

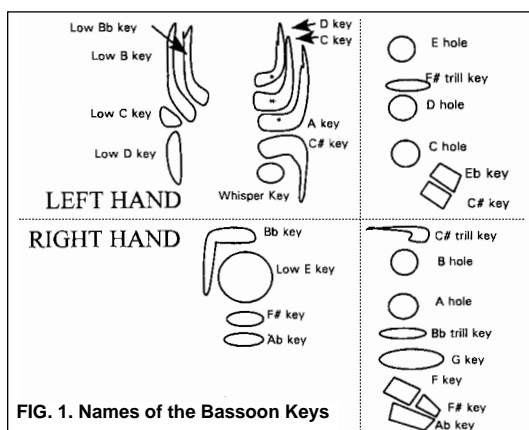
Teaching the Beginning Bassoonist

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Many music educators see the need to start students on the bassoon, yet hesitate to do so because of their lack of expertise on the instrument. Even willing music educators have difficulty dealing with the complexity of the bassoon, its double reed, and its fingering system. The paucity of books and articles on the pedagogy of the instrument—particularly on teaching the young bassoonist—no doubt compounds their frustrations.¹ In response to this need, this article serves as a primer for starting young bassoonists. Below you will find information on criteria for selecting who should play the bassoon, the care of the instrument, lesson plans, and suggestions for ten model bassoon lessons. This article is written for the educator who does not play the bassoon or who has only encountered the bassoon briefly in a pedagogy course.

I. Selecting a Bassoon Student

There are several factors which contribute to a student's success on the bassoon. First, the student's hands should be large enough to play the instrument. Check to see if the student is able to cover the C hole with the left ring finger (third hole) and comfortably reach the whisper key and the speaker keys (A key, C key, and D key) with the left thumb. Figure 1 provides the names of the



bassoon keys and holes, and Figure 2 illustrates the placement of the left hand thumb and fingers to play C3 (C below open F). Several bassoon manufacturers produce bassoons which feature a covered C hole that reduces the stretch for smaller hands. Second, finances are a

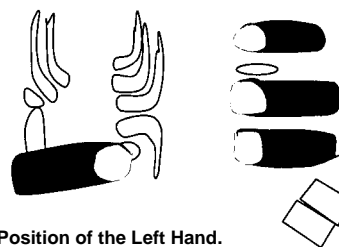


FIG. 2. Position of the Left Hand.

consideration for the student of the bassoon. Bassoon reeds are rather expensive (\$6.00 or more) and the instrument itself is costly to purchase. Ready access to a playable instrument and bassoon reeds are essential for a student's progress. Third, a student with an independent nature should be given preference. The bassoon is viewed as an oddity by most secondary school students, and if peer pressure is keenly felt by the student then playing the bassoon will more likely be a source of embarrassment than a positive experience. Last of all teachers should consider the student's motivation, musical aptitude, and maturity.

The bassoon is an excellent instrument for students with braces. When the bassoon reed is played properly, very little pressure is exerted on the teeth. Thus, playing the instrument does not exacerbate orthodontic problems nor is it as uncomfortable to perform as other instruments after one's orthodontic hardware has been tightened or changed. In addition, bassoonists with braces don't suffer as many problems with tone production as students of the flute and brass instruments encounter when they have orthodontic hardware.

II. Ten Model Lesson Plans and Comments

There are several method books that provide effective instruction for beginning students. The lesson plans below refer to four readily available studies:

J. E. Skornicka's *Rubank Elementary Method for Bassoon* (Hal Leonard Publishing Corporation), Henry Paine's *Studies and Melodious Etudes for Bassoon, Level 1 (Elementary)* (Miami: Belwin Mills, 1969), C. Paul Herfurth and Hugh M. Stuart's *A Tune a Day* (Boston: Boston Music Company, 1964), and Julius Weissenborn's *Bassoon Studies* Opus 8, Vol. I (Frankfurt and New York: Edition

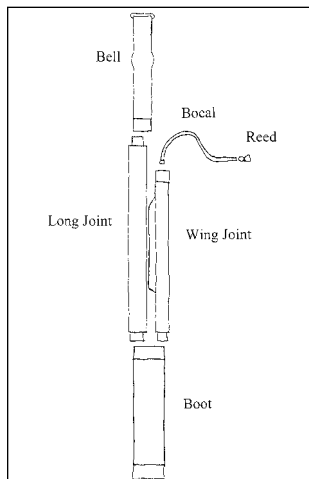
Peters). In this article the four methods are abbreviated as *Rubank*, *Studies*, *A Tune*, and *Opus 8*. The material in these study methods vary widely, and all of them may not be appropriate for your beginning student or your method of instruction. Beginners come in all different ages, aptitudes, and abilities, so the method of instruction must be tailored to each student. Please see the annotated bibliography at the end of the article to determine the appropriate method book.

