip is showing while playing, and that the corners are firm
	Too much upward pressure / biting	Point the chin down and away from reed	practice embouchure without instrument; hold embouchure while starting note with no articulation
Sound is airy and hard to blow or you only hear air	Reed is too hard	Use a softer or older reed	Break a new reed in by gently massaging the heart of the reed.

	<p>Reed is too low on the mouthpiece</p> <p>Air is leaking out of corners of mouth</p> <p>Instrument has a leak Poor posture / weak airstream</p> <p>Reed is damaged (split / broken)</p>	<p>Look at the reed placement</p> <p>Make corners of mouth strong</p> <p>Check for leaks Watch student</p> <p>Look at the reed</p>	<p>move the reed up so the tip of the reed is even with the tip of the mouthpiece</p> <p>sometimes "airy" sound is sound of air coming from corners of mouth outside the mthpc. Weak embouchures / low endurance cause this</p> <p>Sit up, feet flat on floor, curved small of back, shoulders up back and drop, big breath, push air</p> <p>Get a new reed if needed</p>
High notes won't come out	<p>Reed is too soft or too old</p> <p>Not enough mouthpiece in the mouth</p> <p>Using throat to articulate Not putting top teeth on mouthpiece Using middle of tongue to articulate Using "k" syllable in back or roof of mouth</p>	<p>Use a harder or newer reed</p> <p>Push up with right thumb</p> <p>Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate Put top teeth on mouthpiece Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate</p>	<p>If new reed's not available, move reed up on the mouthpiece so tip of reed is just above tip of mouthpiece</p> <p>try gently pulling instrument while student's playing; try gently pushing instrument up while student's playing</p> <p>"Hoootooooootooooo" for uninterrupted airstream; Bumble-Bee exercise</p> <p>practice embouchure without instrument; hold embouchure while starting note with no articulation</p> <p>Feel tip of reed with tip of tongue; Bumble-Bee exercise</p>
High notes sound thin and constricted	<p>Not enough mouthpiece in the mouth</p> <p>Too much upward pressure / biting</p> <p>Poor posture / weak airstream</p>	<p>Push up with right thumb</p> <p>Point the chin down and away from reed</p> <p>Watch student</p>	<p>Feel tip of reed with tip of tongue; Bumble-Bee exercise</p> <p>try gently pulling instrument while student's playing; try gently pushing instrument up while student's playing</p> <p>practice embouchure without instrument; hold embouchure while starting note with no articulation</p>
High notes don't respond immediately	<p>Not enough mouthpiece in the mouth</p> <p>Using throat to articulate</p>	<p>Push up with right thumb</p> <p>Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate</p>	<p>Sit up, feet flat on floor, curved small of back, shoulders up back and drop, big breath, push air</p> <p>try gently pulling instrument while student's playing; try gently pushing instrument up while student's playing</p>

	<p>Reed is too soft or too old Using middle of tongue to articulate Using "k" syllable in back or roof of mouth</p> <p>Puffing cheeks Not coming off throat tone A key quick enough Not enough mouthpiece in the mouth Too much upward pressure / biting</p>	<p>Use a harder or newer reed Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate Make corners of mouth strong Use side/edge of finger to press A key Push up with right thumb Point the chin down and away from reed</p>	<p>"Hoootoooooo" for uninterrupted airstream; Bumble-Bee exercise If new reed's not available, move reed up on the mouthpiece so tip of reed is just above tip of mouthpiece</p> <p>Feel tip of reed with tip of tongue; Bumble-Bee exercise</p> <p>Feel tip of reed with tip of tongue; Bumble-Bee exercise</p> <p>have student see puffing by looking in a mirror practice rolling/tilting to and from A to other notes involving first finger try gently pulling instrument while student's playing; try gently pushing instrument up while student's playing</p> <p>practice embouchure without instrument; hold embouchure while starting note with no articulation</p>
"Crinkle Chin"	Reed is too soft or too old	Use a harder or newer reed	practice embouchure without instrument; hold embouchure while starting note with no articulation
Altissimo notes are flat	Tongue position is too low Puffing cheeks	Think "ee" while playing Make corners strong Push up with right thumb	If new reed's not available, move reed up on the mthpc so tip of reed is just above tip of mthpc
	Not enough mthpc in the mouth Not putting top teeth on mouthpiece	Put top teeth on mouthpiece	have student see puffing by looking in a mirror try gently pulling instrument while student's playing; try gently pushing instrument up while student's playing
	Not pressing right-hand top pinky key Bottom lip is not stretched flat over bottom teeth	Add right-hand top pinky key Smile, think strong corners	practice embouchure without instrument; hold embouchure while starting note with no articulation
Clarion is flat, throat tones are sharp	Using middle of tongue to articulate	Use Tip of Tongue to Articulate Roll bottom lip over bottom teeth	Smile and point chin. Make sure that about half of the fleshy part of the bottom lip is showing while playing, and that the corners are firm
Excessive Squeaking	Biting the reed with teeth		Feel tip of reed with tip of tongue; Bumble-Bee exercise

	Not completely covering necessary holes	Cover necessary holes one hole at a time	practice embouchure without instrument; hold embouchure while starting note with no articulation
	Too much mouthpiece in mouth	Use less mouthpiece	close your eyes while covering holes one at a time to feel each hole under each fingertip; make sure student's fingers are wide enough to cover holes
	Reed is damaged (split or broken)	Look at the reed	Only take in mthpc to where the mthpc lay curves back away from reed. Look at the sideview to find that spot.
	Using wrong fingerings	Watch student's fingers	Get a new reed if needed
Hearing other notes between notes	Not coming off throat tone A key quick enough	Use side/edge of finger to press A key	Make sure students are using fingerings that make sense for the passage, i.e. Chromatic fingerings when appropriate, etc. practice rolling/tilting to and from A to other notes involving first finger
	Not moving all fingers at the same time from note to note	Watch student's fingers	
	Moving jaw when articulating	Jaw is starting in a position that is too closed	Practice moving fingers only without blowing air, then add air, then add producing a sound
"Twangy" pitch change at beginnings of notes, most noticeable in upper register	Not coming off throat tone A key quick enough	Use side/edge of finger to press A key	Open jaw more, think "oh". Practice without instrument: create open "oh" mouth, place edge of index finger vertically over mouth, only move tongue to say "da da da da"
Trouble crossing the break quickly	Fingers are lifting too far from the instrument	Keep fingers close to keys; use less energy Point chin down and away from the reed	practice rolling/tilting to and from A to other notes involving first finger holding your hand over student's hand while they lift fingers helps them feel when they move to far; also have them watch in a mirror
	Not keeping extra fingers down on throat tones (not using "covered fingerings") Moving unnecessary fingers when adding register key, causing fingers to come off holes or hit extra keys	Keep right hand down on throat tones Ab, A, and Bb Relax hands; minimal movement / minimal energy from note to note	
Altissimo D, Eb, &/or E do not sound right, also maybe some squeaks	Bridge key is not sealing	Check alignment of bridge key	Practice embouchure without instrument, practice holding embouchure and starting note without articulation Experiment with intonation/tone and ease of movement with different covered finger combinations practice 12th jumps with eyes closed to relax and focus on only tilting the thumb to add register key www.classicalmusicindy.org/clarinet-bridge-key-issues/