

HOW TO PLAY CLARINET FOR BEGINNERS

Everything you need to get started on the clarinet with the best habits that will help you play more easily and succeed quickly!

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FREE access to 8
easy-to-follow
clarinet video
lessons



Michelle Anderson, Founder, Clarinet Mentors
(www.learnclarinetnow.com)

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with the best habits that will help you to play more
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Michelle Anderson
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About The Author

Michelle Anderson is a professional clarinetist and teacher with a mission to inspire clarinetists to enjoy themselves as they learn to play with more pleasure and ease (while avoiding the most common frustrations that clarinets usually encounter). She is the founder of Clarinet Mentors, an online web resource featuring several free educational videos and articles. Her course, **Clarinet Is Easy**, has helped many clarinetists world-wide to learn to play the clarinet more easily through web-based videos and easy-to-follow instruction. Her videos have been featured in many educational and her YouTube (www.YouTube.com/clarinetmentors) channel has been viewed over a million times. As a performer, she has performed with the Vancouver Opera Orchestra, Lion's Gate Sinfonia, the Pacific Symphonic Wind Ensemble, Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the CBC Vancouver and Winnipeg Orchestras, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet Touring Orchestra, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, and is a regular performer with the West Coast Chamber Music series.

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How To Play Clarinet For Beginners – FREE BONUS VIDEOS FOR YOU!



Michelle Anderson, Founder of **Clarinet Mentors**, welcomes you and gives you access to over 10 valuable videos that will teach you in detail everything you need to know to have a great start on clarinet.

Click on the video link in the introduction for access to the Free Clarinet Videos, or go to [Free Lesson One Videos](#) to sign up for them now.

You will be directed to a webpage that allows you to enroll in the **Clarinet Is Easy** membership site at absolutely no charge. Once you enter your name and email address, you will be directed to the **Clarinet Mastery** login area. You can then login with your email address and a password, which will be automatically sent to your email inbox. This will allow you access all of the instructional videos that are referenced in this book, **How To Play Clarinet For Beginners**, which correspond to Lesson One of the **Clarinet Is Easy** 10-lesson course.

Once you login, you will be directed to the members area and you will see all of the videos listed in the drop-down menus. There are links to each video within the chapters of this book to help you to easily navigate to the relevant video as you read the book. Enjoy!

It is much easier to learn to play a musical instrument if you can see and hear how it works, so please, click on the link above before you dive into the great content of this book.

If you like and appreciate this book, please submit a review. Your review helps me to improve the next version, and allows other clarinetists to know what you found helpful.

Table Of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1: What Do You Need To Know Before You Begin Playing The Clarinet?](#)

[Chapter 2: How Do You Properly Assemble the Clarinet?](#)

[Chapter 3: How Do You Use Clarinet Reeds?](#)

[Chapter 4: How To Make Your First Sound With The Best Habits To Sound Great And Learn Quickly](#)

[Chapter 5: Your Next Important Good Habit – How To Start Notes By Using Your Tongue](#)

[Chapter 6: Time To Play Your First Five Notes](#)

[Chapter 7: How Your Posture and Position Can Help You Play More Easily](#)

[Chapter 8: How Do You Master The Five Most Important Good Habits?](#)

[Appendix A – Special Bonus Material](#)

[Appendix B: Other Helpful Clarinet Resources](#)

Introduction

I am so excited that you have decided to play the clarinet! Learning to play a musical instrument has been proven to be one of the most rewarding pastimes that can give us challenges and pleasure both. You will develop some excellent physical skills. You will activate your brain in ways that are unique (thus encouraging “smart” brain activity). You will develop a talent you can share with others when you join a musical group. You have selected an instrument that sounds great by itself, but also is an integral part of most concert bands, orchestras and many church and other community groups. It is well known as a classical, jazz and folk instrument. Whatever style of music interests you, having a good foundation on the basics of clarinet playing will help you to succeed much faster than if you simply tried to guess how to do it on your own.