Lesson 1:

- A. Care of the bassoon and reed
 1. Proper assembling
 2. Soaking the bassoon reed
 3. Pull-through bassoon swabs
- B. Holding the Bassoon
 1. Seat strap
 2. Hand position
- C. New Fingerings
 1. F3-C3 (Open F down to C)
 2. Use of the whisper key
- D. Embouchure basics
- E. Lesson materials
 1. *Rubank* lesson 1, *Studies* pp. 4-5, *A Tune* lessons 1-3, or *Opus 8* lesson 1.

The bassoon is an expensive instrument; even the lowest priced models costs thousands of dollars. From the start, the teacher needs to impress upon students the importance of proper care of the instrument. The joints on the instrument should fit snugly, but not tightly. Overly tight fitting joints can result in damage to the key work as the student tries to force the instrument together or apart. The parts of the bassoon should be assembled in the following order: the tenor joint fits into the boot joint, the

FIG. 3. Parts of a bassoon.



long joint then fits into the boot joint, the bell fits onto the long joint, and finally the bocal is inserted into the tenor joint (see Figure 3). Special care should be taken when the bocal is inserted so that the whisper key pad is not torn. The bassoon is disassembled in the reverse order.

The best way to prepare the reed

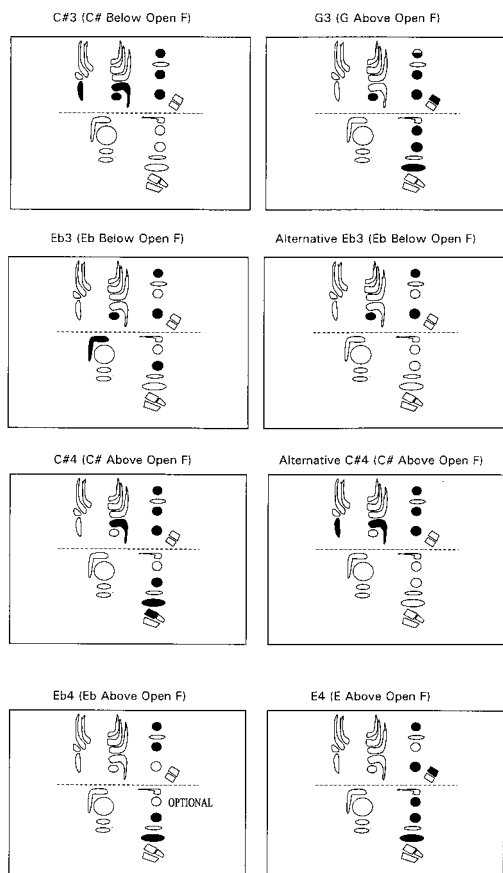
for playing is to soak it in tepid water for a minute or two. Many players also rinse the reed off after each practice session in order to prolong the life of the reed. When not in use, the reed should be placed in a container which allows air circulation or it will be prone to mold, especially in humid climates. Bassoon reeds do change from day to day and week to week so teachers may wish to consult Robert Barris and Michael Jampole's article in *The Instrumentalist* 52/2 (September 1997) on reed adjustments.

Students should realize the necessity of swabbing the instrument after each practice or performance session. Most bassoons come supplied with wool-haired swabs that can create problems for the bassoonist if used on a regular basis. The swabs frequently shed fibers which then become lodged in tone holes and pad seats. If these swabs are used, they should be covered with a non-shedding cloth material such as cotton or linen sheets. A better solution, however, is to purchase or make pull-through swabs: one for the boot joint and a smaller one for the tenor joint.² Some silk swabs are suitable for swabbing both joints. These swabs will need to be attached to a weighted cord which can be dropped through the joints before the swab is pulled through.

Most American bassoonists hold their instrument with the aid of a seat strap. The strap is either hooked into a hole on the metal cap of the boot joint or has a metal band or cup into which the metal cap is inserted. The strap is laid on the seat and the student sits on the strap with the bassoon resting on the right thigh. As an alternative, students may employ a neck strap, which hooks into a ring at the top of the boot joint. Younger students, and most professional players, however, find that balancing the instrument with just a neck strap is rather awkward.

