

Troubleshooting: Tips for Improving Your Clarinet Section

by Shawn Goodman

<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 low	Use a harder or newer reed Make corners strong Think "ee" 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	Reed is too hard	Use a softer or older reed	Break a new reed in by gently massaging the heart of the reed.

	<p>Bottom lip is too relaxed</p> <p>Reed is too low on the mouthpiece</p> <p>Air is leaking out of corners of mouth</p> <p>Instrument has a leak</p> <p>Poor posture / weak airstream</p> <p>Reed is damaged (split / broken)</p>	<p>Make bottom lip flat</p> <p>Look at the reed placement</p> <p>Make corners of mouth strong</p> <p>Check for leaks</p> <p>Watch student</p> <p>Look at the reed</p>	<p>Pull corners back and point chin down to flatten bottom lip. (smile)</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</p> <p>Not putting top teeth on mouthpiece</p> <p>Using middle of tongue to articulate</p> <p>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</p> <p>Put top teeth on mouthpiece</p> <p>Have Clarinetist use Tip of Tongue to Articulate</p> <p>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;</p> <p>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> <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>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> <p>Sit up, feet flat on floor, curved small of back, shoulders up back and drop, big breath, push air</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>try gently pulling instrument while student's playing; try gently pushing instrument up while student's playing</p> <p>"Hoootooooootooooo" for uninterrupted airstream;</p> <p>Bumble-Bee exercise</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</p> <p>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</p> <p>Push up with right thumb Point the chin down and away from reed</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>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 practice embouchure without instrument; hold embouchure while starting note with no articulation</p>
"Crinkle Chin"	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
Altissimo notes are flat	<p>Reed is too soft or too old Tongue position is too low Puffing cheeks</p> <p>Not enough mthpc in the mouth Not putting top teeth on mouthpiece Not pressing right-hand top pinky key</p>	<p>Use a harder or newer reed Think "ee" while playing Make corners strong</p> <p>Push up with right thumb Put top teeth on mouthpiece Add right-hand top pinky key</p>	<p>If new reed's not available, move reed up on the mthpc so tip of reed is just above tip of mthpc</p> <p>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 practice embouchure without instrument; hold embouchure while starting note with no articulation</p>
Clarion is flat, throat tones are sharp	Bottom lip is not stretched flat over bottom teeth	Smile, think strong corners	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	<p>Using middle of tongue to articulate</p> <p>Biting the reed with teeth</p>	<p>Use Tip of Tongue to Articulate Roll bottom lip over bottom teeth</p>	<p>Feel tip of reed with tip of tongue; Bumble-Bee exercise practice embouchure without instrument; hold embouchure while starting note with no articulation</p>

	Not completely covering necessary holes Too much mouthpiece in mouth Reed is damaged (split or broken)	Cover necessary holes one hole at a time Use less mouthpiece Look at the reed	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 Only take in mthpc to where the mthpc lay curves back away from reed. Look at the sideview to find that spot. Get a new reed if needed
Hearing other notes between notes	Using wrong fingerings Not coming off throat tone A key quick enough Not moving all fingers at the same time from note to note	Watch student's fingers Use side/edge of finger to press A key Watch student's fingers	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 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	Moving jaw when articulating	Jaw is starting in a position that is too closed	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	Not coming off throat tone A key quick enough Fingers are lifting too far from the instrument Biting the reed / too much upward pressure from jaw 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	Use side/edge of finger to press A key Keep fingers close to keys; use less energy Point chin down and away from the reed Keep right hand down on throat tones Ab, A, and Bb Relax hands; minimal movement / minimal energy from note to note	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 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