How To Play Clarinet For Beginners will help you to play the instrument with the correct mouth shape, hand positions, and proper blowing techniques. I have personally seen hundreds of new clarinetists use the materials from this book to improve at an astonishing rate. If you begin the clarinet with the best habits, you will avoid many of the common frustrations that slow people down, or even lead them to quit.

This book will serve as a valuable resource as you learn the clarinet, especially if you make full use of the free video lessons that accompany it. It is not designed to teach you everything, but simply to help you get started correctly. Imagine if you have never driven a car before, and someone handed you the car keys and asked you to drive away. You could have some interesting, and frustrating results, by not knowing how to use the controls. This book is like the manual that shows you what each gadget of the car is for, and teaches you how to drive safely on your first test drive with your knowledgeable instructor beside you.

You will find that the book is laid out in different chapters, each of which is designed to help you learn one of the important good habits for success. I recommend that you read these chapters in order, since some of the skills are incorporated into the following chapters. Once you have gone through the entire book, then you may find it useful simply to review chapters specific to the skill that you are working on at any given time. After finishing this book, you will have a good understanding of the controls needed to “drive” the clarinet. From there, you will be able to use any number of excellent beginning music books to help you further your musical journey.

I find that most people can learn a musical instrument much more easily if they can see and hear the instrument being performed. I highly recommend that you listen to some good clarinetists, whether it be live, or on video. As a special bonus, to help you learn the clarinet faster, I am giving you a gift of free access to a series of educational videos that accompany this book. All you need to do to

access these videos is to click on the video image below if you have not already registered.



This link will take you to a webpage where you can sign up for the **How To Play Clarinet For Beginners** videos. If you have already registered for the videos, you should see a login page. You will find there is at least one video lesson to accompany each chapter in this book. You will also find a comments box on each video page. If you have any questions about the clarinet, you may enter them in the comments box, and I will personally respond to you.

My goal is to help as many people learn the clarinet, without the most common frustrations, as possible! As a performer, one of my greatest joys comes from playing great music with other musicians. As a teacher, one of my greatest joys comes from helping others to discover that joy of performing. One of my talents is distilling the years of expertise that I have learned from some amazing teachers into simple step-by-step lessons that can help new players such as you. I genuinely hope that the exercises in this book, and the bonus free videos that accompany it, give you a fantastic start on the clarinet. You will be amazed at how much you can play, quickly, if you follow these lessons.

Please enjoy this book and the accompanying video lessons. Once you complete this, I invite you to try out the many other clarinet videos that I have available for musicians such as yourself!

Michelle Anderson, founder, Clarinet Mentors

Chapter 1: What Do You Need To Know Before You Begin Playing The Clarinet?

Playing the clarinet is a fun and rewarding endeavor. This book will guide you in getting a great foundation for your clarinet playing, so that you succeed more quickly.

To get started, you need to have the right equipment to play the clarinet. Here is a list of some musical gear that you should have:

1. **Clarinet** - you can rent or purchase a clarinet through a music store, or through secondhand channels such as eBay. There are many types available. In general, a beginner clarinet will be made out of plastic. This is relatively inexpensive, and easy to take care of. More advanced models will be made out of wood. These will have a richer, darker, tone quality. You can get started on either one. Typically, a clarinet will come in a hard shell case to protect it, and will have the necessary accessories included with it. There are some very inexpensive clarinets that are made to sell new at under \$300. Typically you find these in major supermarkets, or places where you might not expect to find high quality musical tools. I highly advise that you not get one of these cheap instruments. (I have a good friend who calls these MIS-Ds – Musical Instrument Shaped Devices). Typically the metalwork is inferior, and bends out of shape easily, making the instrument quickly unplayable. You would be much better off getting a better quality used instrument for the same price. If you choose a reputable music store in your neighborhood, odds are you will find a good quality instrument to get you started. You can often rent an instrument fairly inexpensively.
2. **Reeds** - the clarinet needs a reed to produce sound. These are pieces of cane, much like a piece of bamboo, which are cut and shaped to vibrate against your mouthpiece to produce tone. These are fragile, and can break easily. They also do wear out, typically after a couple of weeks of use. I recommend that you start with at least 5 to 10 reeds so that you can rotate between them, and that you have spares available. They are produced in different strengths. I recommend that you begin on size 2 if you are a very young person, or a size 2½ if you are older. You will advance to stronger reeds as your muscles and air support get stronger. Although there are many good reeds out there, I often recommend the [Mitchell Lurie 2-1/2](#) for mature beginners. You can also start on a Legere synthetic reed, which is a plastic, hassle-free reed that will last for weeks for most beginners.
3. **Reed Holder** - your reeds will last longer if you store them in a proper case. There are a wide variety of reed cases available. For beginners, I recommend the [Reedgard by LaVoz](#). This is a small, hard plastic case that

