

“Got Oboe?”

Terri Knight, San Ramon Unified School District
Terriknight09@gmail.com

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Starting a student on the oboe whether they have played another wind instrument or not, requires a commitment to using high quality equipment and putting in the extra practice time on the front end. The oboe is not an easy instrument and the student needs to be willing to put in the effort. One oboe with bad tone/intonation will ruin the sound of an entire ensemble.

Equipment

Good quality reeds are a must! A student's success is dependent upon responsive reeds that sound good and play in tune. Recommended supplier: Forrest Music in Berkeley. Their reeds are handmade by oboe players and good quality. I stick with the Forrest Brand Gold label reeds (med. or med. hard). More advanced students in high school might prefer the Duste reeds (regular or hard). Steer clear of the soft reeds. They collapse very quickly and tend to be flat.

Instrument Models

Equally as important is the quality of instrument the student uses. Make sure he/she has a good, well maintained instrument. They will get frustrated quickly and want to quit if the instrument is not functioning properly. The Fox and Yamaha student lines are good. Stay away from “off brands”.

Embouchure

A rounded embouchure is the best and most successful to achieve beautiful tone, dynamic flexibility and good intonation. The student should pucker their lips around the tip of the reed with the reed resting in the lower lip. No Teeth!!!!

Old school teaching instructed students to put the reed on the lower lip and “roll” it in, resulting in a “smiling embouchure”. This pulls the lips tightly across the teeth and results in a more thin, shallow tone and very little flexibility for volume, tone color and intonation adjustment. Practicing long tones and working on slow, sustained music is very helpful in developing the embouchure muscles. Good repertoire for high school students to use for this is Evelyn Rothwell's J.S. Bach Difficult passages. Plenty of beautiful, sustained music in this collection.

Breath support/control

Please allow your beginning oboist to be “loud” at the start. It will take some time for them to develop the embouchure and breath control to harness the volume. If you constantly tell them they're “too loud”, they will become self conscious, start biting the reed and put less air through the oboe in order to play quieter. The result will be a thin, shallow, piercing tone and very sharp pitch.

If possible, encourage your oboe student to take private lessons. One on one time with an oboe player will do wonders for your student's progress. Another option if private lessons aren't possible would be to have an oboe specialist come in and work with your student at school.