

Reasons for Changing Your Mouthpiece

For Clarinet and Saxophone Students:

The mouthpieces that are supplied with beginning clarinets are designed to meet the specific needs of inexperienced players. When students begin to play, their air stream or breathing is usually not developed to the point where they can provide a sufficient amount of air into the instrument to produce a full bodied tone for any duration. Lips and facial muscles (embouchure) are also not developed to the point where they can firmly cushion the reed and mouthpiece while blowing the needed air for a full bodied tone.

To compensate, mouthpieces are designed with a short, shallow opening to be used specifically with a very thin reed. The result is that with very little air, a beginner can instantly produce a thin, rudimentary tone in the low and mid range of the instrument. Although these mouthpieces are beneficial for beginners, beyond a certain point (usually in middle school), they begin to work against the student and actually restrict the student's development. Beginning mouthpieces limit the amount of air that a student can put into the instrument. They are also not designed to play well in the upper range or to provide a full tone. Developing students who stay on beginning mouthpieces usually either don't put enough air into the instrument, causing bad intonation (playing out of tune) and poor tone, or they try to unnaturally force air into the mouthpiece, resulting in unhealthy tension in breathing and the embouchure, tight thin playing, or unfocused tone.

Most clarinet and saxophone teachers agree that the proper mouthpiece and reed combination is the single most important equipment factor contributing to a good tone. I encourage all students to move from their beginning mouthpiece to a mouthpiece that will help them develop better range, intonation, and tone quality, and ultimately providing a more fulfilling and less frustrating experience on their instrument.

Brass Students:

Brass Students change mouthpieces to improve sound and intonation, change tone color, increase range and endurance, add volume or flexibility, increase comfort, and to extend playing life. Playing habits of a student and the type of playing a student does will determine the mouthpiece to use. Brass players also change mouthpieces depending on the ensemble in which they are playing or they decide on one mouthpiece that will best suit all playing situations. For example, symphonic band, marching band, jazz band, etc. Some mouthpieces enable students to play easier in the upper register (for lead players in Jazz or 1st part players) while other mouthpieces produce big sounds in the lower register. Mouthpiece considerations include the size of the rim, cup, bore, and shank.

Procedure for Changing Your Mouthpiece

1. Students are encouraged to change mouthpieces with the help of a private teacher or the band director.
2. Students should test several models in order to find the most comfortable and best sounding mouthpiece.
3. No mouthpiece should be purchased unless it both audibly improves the sound and is comfortable for the player.