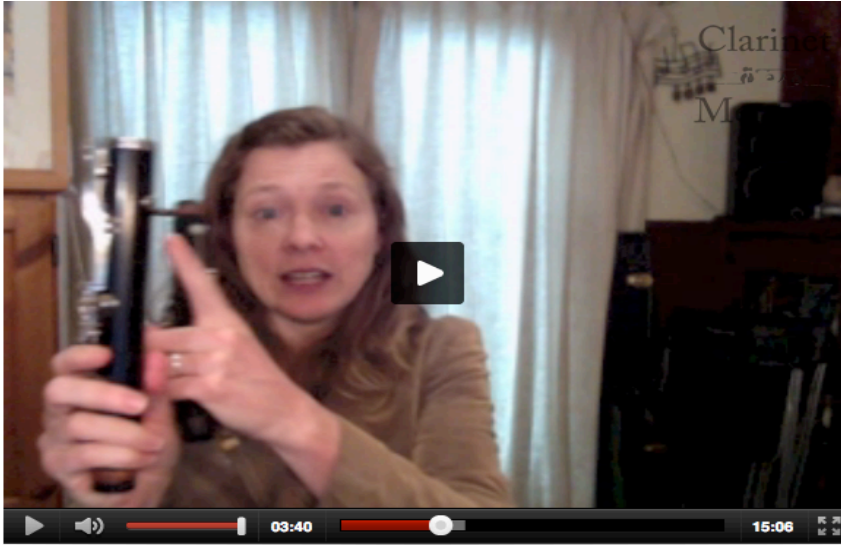
will protect two to four reeds. This is an optional, but recommended, accessory. There are several upgrades to fancier cases as you develop.

4. **Music Stand** - it is important for proper posture that any music you are reading is at eye-level. For most people, propping a book on a table or desk would be too low. This would lead to a bad habit of looking down as you play, which interferes with good tone quality. I highly recommend that you purchase a music stand. There are [some very inexpensive stands](#) that can also fold up into a very portable package when you are not using them. The height is easily adjustable, whether you are sitting or standing as you play your clarinet.
5. **Clarinet Stand** - another optional, but useful, accessory is a clarinet stand. This is a small device that will hold your clarinet up vertically if you set it on the floor while you are practicing. It will keep your instrument from tipping over, as it may if you simply tried to stand it on its own bell. For less than \$20, you can find one that will fold up into your case. I recommend the [Pack-A-Stand](#).
6. **Music Instructional Book** - there are many excellent books that teach you the notes to play on the clarinet, and give you some fun music to play. The music store where you get your clarinet will probably have many such books available. There are many method books, designed for school band programs, which also work very well for a stand-alone player. Of course, this book that you are now reading will get you started! You will be eager to find more music once you complete this. A good one to consider is the [Yamaha Band Student, Book 1 – Clarinet book](#).

Chapter 2: How Do You Properly Assemble the Clarinet?