The fingerings introduced in the ten lessons are found in fingering charts accompanying the method books. In some instances, however, standard American bassoon fingering practices differ with those in some of the fingering charts. Please see Figure 4 for eight preferred fingerings. For this lesson, however, the fingerings for F3 (open F) and the three diatonic notes below it do not differ in the method books from conventional American fingerings. You may also refer to standard bassoon fingerings given at the IDRS Web in the *Bassoon-Family Fingering Companion*: <http://idrs.colorado.edu/BSNFING/FINGHOME.HTM>. The student should have the whisper key engaged by the left thumb for the four pitches in this lesson. The whisper key is analogous to an octave key except that it is depressed for the

FIG. 4. Standard American bassoon fingerings.



lower registers and left open for the upper register. The left hand fingers cover the holes on the tenor joint.

The embouchure is much looser and more mobile on the bassoon reed than on the clarinet or saxophone mouthpiece. Students can simulate the feel of the bassoon embouchure by whistling a low pitch, and then rolling in the lips slightly with a finger. It is a good idea to have students blow a few notes on the bassoon reed by itself before placing the reed on the instrument. A well adjusted bassoon reed with a properly loose embouchure and good breath support will produce a rattling sound—not a single pitch—that we often call “a crow.” If the student is not able to produce this sound at the first lesson do not labor over the issue, it could be a problem with the bassoon reed, rather try to encourage a loose, non-biting embouchure.

Lesson 2:

A. Posture and breathing

1. Sit up straight with back to the chair
2. Reed should enter the mouth straight-on

3. Breathe by dropping lower jaw
4. “Diaphragmatic breathing”

B. New Fingerings

1. B2 (B below open F), A2, and G2.

C. Lesson materials

1. *Rubank Lesson 2, Studies p. 6, A Tune lessons 4-7, or Opus 8 lesson 2.*

Seek to start off your students with a proper and comfortable posture. The best and most relaxed way to play the bassoon in a seated position is with the student’s back against the back of a chair, and the instrument positioned in such a manner that the reed enters straight into the mouth—not at an angle. Some bassoon bocals are bent at such an angle that this straight-in positioning of the reed may not be possible with a seat strap. These bocals are intended to be played with neck-strap support only. A repairman may be able to alter the angle of the bocal, or you may wish to search for another bocal instead. The student’s head and torso should be straight and upright when playing the bassoon, not tilted to one side or the other. The music stand should be placed so that the student is reading to the right side of the bassoon bell from their vantage point.

Encourage students to breathe by dropping the jaw. Too often bassoonists breathe by raising the upper lip off the bassoon reed and pivoting the head up and backwards. Breathing above the reed is not as efficient or as quick as breathing below the reed, that is by dropping the jaw.

Much has been written in the literature about proper breathing, so we will not labor the point here.³ Students should breathe comfortably by employing the diaphragmatic muscles to breathe in and the abdominal muscles to breathe out. The concept of filling a glass often works with students: the glass is filled with water from the bottom to the top; similarly students should feel their abdomen extending and “filling up with air” before their chest cavity moves. Students with signs of strain and excessive shoulder movement during inhalation may profit from relaxed breathing exercises. One such exercise is to have students lay flat with their backs on the floor. Most of them immediately breathe in a relaxed and proper manner in this prone position.

In these first lessons, students should play everything at a comfortable forte dynamic. Establish a relaxed and rounded embouchure encircling the reed before seeking embouchure adjustments needed for the quieter dynamics. At this early stage of development, the vast majority of bassoon students play with an embouchure that is much too tight. A “crocodile-bite” embouchure is

difficult for former single-reed players to abandon. To produce the best sound on the bassoon, there must be considerable space between the upper and lower molars. In other words, the jaw must be dropped.

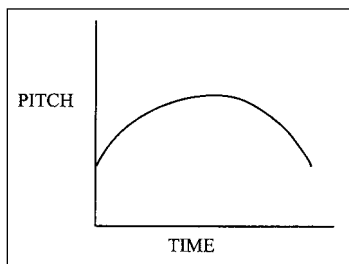
Lesson 3:

- A. Articulation experiments
 1. Air
 2. Embouchure
 3. Tongue
- B. The proper method to start a note on bassoon
 1. Place tongue on the reed
 2. Start breath support
 3. Release the tongue
- C. The two proper methods to stop a note on bassoon
 1. Tongue stop
 2. Balanced air/embouchure stop
- D. Lesson materials
 1. *Rubank* lesson 3, *Studies* p. 7, *A Tune* lessons 8-9, or *Opus 8* lesson 3

The third lesson on the instrument is an excellent time to introduce proper articulation.⁴ The method by which notes on the instrument are started and stopped has great consequences for proper tone production. Students can confirm for themselves the effect of different types of articulation by experimenting with the articulations on a bassoon reed placed solely on the bassoon bocal (apart from the instrument). The pitch on the bocal with the reed is rather unstable, thus presenting an ideal forum in which to discover pitch deviations.

