

Clarinets Crossing the Break

By Kenneth F. Beard

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There are 5 key factors that will enable or disable your young clarinet students in learning to cross the break.

1. Fingers must cover the holes especially on the right hand.

The rings and the holes of every key must be covered completely. Many students are very small at the age when they are first learning to cross the break and their fingers have difficulty covering the holes. It will get better with time.

Be sure to watch the thumb hole as the student touches the thumb “spatula” key. If the thumb uncovers the thumb hole, it will not work and the student will not be able to get the correct note.

2. The embouchure must be firm on the bottom lip and not mushy. A “flat” chin also increases the chances of getting the high notes out.

The bottom lip should be a firm straight line that does not protrude into the mouth any more than to cover the bottom teeth. This will make a firm chin muscle (which I call the “canoe” muscle to help the student picture the shape that the chin muscle should make) and will aid in getting the note out.

3. The air must be strong enough to make the high notes come out.

If the student is using enough air to get the low notes out, the high notes should also come out. If the air doesn't stay strong the high notes will not come out clearly.

4. The reed must be in good condition and medium strong or stronger in relation to the mouthpiece.

The reed must be a good reed without chips or too soft because it is old and water-logged. The medium strength reed will work to get the higher notes out as long as the mouthpiece is O.K.

5. The clarinet must be in good working order and capable of playing the notes above the break.

The clarinet must be able to cross the break and be in general good working condition. If in doubt find someone who can check the instrument with their own mouthpiece.

By practicing the exercises on the next page, young clarinet students should easily be able to learn to play the upper register notes.

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The musical score is written for Clarinet in B-flat and is set in 4/4 time. It consists of nine staves of music, each beginning with a measure number. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The notation includes various rhythmic values such as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests. Slurs and ties are used to indicate phrasing and melodic lines. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of the ninth staff.

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