If you have your gear together, it is time to discuss how to put your instrument together properly. There are a few simple pointers that will help you maintain your instrument in excellent condition, and ensure that it is properly set up.

To watch the accompanying video, click on the image below: (Ensure that you have signed up using the [special link](#) in this ebook).



I'm going to start with something that may be very obvious, but I'm surprised at how many people accidentally slip up on this one. You need to make sure your case is right side up before you open it. Generally the handle is going to be on the bottom half of the case, and if there is a logo, it is usually on the top. If you accidentally open the case upside down, you will pull the lid open and find all your pieces tumbling onto the ground. This is very dramatic, and it is a good way to inadvertently damage your instrument. Most people are naturally careful about this, but I am amazed at how many people accidentally open the case upside down if they are distracted at the moment.

Once you are certain that your case is right side up, go ahead and open it. Before assembling your clarinet, you are going to need to grease the corks. This will help you put it together more easily. If you look at your clarinet, you can see that there are little corks at each joint (on the ends of the pieces). These corks help to create an airtight seal when you put two pieces together. If air were to leak, the instrument would feel much harder to play. On a brand new instrument, the corks are extra thick, because over time they will compress. What it means for you, if you have a new instrument, is that it is going to be a little challenging to put together your pieces at first. It will get easier when those corks settle down in a few weeks. Somewhere in your clarinet case, you should have some cork grease. It will either be a tube that looks a bit like lip balm, or it might be in a little

tub. They basically work the same way. You apply it to the corks in a similar manner to putting lip balm on your lips. Spread a thin layer of cork grease on each cork that you find wrapped around the ends of the pieces. You can use your finger to rub it lightly in. Some people like to use their pinky finger to do this, because they find that is easier to clean off afterwards. When you have finished this, you should wipe the grease off of your fingers so it doesn't smear onto the instrument.

I recommend that you grease each cork the first time you put your clarinet together. If you have an older instrument that has been played before, you'll likely only need to do this every couple of weeks or so. You want to make sure that when you are assembling the parts, they can slide smoothly together. If it feels sticky, or resistant, then they need cork grease. If it is too sticky, or resistant, you are in danger of bending the pieces as you put it together. On a brand-new instrument, you may need to grease the corks every time you put your clarinet together at first. Eventually, they will settle down, and you will do this less frequently.

Once you have well-greased corks, you are ready to start joining the pieces together. I recommend that you start with the two big pieces that contain the silver keys. Clarinets are pretty sturdy and these keys are made out of hard metal. They are designed to cover the holes that our ten fingers are unable to reach on their own. If you drop your instrument, or if you end up twisting or wrenching the keys, you can bend them out of position, and they will no longer work properly. As much as possible, try to hold the pieces so that your fingers are mostly touching the black parts of the clarinet, and not the keys. It is inevitable that you will end up touching the keys a bit. Avoid placing any sideways or twisting pressure directly on the keys as you put the pieces together. The larger piece, that has the peg sticking out the back, is your bottom piece. If you put that piece in your right hand, you can support it with right thumb underneath that peg, which is called the thumb rest. Hold it vertically so that the end with the pieces that stick out over the edge is on top. You will notice that the other piece with keys also has an end where keys stick out over the edge. If you hold this piece vertically, so that the end with pieces sticking out is facing down, you will be in the position to join these two pieces together. You want to gently insert the cork from the top piece into the hole on the bottom piece. Align the holes that you will see running up and down these keys into a straight line. When we place a cork joint together, the best technique is to gently twist back in forth in very small motions. If you twist these pieces too far, you will likely find that the metal keys crash together, and are in danger of bending. There is one little trick to fitting these two pieces together that can be helpful. Hold these pieces upright, and look at the front of the instrument (the face that has all of the holes). Notice that on the left side, each piece has a straight key, that when joined together will form a straight line. On the top joint, this is hidden under the four keys that stick out on the side. These join together to form what we call the bridge key. It is important that you align the pieces so that these truly do form a straight line. On

some clarinets, the bridge keys tend to crash into each other as we twist the pieces together. If this happens on your instrument, you can avoid it by “raising the bridge” on the top joint. You do this by pressing the little metal ring that you will see lining the middle open hole. When you press it down, it moves the bridge key up on the top joint so that you can more easily slide it over the corresponding bridge key on the lower joint. This is well illustrated on the video that accompanies this lesson.