The bocal experiments could take the following form: Have your students start a tone with the air, crescendo to about forte, and then decrescendo until the note stops. Through this whole exercise the embouchure should remain steady with no movement. Figure 5 gives a chart of the likely result—the pitch will rise and then fall.⁵ Next your students should pinch the reed with their embouchure, start the air stream with no sound at

FIG. 5. Air articulation.



this point, slowly drop the jaw downward until the reed vibrates, continue to drop the jaw further and then raise the jaw until the reed stops.

The air stream should not waiver through this exercise. The students' chart of this exercise should look similar to Figure 6—the pitch falls and then rises.

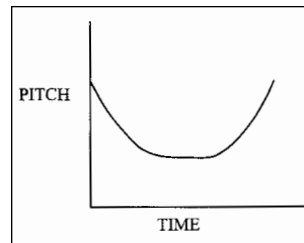


FIG. 6. Embouchure articulation.

Next students should experiment

with the tongued start and stop. Place the tongue on the reed, start the air pressure before the tongue releases, release the tongue without varying the air or embouchure, then finally place the tongue back on the reed. Figure 7 presents a chart of what should be a steady pitch in this experiment.⁶

Our experiments have yielded interesting results. Only one articulation when employed by itself avoids pitch deviations—the tongued start and stop. This method of articulation should be

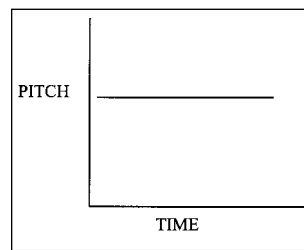


FIG. 7. Tongue articulation.

preferred for rapidly re-articulated notes. The instability inherent in starting notes with the air or embouchure also brings us to a decision on how to start notes. Every note should be started with the tongue on the reed. This alone will produce a clean and accurate attack. Students may find it helpful to think of five steps to starting a tone: 1) exhale, 2) inhale, 3) place the tip of the tongue in the opening of the reed and seal the embouchure around the reed, 4) start the breath support, 5) release the tongue.

The embouchure and air articulations may be employed to end a note if the two are properly balanced. At this stage your students will begin to discover that dynamic differences on the bassoon are made with the air stream. In order to avoid pitch deviations during dynamic changes, the embouchure must be adjusted: for crescendos the embouchure opens, for decrescendos the embouchure closes. Thus, if a taper or diminuendo is desired at the end of a note—and time permits—the balanced combination of the air and embouchure end to a pitch can and should be used. However, even with a tongued start and a combined air/embouchure release to notes, students should avoid excessive jaw movement.⁷

Lesson 4:

- A. Long tone exercises
 1. Sustained long tones
 2. Articulated long tones
- B. New fingerings
 1. G3 (G above open F), A3, B3, and C4.
For G3 see Figure 4.
 2. The half hole
- C. Lesson materials
 1. *Rubank* lesson 4, *Studies* p. 8,
A Tune lessons 11-13^s, or *Opus 8* lesson 4

In the last lesson concepts of correct articulation were introduced. This lesson presents several exercises which focus on articulation. All students should practice the exercises with a metronome. Not only does a metronome develop solid metrical timing, but it gives a guide by which to judge the accurate timing of the beginnings and endings of notes.

Long tone exercises are very useful for the beginning student. Students should practice starting, sustaining, and stopping notes without any wavered pitch. With the metronome set to 60 have your students start a note exactly with the beat, sustain for four counts, and then stop the note exactly with the metronome. Various pitches on the instrument should be practiced, since every note on the bassoon responds differently. The two types of stops should be practiced: tongue and the combination of air and embouchure. Increase the length of the note as students gain further mastery.

Figure 8 illustrates a modification on the long tone exercise. Again set the metronome for 60.



FIG. 8. Representation of an articulated long tone study.

Students start the note with the beat then stop the note with the next beat, repeating several times. Both methods of terminating the note should be practiced. With the tongued stop, the air pressure and embouchure setting remains unchanged whether the reed is vibrating or not. Insist that your students keep up the air pressure even when the tongue is on the reed. There should be no “chewing” motion with the jaw during the tonguing. In the tongued start and stop the tongue functions independent of the jaw. With the air and embouchure stop, exhort your students to avoid any pitch deviations.

