

Pitch Bending & Glissandos

When learning how to bend the pitch on the clarinet, it is important to remember these two tips...

1.

EMBOUCHURE affects TONE;

TONGUE POSITION affects PITCH

This means that dropping or moving your jaw isn't a very effective way to change or bend your pitch. This also means that *glissandos*, which can best be described as a gradual rise in pitch in which the notes are somewhat smeared together, are accomplished more with the TONGUE than with the fingers.

2.

Most things that work on clarinet are COUNTER-INTUITIVE.

In other words, we often think we should tighten up for high notes (since that may work on brass instruments). However, if we tighten up much, it usually results in pushing up on the reed, which constricts and sometimes even inhibits the vibrations of the reed.

We also often think that we should play quieter on high notes so they aren't so *screechy* and out of tune. However, quieter volumes will tend to be sharp if purposeful adjustments are not made. Also, when people try to play quiet on altissimo, they may back off the air support, a necessary component of playing high notes. They may also tighten up the embouchure. This may cause squeaks or response issues.

We also often think that we should think EE on the high notes of the instrument to focus the airstream. While thinking EE will focus the airstream, it also tends to lesson or silence desirable overtones and will even lead to playing flat in the upper register.

Generally, think EE for the low notes and think O for the high notes. (There is an obvious change in this tongue position around G above the staff)

Likewise, when bending the pitch, you might think you would need to make an O position with the tongue, since a lower tongue position might seem logical for a lower pitch. However, it's actually the EE tongue position, a higher position, that will give us a lower pitch and the ability to bend and control the pitch.

How to practice Pitch Bending:

1. First, play this as written:



2. Then, play the same thing, but instead of moving your fingers to finger B, move the middle of your tongue closer to the reed slowly until you hear the pitch start to drop. Listen to the pitch and try to match the B you heard in Step 1. (it may be necessary to alternate several times between these first two steps until you are able to match pitches. It may also help to use a tuner to figure out where the B is)

PRO TIP

When moving your tongue closer to the reed, try thinking EE. Another trick is to make the hissing sound that a cat makes when they're mad. Make this sound, then put the mouthpiece in your mouth and try to recreate the same tongue position as you did when hissing.

Experiment with this and you will find it!

3. After you can do Step 2, work to master the next exercises in the same way (First play the C, slur to the second note, slur back to C as written. The second time, change to the second note by only changing your tongue position without moving your fingers, then, bend the pitch back up to C by returning the tongue to its normal position)



PRO TIP

Do not move your jaw or try to change your embouchure to change the pitch!! While you might get a tiny change, you won't be able to change the pitch by a half-step or more, and the sound will eventually stop all together. Only move your tongue to change notes!

Glissandos:

Once you can do the above exercises, glissandos are easy! Just start on the lowest note with your tongue in the EE position and drag your fingers away from the instrument (rather than lifting them up). When you get to the top, return your tongue to its normal position. Practice this first from high B to C, then from Bb to C, etc. down the instrument. Yes, this even works in the chalumeau and altissimo registers, but these registers are more difficult to master than the clarion register.

****PRO TIP****

When playing *Rhapsody in Blue* (every clarinet player's favorite reason to gliss!), finger a chromatic scale in the lower register while using your tongue position to smear the notes. When you get to the clarion register around the D, slide your fingers off of the clarinet (ala C major scale) until you get to the high C fingering. HOWEVER, do not finger high C like you normally would! Instead, hold the key ring that sits under your left-hand middle finger until the conductor cues the next down beat. This way, you can resolve your tongue position but still hold the gliss sound a little extra long before resolving on cue. To hear an example, check out my recording on YouTube:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IO_C_UK4vDk

