

# Mastering the Basics: Practice Techniques for Beginning Saxophone Players

Created for Clearwater Jazz Holiday Jazz Master  
“Virtual” Sessions - by Austin Vickrey

# “Basics” of Saxophone Playing

- Proper Embouchure
- Good Quality Sound
- Clean Articulation (Tonguing)
- Proper Technique (Fingers)

# Proper Embouchure

- Embouchure - Mouth position/shape needed to produce sound
  - Top teeth on the mouthpiece
  - Bottom teeth covered by bottom lip
  - Corners of mouth drawn back
  - Lips firmly wrapped around mouthpiece like a drawstring - “Ewwwwww”
  - Jaw pressure on reed

# Developing Embouchure

- Daily / Consistent Practice
- Warm-up technique
  - Long tones - On saxophone or mouthpiece
  - Very important to maintain proper embouchure from the get-go
  - Check embouchure in mirror regularly until muscle memory is developed

# Good Quality Sound

- Factors Include
  - Lots and lots of air through the instrument at first
  - Good mouthpiece reed setup
    - Beginning mouthpiece - Yamaha 4C, David Hite, stock mpc
    - Soft to Medium Soft Reed - Cheaper reeds to start
      - Rico, Vandoren, D'Addario
  - Shape of the oral cavity / Position of tongue
    - Syllables - "Ahh," "Ehh," "Eee,"
  - Saxophone Brand - \*Not as important but can be a factor

# Clean Articulation

- Proper Use of the Tongue
  - Tip of the tongue to the tip of the reed
- Make sure tongue does not inhibit air flow from throat
- Hard tonguing VS Soft tonguing

# Clean Articulation

- Developing speed of articulation
  - Keep the tongue “light”
  - Practice slowly at first; gradually increase speed
- Use metronome to help with control and speed
  - Exercise: Whole Notes, Half notes, Quarter notes, 8th notes. (Move on to 16th notes and triplets when ready)

# Clean Articulation

- Slurring exercises
  - “Back and Forth” exercise
    - Start with adjacent notes (A-B, B-C, etc.)
    - Gradually increase to larger intervals (3rds, 4ths, etc.)
  - Take a group of four adjacent notes and practice following combinations of slurring and tonguing:  
S = Slur, T = Tongue
    - S4, T4, S3/T1, T1/S3, S2/T2, T2/S2



# Proper Technique

- Hand Position
  - Curvature of fingers
  - Using fleshy part of fingers
  - Relaxed hands / wrists
  - “Light Switch” Fingers

# Developing Technique

- Slow, controlled finger movements at first
- Work with a metronome
  - Start slowly, gradually increasing speed
- “Constant Contact” finger exercise
- Isolation of unfamiliar finger movements
  - “Back and Forth” exercise

# Developing Technique

- Learn Scales and Arpeggios
  - Scales in “thirds” - 1-3, 2-4, 3-5, 4-6...etc.
  - Large “leaps” between notes - Stay within one octave for beginners (8 notes apart)
- Method Books: Rubank, Accent on Achievement, Standard of Excellence, etc.
- Private Lesson Teacher

# Picking a saxophone

- What saxophone do you want to learn?
  - I highly recommend starting on the alto saxophone
    - Good size for all ages, “easier” to make beginning sounds
  - Young students should start on alto (1-2 years)
    - Middle School age (10-13 years old)
  - Young adult and adult students can start on tenor if desired, but I still recommend alto as a starter saxophone.
  - Alto sax students can easily transition to baritone.
  - Save soprano for more advanced students

# Miscellaneous

- Daily / Consistent Practice
  - Start with 30 min practice sessions
  - Take a rest or break if you begin to fatigue
  - Stop if you feel pain! Consult a teacher or doctor if pain persists.

# Miscellaneous

- Practice can be “boring” at first
- Patience & Persistence
- Attention & Awareness
- Willingness to Fail - “Just keep swimming...”
- What is your goal with saxophone?
  - School, hobby, professional performing, etc.

# Miscellaneous

- Learn to read music
- Find easy and fun beginning repertoire
  - Easy Pop, Disney, Movie Themes
- Use the internet (WITH CAUTION)

Have fun and go  
practice! :-)