The half hole is critical to the tone production of the three chromatic notes above open F: F#3, G3, and Ab3. The technique of “half-holing” requires the left index finger to vent the E hole with a downward rolling motion towards the

second finger. In order to properly execute this technique the E hole should be covered only with the finger’s upper portion (see Figure 9).

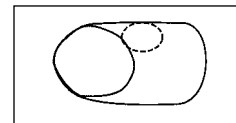


FIG. 9. Position of E hole covered by the left index finger.

Slurring from A3 to G3 above open F provides students an excellent opportunity to practice the half-hole technique. Students finger A3 with the E hole fully closed and the whisper key not engaged. When they proceed to G3 the students should roll the left index finger downward, venting the E hole slightly. The whisper key should also be depressed when the E hole is vented.

Lesson 5:

- A. Review prior concepts
- B. Lesson materials
 1. *Rubank* lesson 5, *Studies* p. 9,
A Tune lesson 14, or *Opus 8* lesson 5

The fifth lesson, midway through the ten lessons, provides a suitable place at which the teacher should review the concepts taught in the previous four lessons. Students should not progress to new techniques discussed in the later lessons until there is a consistent command of the essentials taught above. If necessary the teacher may introduce new fingerings and even progress further in the lesson materials, but the new techniques given below should not be taught until the student is correctly supporting the sound at a forte dynamic, properly employing the whisper key and half-hole technique, and gaining mastery over the two tonguing methods.

Lesson 6:

- A. Flick Keys
- B. New fingerings
 1. F2 (Low F), Bb2 (Bb below open F),
and Bb3 (Bb above open F)
- C. Lesson materials
 1. *Rubank* lesson 6, *Studies* p. 10,
A Tune lesson 15, or *Opus 8* lesson 6

The art of “flicking” is one of the most difficult techniques for a young bassoonists to master. Given the difficulty of the task, students often question the necessity of mastering the flicking technique. Take time in this lesson to carefully explain the reason for flicking. Once the students understand the benefit, they will be much more likely to put in the necessary time to master the technique.

The necessity of employing the flick keys, or

speaker keys, can be demonstrated on the pitch A3 above open F. Have the students rapidly tongue the A several times at different dynamic levels. Listen carefully to the attack of each note. Several, if not all of them, will articulate indistinctly with a cracking sound, or a bit similar to a double attack. Now have your students hold down the left thumb A key while they repeat the rapid tonguing again. Immediately it will be apparent that the attacks are crisp and clean.

Although beginners may find it more convenient to leave the flick keys depressed the entire note, the tone is generally improved with the release of the keys after the start of the note. For instance, the sound quality of the A3 (the A above open F) is not as pleasant with the speaker key held down. Releasing the key after the attack will greatly improve the sound of the note. For this reason bassoonists generally depress the A, C, and D flick keys (marked with an asterisk in Figure 1) for the start of the note only. In other words, the keys are flicked.

Besides A3, four other pitches are generally flicked on the bassoon. Bb3 above open F is flicked with either the A or C speaker key. Students should hold down the A speaker key and then the C speaker key while tonguing the Bb. Use whichever produces the best tone on the instrument. Flick B3 and C4 above open F with the C speaker key. If necessary, flick the D above open F with the D flick key. Usually there are few problems with the attack of the D, so it is not as necessary to flick this note when tonguing it. Many models of bassoons made for students do not have this D speaker key.

There are two situations in which the flick keys must be employed. We have covered the first situation—the articulation of select notes (A3, Bb3, B3, C4, D4). Slurs of a third or more to the selected pitches require the second instance of flicking. Figure 10 gives an exercise which helps students to master the flicking technique during octave slurs. In the first beat of each measure hold down



FIG. 10. Slurred flicking exercise.

the whisper key. On the second beat the whisper key is released. During the third beat when the new pitch is sounded depress the appropriate speaker key. On the fourth beat the speaker key is released. As the students gain confidence they then should be encouraged to hold down the whisper key as long as possible. The speaker keys, conversely, should be held down just at the start of the new pitch.

