

WOODWIND CLEANING GUIDE

A practical and safe way to care for your musical investment

For Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, and Saxophone

A musical instrument is quite an investment. Proper care will keep it working well for years to come. Read this page before attempting any cleaning or maintenance on your instrument. When in doubt, ask the band director – he/she is there to help and would be happy to give any advice.

All woodwind instruments require the same basic care procedures. First some major rules for all woodwinds:

- NEVER immerse in water!! This will damage the pads of the instrument and will cost well over \$100 to fix. Avoid water contact at all times.
- Never use any type of polish on your instrument (no liquid or cloths unless it is made specifically for a musical instrument). The finishes may look like regular silver or brass, but they are not quite the same and the chemicals in most polishes will damage the instrument.

To best care for a woodwind instrument, it requires a small amount of daily care. Unlike brass instruments, there is no way to go back and scrub the instrument (unless you take it to a repair shop to be professional disassembled and cleaned through ultrasonic technology). Steps to keep your instrument in tip-top condition are:

- 1) Avoid playing your instrument after eating. Food particles can collect inside the crevices of your instrument and can be difficult to remove.
- 2) Each time you play your instrument, swab it out after you are finished – individual instructions are below. This will dry out the moisture that collects from playing and will preserve the keypads.
 - a. Flute – using a small piece (a 2-4” strip, about 10” long) of soft, cotton cloth, insert one corner into the eye of the cleaning rod. Wrap the cloth around the tip of the rod and around the rest of the rod as well. You want the metal rod to be covered with the cloth to avoid scratching the inside of the flute. Simply run this through the flute, starting with the foot joint and ending with the head joint to dry out any moisture.
 - b. Oboe, Clarinet, and Saxophone – You should have a swab designed for your instrument. This is a long string with small weight on one end and a cloth on the other. After you play, drop the weight into the top of your instrument and pull it through the bottom. This will drag the cloth through the entire length of your instrument. If you have been doing a lot of playing, you may need to repeat this. After taking each joint apart, you will probably need to use your swab to wipe off each tenon joint to remove the moisture there as well.
- 3) After you have swabbed out the inside of your instrument, use a soft, dry cloth to wipe down the outside of the instrument. If fingerprints and oils are not coming off, a few *drops* of water *on the* cloth (not directly on the instrument!) can help remove them. Be careful not to rub the cloth against the pads of each key – these are fragile and can be easily damaged, requiring professional and costly repair.
- 4) Carefully replace in the case, and make sure the latches are shut tightly.
- 5) Try not to let your instrument sit in extreme temperatures – for example, leaving it in the car overnight or on a hot afternoon is not a good idea – this can cause the metal parts to contract or expand and will affect the tiny adjustments that are necessary to proper playing.
- 6) Avoid keeping large items in your case – such as loose parts, music, books, etc. These can rattle around or put pressure on your instrument and cause damage after a while.

ADDITIONAL FLUTE TIPS

The 'crown' of the flute (the end of the head joint) does screw and unscrew – but that does not mean it should be turned. That piece is connected to a large cork that seals the end of the headjoint. If this cork is not placed exactly correctly, it can cause the flute to not play in tune or possibly not play at all. The location of the cork can be checked by using the cleaning rod. On one end you will see a small notch in the rod. If you insert that into the head joint, that notch should be right in the middle of the tone hole. If it is not, take it to your band director for adjustment.

ADDITIONAL CLARINET TIPS

If you are having trouble getting your clarinet together, use cork grease on the joint. After a while, this will loosen up.

If you are having trouble getting a good sound out – especially if it is squeaky – check the following things:

- Is your reed broken? If so, replace it.
- Is your reed on correctly?
- Is your ligature too tight?
- Is your ligature too high on the mouthpiece?
- Are the joints of your clarinet put together correctly (are the keys lined up as they should be)?

ADDITIONAL SAXOPHONE TIPS

Keep the cork on the neck greased so you will be able to adjust the mouthpiece as needed.

If your sound is squeaky, check the same items as in the clarinet tips section.

OTHER GENERAL MAINTENANCE

For all woodwinds:

Periodically check the instrument to make sure none of the small screws, etc. are backing themselves out. If they are, please let your band director know. I know it seems simple enough to just do yourself, but some screws aren't supposed to go all the way in, some need to stay loose, and some tight – so rather than guess, just send it in. 😊

**** NEVER** try to adjust or fix something yourself. It is much simpler to let the band director – who has special tools and training to deal with the mechanism - look at it. A very common mistake is when people try to use household tools to fix things themselves and end up breaking something that is often unseen.

