

## SAXOPHONE FUNDAMENTALS

# POSTURE

**Feet** should be flat on the floor and positioned so that the player could stand up easily. Sit on the front half of the chair, without resting on the back of the chair.

The **back** should be straight but relaxed, this will allow you to support the saxophone and facilitate good breathing.

**Shoulders** should be relaxed as well. This should naturally fall into place when the back is straight.

Your **head** should be straight and level with the ground. The Saxophone should come to you, adjust the neck strap accordingly.

If movement in our bodies is pinched or tense, our sounds will be pinched or tense. Conversely, if the movement is free and easy, our sounds will be free and easy.

# BREATHING

Wind players use a muscle known as the diaphragm to engage in Diaphragmatic Breathing.

It is a large domed shaped muscle at the base of the lungs. Your abdominal muscles help move the diaphragm and give you more power to empty and fill your lungs.

The diaphragm should always be engaged while playing the saxophone. It will give you the support and endurance to play for longer periods with a more full and clear tone.

Lie on your back on a flat surface. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe. Breathe in so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible. Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale. The hand on your upper chest must remain again as still as possible.

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### Hand Position

First things first. The left hand goes on the upper key stack and the right hand on the lower.

The pads of the index, middle and ring fingers of both hands are placed on the key touch pieces.

The pinky on the left hand is used for G#/Ab, low C#/Db, B & Bb.

The pinky on the right hand is used for low C & Eb/D#.

Focus on keeping your fingers always touching the keys even when you are not closing the tone holes. This will allow smoother and faster playing.

The wrists of both hands should be relaxed and in the same position as when your arms are at your sides.

### Embouchure

Saxophone players used the single lip embouchure.

This embouchure involves tucking your bottom teeth under your bottom lip, just until your teeth are covered. Then, pull your lips nearly closed. Think of closing a drawstring bag.

Place the mouthpiece in your mouth with your top teeth resting on the top and your bottom lip pressed firmly against the reed. Make sure you don't bite the mouthpiece. A good rule of thumb is to take the mouthpiece in to the point where the reed separates from the bottom of the mouthpiece.

Press the corners of your mouth and your top lip against the mouthpiece, forming an airtight seal all the way around. Make sure you're using your lips to make the seal and not biting down on the mouthpiece. It's more difficult this way at first, but you'll eventually build up the muscles in your lips.

Long tones are the quickest and most sure way to build up the muscles necessary to have a healthy embouchure. Use them in your daily practice to warm up and to warm down.

I recommend playing in front of a mirror when first starting to play the saxophone. This will allow you to observe your embouchure and correct any mistakes right away.

Look for: A smooth chin, tucked in lower lip, using the correct amount of mouthpiece, not puffing out your cheeks, and keeping the embouchure shape intact while breathing between notes. This means keeping the lower lip pressed against the reed and the upper teeth on the mouthpiece, only lifting the upper lip to allow air in.

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# Intonation

At some point it will be necessary to play every note on your saxophone with a tuner at hand. Just because your concert Bb is in tune doesn't mean every other note on the horn will be too.

Also every saxophone is slightly different. This means you need to get to know your horn and what quirks and tendencies it has while playing. Certain notes are going to be always out of tune. This is where intonation training comes into play.

What good intonation comes down to is the development of our ears in concert with our inner mouth, throat, and tongue.

Practice singing a note and then jumping up an octave. Notice the changes in your throat that occur with the octave change. Now that you know which muscles to feel out for, trying being aware and implementing that feeling when playing low and high notes on the saxophone.

Experiment with tongue placement while playing a upper register note like C. Change the position of the tongue by thinking "AAhhhhh" or "Eeeeeee" and notice the change in pitch.

Also practice overtones starting with Bb. This will work the same muscles you will need for playing with good intonation.