Lesson 7:

- A. Introduction to the "drive."
 1. Long tone exercise with dynamics
 2. Discussion of musicality
- B. Lesson materials
 1. *Rubank* lesson 7, *Studies* p. 11, *A Tune* lesson 16⁹, or *Opus 8* lesson 7

This is the first point in the lesson plans that the student has been encouraged to play a dynamic other than forte. By now the student should be accustomed to the feel of an open, forte bassoon embouchure. Playing quieter dynamics on the bassoon does require a tightening of the embouchure. Beware though, of the likelihood of an overly tight embouchure returning. Encourage students to memorize the feel of a well-supported forte sound. This becomes a reference point from which to depart and return during the long tone exercises.

Figures 11 and 12 present two forms of the long tone exercises with dynamics. Figure 11 gives a long tone exercise in an inverted form, which



FIG. 11. Inverted long tone exercise.

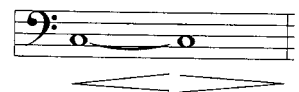


FIG. 12. Long tone exercise.

students will find the easiest to begin with. The most standard form of the long tone exercises starts at a quiet dynamic level, crescendos to a loud dynamic level, and then decrescendos to a quiet dynamic level (Figure 12). For the younger student, however, the initial piano or pianissimo attack presents many problems.

You may wish to have students work on several variations of Figure 11. Set the metronome for 60. Start with four counts of diminuendo and four counts of crescendo. Increase the length of the exercise by adding more counts to the diminuendo and crescendo. Students also may profit from the insertion of "dynamic plateaus." For instance, 3 counts of forte (a dynamic plateau), 3 counts of diminuendo, 3 counts of piano (another dynamic plateau), 3 counts of crescendo, and end with 3 counts of forte. The object of the exercise is to attain control over the pitch at all dynamic levels. Insist upon a steady tone with plenty of breath support through the entire exercise. Naturally long tone exercises should be practiced on a variety of pitches; that is, low notes, middle notes, and high notes.

Even young students should be encouraged to

grasp the concept of musicality. When you discuss musicality it need not be ethereal and intangible, you can link musicality to the practice of long tones with dynamic shadings. Marcel Tabuteau, famed oboist with the Philadelphia Orchestra and teacher at the Curtis Institute of Music, coined a term to depict motion in music—the “drive.” A drive is the scaling of various components of music. For our purposes here, the drive will mean gradations of dynamics. A drive with dynamics, for instance, could include a crescendo towards a musical goal followed by a decrescendo. Tabuteau employed numbers to depict various levels of tension, or in the instance of dynamics various tiers of loudness.¹⁰

In the lesson material choose a phrase to practice with a musical drive. Decide on the musical goal in the phrase. Then employ a crescendo to the goal and a decrescendo away from the goal. For instance: in *Rubank* lesson 7 number 1 make the downbeat of measure 2 the goal; in *Studies* p. 11 Etude No. 15 make the downbeat of measure 3 the goal; in *A Tune* lesson 16 number 3 make the downbeat of measure 2 the goal; or in *Opus 8* lesson 7 first line make the downbeat of the third measure the goal. The mastery of dynamic levels gained during long tone study are thus applied directly to the music, impressing upon the student the importance of diligent practice of the exercises.

Lesson 8:

- A. Articulated long tones with varied dynamics
- B. New Fingerings
 - 1. Eb3 (Eb below open F). See Figure 4.
- C. Lesson materials
 - 1. *Rubank* lesson 8, *Studies* p. 12, *A Tune* lesson 21, or *Opus 8* lesson 8.¹¹

Continue to stress the importance of long tone exercises in your lessons with students. To keep up the student’s interest and add a new element to master, one can introduce articulated stops and starts to Figures 11 and 12. Keeping in mind the same dynamic inflections introduced in Figure 11 and 12, have students alternately start and stop the tone with the tongue. See Figure 13 for a depiction of this broken long tone exercise. Remind students to stop and start the note with the tongue while not changing the pitch or dynamics during articulation.

FIG. 13. Representation of a broken long tone exercise.



Lesson 9:

- A. Refinement of pitch control
- B. New fingerings
 - 1. D4 and Eb4 (above open F). For Eb4 see Figure 4.
- C. Lesson materials
 - 1. *Rubank* lesson 9, *Studies* p. 13, *A Tune* lesson 17 and supplementary material p. 26, or *Opus 8* lesson 9.

By this time students will be aware of at least one way to control the pitch on the bassoon—embouchure adjustments. If this is the only means by which students can control the pitch, however, their tone and dynamics will greatly suffer. The best sound on the bassoon requires the perfect alignment of air, embouchure, a relaxed (or open) throat, and the correct vowel in the mouth. In lesson 3 we experimented with different types of articulations. At this point it is a good idea to review the change of intonation with increases and decreases in air flow and embouchures tightening or loosening. Figure 14 provides a table of the air and embouchure effects on intonation already discussed. It also includes information on intonation changes due to the mouthed vowel.

