More Mouthpiece, please

About the Author

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I can’t tell you how many times I have worked with clarinet sections in schools and found that the students take too little mouthpiece. This key approach will improve their sound almost immediately, and enable them to get more air into their instrument.

What to Instruct: Have the student start by taking slightly more mouthpiece into their mouth and play a sustained C1. It will likely sound fuller right away. Have her/him take more. The sound should continue to improve, until you cross a line where the sound spreads or the student squeaks. That is the “too far” point. Slightly less than this point is the ideal amount of mouthpiece for the student to take.

Issues to watch for: Logistical issues surrounding this requires a bit of “trial and error” with the mouthpiece placement. Since everyone’s mouth, teeth and oral cavity are different, not everyone is going to require the same amount of mouthpiece in the mouth. You also have to be very careful about their tongue placement in the mouth. Often students are not thinking about tongue placement, and if the tongue is lying flat or all the way up at the top of the mouth, they will squeak, thus causing you to misdiagnose the correct mouthpiece placement.

Reinforcement Techniques: Cut a thick rubber mouthpiece patch in half. Once you have found where the top teeth should go to have the correct amount of mouthpiece for that student, make a pencil mark on the side of the mouthpiece where the top teeth rest. Place the flat part of the mouthpiece patch on the mouthpiece at the pencil marking, which is exactly how far the top teeth should move down on the top of the mouthpiece. The student will feel their top teeth on the “ridge” that is formed by the mouthpiece patch and the mouthpiece, which will remind them to take more mouthpiece and develop the habit.