

*Extract from the embouchure section in LESLIE CRAVEN'S book
"CLARINET PLAYING AND TEACHING"*

Embouchure and tongue

After learning to assemble the instrument I usually take the mouthpiece only and begin teaching the "face funnel" so that a new pupil can have fun with a few squeaks and squawks. It is essential to funnel the air efficiently. I generally teach the embouchure first, almost simultaneously with breathing as the two are inextricably linked.

Once the student has an understanding of the embouchure then a properly supported air column can be taught (See blowing pressurized air) and the "face funnel" will then do its job, blowing a thin, fast, constant stream of air.

Before learning to blow, the pupil must learn the correct face shape. It is as important to show the incorrect as well as the correct embouchure shape, so that the pupil can recognize both. A mirror is useful to the student to keep an eye on the embouchure during practice. It should also be used to study the embouchure during tongued passages to ensure that the lower jaw and lips are not moving whilst tonguing.

The tongue not only articulates but helps form the sound

It is paramount that the face muscles form a rigid funnel for the air.

To achieve this the tongue needs to be in the correct position in the mouth to enable the embouchure to function correctly.

As a rough guide form the vowel sound EE whilst smiling, combined with the sound "U" (as pronounced in French). **This is created by gently pushing inward** with the muscles at the sides of the mouth (N.B. not forwards) and will bring the tongue into the desired position forming a "flat chin", no discernible bulges. I often tell pupils to try to smile and whistle at the same time.

This enables the sets of muscles in the face to act as a funnel (rather like pronouncing EE-FFFFFFFFF-EE whilst smiling, thus directing the downward as if blowing cold air on a spoonful of hot food.). This will create a narrowing of the space between tongue and roof of the mouth and a small aperture between the lips rather like squeezing the end of a hosepipe.

The hosepipe analogy

Imagine the air coming up from your lungs is similar to the water in a hosepipe.

If you squeeze the end of the hosepipe, the water comes out faster but the pressure in the water supply remains constant.

The correct position of tongue will vary from player to player as we are all built differently so experimentation with different tongue positions will be necessary.

The mouthpiece should be inserted into the narrow opening created between the lips only when the correct face "funnel" can be formed in a relaxed, natural way.

This may take a considerable amount of repetition and patience.

The jaw must not bite upwards or move in any way.

The lower jaw is capable of exerting enormous pressure and will, if not corrected early on, create dreadful problems for the clarinetist. (See diagram page19)

IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE MUSCLES IN THE FACE DRAW THE JAW BACK AND DOWN TO COUNTERACT THE NATURAL TENDENCY TO BITE

Biting is a natural phenomenon when the mouthpiece is put in the mouth but is counter productive because it creates tension and causes pain and a poor tone.

It is important that the face muscles keep the jaw in an open position to combat the urge to bite.

Biting

Many clarinetists, fold too much of the lip over the teeth in an attempt to cushion the pain, ironically, caused by biting.

Explain the correct method clearly in lesson one and tone and articulation will benefit. Sadly, too much lip cushioning the teeth causes many problems including muffled tone, poor articulation, squeaking, and lack of stamina.

Squeaking

Almost all clarinetists squeak at some time or other. Frequently, this is the fault of the instrument as much as the inexperience of the pupil.

Poor embouchure, problems with the sealing of the clarinet's pads, bent keys, broken springs, adjusting screw on the A key too tight etc., etc, all cause squeaks.

Squeaks are also caused by: puffing cheeks, poor hand positions, too much mouthpiece in the mouth, moving around whilst playing, teeth touching the reed, incorrect fingerings, failure to cover one or more holes, leaning against side keys, broken or split reed, (often caused by the pupil looking at the fingering and smashing the reed against his / her shoulder, and / or carelessness in putting on the ligature or reed cap).

Squeaks are not all bad and an understanding of what squeaks are is actually helpful.

(More about squeaks in the "harmonics" section)

Volume control and sound quality

The muscles around the lips control the volume by allowing a greater or lesser amount of air through the mouthpiece. The speed of air and the pressure in the abdominal muscles remain constant but the side pressure applied by the muscles in the face governs the quantity, therefore the volume of sound produced. Similarly in my hose pipe analogy the squeezing of the hose allows more or less water to come out.