	Sharper	Flatter
Air	Increased Breath Support	Decreased Breath Support
Embouchure	Increased Pressure (Jaw up)	Decreased Pressure (Jaw Down)
Vowel	“ee” or “ih” sound	“ah” or “oh” sound

FIG. 14. Methods of pitch control.

To demonstrate the effect of vowel formations on the pitch and timbre of a bassoon sound have students sustain G3 (G above open F) while slowly alternating between the vowel sounds “ee” and “oh” in their mouth. The students do not actually voice the vowels, rather they form these vowels in their oral cavity. You and your student will notice a drop in pitch when the “ee” (long e as in peek) or “ih” (short I as in “pig”) sound is substituted by the “oh” or “ah” sound.

In order to achieve the maximum resonance and the best intonation on the bassoon there is a general progression of vowel sounds which need to be followed through the bassoon registers. Individual notes may depart from these generalities, depending upon a chosen fingering or bassoons with poorer intonation. The first or fundamental register from Bb1 (low Bb) to E3 (E below open F) starts with “oh” or “ah” vowel on Bb1, around Bb2 the vowel changes more to a “eh” sound, and by the time E3 is reached, the mouth cavity tends towards “ee.” See Figure 15. Starting at the break on F3 (open F) the progression starts



FIG. 15. The bassoon registers.

over in the second register, although this time the vowel shift is more rapid. F3 (open F) is back to the “oh” sound, by A3 or Bb3 the vowel is close to “eh,” from C4 to F4 the vowel is “ee” with the possible exceptions of C#4 and D4. The third register F#4 to C5 only loosely follows the progression since fingering choices can widely vary in pitch thus requiring a different vowel.

There is a hierarchy to methods of pitch control which students must follow if they wish to obtain the best possible sound at any dynamic. Breath support comes first. Always use as much air as possible at any dynamic level. Once the breath support is in place then adjust the vowel in the mouth, and only at the end temper the intonation with an embouchure adjustment. The most common mistake for beginners to make is to adjust the pitch by embouchure movement alone. Often this adjustment is to the detriment of proper breath support and a good tone.

Lesson 10:

- A. Review prior concepts
- B. New fingerings
 1. C#3 (below open F), Ab2 and Ab3.
For C#3 see Figure 4. Also note that the Fingering for C#4 is in Figure 4 — for future use.
- C. Lesson materials
 1. *Rubank* lesson 10, *Studies* p. 14, *A Tune* lessons 18-20, or *Opus 8* lesson 10.

With the tenth lesson, we have completed our brief introduction to bassoon instruction. Obviously these ten lessons have been highly stylized; few, if any students will be suited to follow the lesson format exactly as presented here. These ten lessons should not be viewed as rigid mandates. Rather, it is the author’s hope that material and explanations contained in these lessons will be introduced at an appropriate time at the teacher’s discretion. For example, the concept of flicking (Lesson 6) may take a student several months to master. In this instance, it is best to continue with new lesson material and new fingerings.

Although the bassoon is a daunting instrument to teach, the rewards for students who master the instrument are considerable. Students who master the bassoon have exceptional opportunities in summer music festivals, colleges and universities, and even professional positions with orchestras

or bands. The time spent to master the material presented here should pay handsome dividends for student and teacher alike.

III. Studies, Solos, and Collections

A. Recommended method books for the beginning bassoonist

Herfurth, C. Paul, and Stuart, Hugh M. *A Tune a Day* (Boston: Boston Music Company, 1961). This is a fine tutor for very young (age 9-12) students. It provides a practice record, ample pictures of finger positions, a good introduction to music notation, and duets with every lesson. The fingering chart, unfortunately is rather cumbersome, containing non-standard fingerings for Eb3 (Eb in the staff), and Eb4 (Eb above the staff).

Paine, Henry. *Studies and Melodious Etudes for Bassoon* (Miami: Belwin Mills, 1969). Best suited for a junior high or high school beginner. The book contains no duets, and assumes some remedial knowledge of notation. The fingering chart is concise and easy to read. Don’t have students use the second Eb3 (Eb in the staff) or the first Eb4 fingering (Eb above the staff).

Skornicka, J. E. *Rubank Elementary Method for Bassoon* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Publishing Corporation, 1935). This is the classic work many American bassoonists started with. Lessons are well-suited for elementary, junior high, or even high school students. In general the book progresses at a faster rate than *A Tune a Day*. The work has no pictures, but contains ample duets. The fingering chart is moderately easy to read, but again be careful to select a proper Eb3 or Eb4 fingering.

Weissenborn, Julius. *Bassoon Studies Opus 8, Vol. I* (Frankfurt and New York: Editions Peters, No.2277a). This is the venerable bassoon tutor. The lessons become quite sophisticated in a short period of time, so it is recommended for the adult beginner or a student with prior musical background. This study might best serve as a follow-up to any of the prior three studies mentioned above.

B. Recommended solo literature for the beginning bassoonist¹²

Braun, Jean Daniel. *Solos (1740)* (Schott). A collection of varied movements.

Jacob, Gordon. *Four Sketches* (Emerson Edition). Easy and fun.

Weissenborn, Julius. *Arioso and Humoreske* (International). The Arioso is beautiful, the Humoreske is manageable.

Vaughan Williams, Ralph. *A Winter's Willow* (Medici Music Press). A folksong arrangement.

C. Recommended collections for the beginning bassoonist¹³

Das Fagott, vol. 5 (Deutscher Verlag for Musik). A selection of easy to moderately difficult works.

Fagottmuzika (Editio Musica Budapest). A collection of 22 pieces of well-known songs and dance movements.

Going Solo (Faber Music). All short pieces including some orchestral bassoon solos.

New Pieces for Bassoon, 2 vols. (Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music). Original works for bassoon commissioned by the Royal Schools of Music, U. K. ❖

Endnotes

¹ Notable exceptions are: Robert Barris and Michael Jampole, "Basics for Beginning Bassoonists," *The Instrumentalist* 52-2 (Sept. 1997): 28-31, 104; William Spencer, *The Art of Bassoon Playing* (Summy-Birchard); and Homer Pence, *Teacher's Guide to the Bassoon* (Selmer).

² Douglas M. Huff describes how to make bassoon swabs in "The Pull-Thru Bassoon Swab: Its Components Construction and Use," *The Double Reed* 2/4 (April 1980): 21-23.

³ For one discussion of breathing please see Martin Schuring's "Fundamentals of Oboe Playing," *The Double Reed* 32/1 (2000): 19-22.

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of my views on articulation please see my article, "Basic Bassoon Articulations," *The Instrumentalist* 53/8 (March 1999): 28-32.

⁵ These pitch changes are also noted in Arthur Weisberg, *The Art of Wind Playing* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1975; Minneapolis: SATCO, 1993), pp. 8 and 20.

⁶ For a further discussion of pedagogy on the bassoon bocal see my article "Using the Bassoon Bocal as a Diagnostic and Pedagogical Tool" *Journal of the National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors* 60/3 (Spring 1992): 4-7.

⁷ A further discussion of jaw movement is contained in my article "Articulation on Bassoon: Should the Jaw Move?" *The Double Reed* 17/3 (Winter 1994): 83-85.

⁸ *A Tune a Day* introduces F# in these lessons.

⁹ *A Tune a Day* introduces low E in this lesson.

¹⁰ For further information on the drive including references to other writers see my article "A Bassoonist's Expansions upon Marcel Tabuteau's "Drive," *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society* 20 (July 1992): 27-30.

¹¹ *Opus 8 Bassoon-School* introduces low Ab in this lesson.

¹² These works were recommended in Daryl Durran's "User Friendly Bassoon Tunes," *The Double Reed* 22/1 (March 1999): 63-65.

¹³ *Ibid.*

About the author ...

Terry B. Ewell is chair of the Department of Music at Towson University. He has performed as principal bassoon of the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Wheeling Symphony, and the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra. Dr. Ewell has recorded for Musical Heritage Society, Hong Kong Records, Pickwick Records, and Cambria Records. His writings appear in nine journals principally *The Double Reed*, *the International Double Reed Journal*, and *Scrapes*. In addition he is an author or editor of several publications on the *International Double Reed Society World Wide Web Site: the Bassoon-Family Fingering Companion*, *the IDRS MIDI site*, *IDRS Who's Who*, and *the IDRS Conference Publications*. He is first vice president of the *International Double Reed Society* and will serve as host of the *International Double Reed Society 2001 conference at West Virginia University*. Dr. Ewell brings a unique perspective to the topic of "Teaching the Beginning Bassoonist," having started the bassoon at age eight. He is currently teaching his eleven-year old son the instrument.



Terry and John Ewell performing in the WVU Double Reed Day.