Now that you have the two main pieces put together and all of these holes are lined up with each other, you can add the other pieces of the clarinet. Pick up the piece that looks like a bell without a clapper. It is called the bell, and it fits onto the bottom. (Remember that the bottom piece has the thumb rest, and it is larger than the top joint.) You can gently twist the bell back and forth onto the lower joint, until it fits snugly.

After that, you will find a piece that looks like a barrel, and in fact is called the barrel. One end is smaller than the other. If it is upside down, it will not fit onto the top joint. Often there is writing on it that will help you orient it in the right direction. Hold your instrument in a way that is not putting much pressure on the keys, as you the barrel on to the top joint.

Again, with a brand new instrument that has thick, stiff corks, this might feel difficult to do. It may take a lot of back-and-forth action to fit any of these corks together. That is normal on a new instrument. If you have a joint that is really stiff, what I recommend you do **is** leave your instrument assembled after your first session. Put it in a safe place, (where your dog is not going to knock it over or eat it), and let it sit overnight. This will give those corks a chance to start compressing, so that it will get easier to put together as time goes on.

At this point, you have assembled the two main body pieces, the bell at the bottom, and the barrel at the top. The next piece is called the mouthpiece. It often comes with two accessories attached to it. One is the mouthpiece cap, which is a cover that is either made out of metal or plastic. For now, you can set the mouthpiece cap aside.

There is another piece with a screw or two on the mouthpiece that holds the reed onto the mouthpiece. This is called the ligature. Ligatures are usually made out of metal or rubber. You can set that aside for the moment as well.

Put the mouthpiece onto the barrel of your clarinet using the same gentle back-and-forth movements. Align the mouthpiece, so that the side with the hole and the flat part, is in line with the register key, on the back side of the instrument. The register key is the long skinny key above a hole on the top joint (which is also in line with your thumb rest). Now you have the main pieces of your clarinet assembled. You are ready put your reed on and try making your first sound!

Chapter 3: How Do You Use Clarinet Reeds?

It is helpful, to have a little bit of information about clarinet reeds. A reed is a small piece of cane, which is cut to fit on the mouthpiece, and vibrate against it when you blow to create a beautiful clarinet tone. There are different sizes of reed strengths. Generally, they are made in $\frac{1}{2}$ sizes from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to about a 4. The lower the number, the thinner the tip, and that means it doesn't take a lot of air to get it vibrating. As an adult beginner, you would normally start on a 2 or a $2\frac{1}{2}$. A reed of strength $1\frac{1}{2}$ is too wimpy for most people, and will not produce a full, rich, tone. I recommend that you use Rico Royal size 2 or Mitchell Lurie size $2\frac{1}{2}$ to get started.

In order for the reed to vibrate properly, it needs to be wet. You can fill a small glass with water, and gently let the reed soak for a minute with the thin side facing down. Another option, that many clarinetists use, is simply to wet the reed in your mouth. The tip of the reed is fragile, so ensure that it does not bump your teeth if you soak the reed in your mouth.

When the reed is wet, you will place the flat side of the reed over the opening on the mouthpiece. The curved tip of the reed will line up with the curved tip of the mouthpiece. The ligature, that we set aside earlier, will hold the reed in place on the mouthpiece. Hold the reed pressed onto the mouthpiece with your thumb. With your other hand, carefully loop the ligature over the top of the reed, and slide it down into position.

Many mouthpieces, have guidelines where the top and bottom of the ligature should sit. If your mouthpiece does not have guidelines, slide the ligature down low enough that if you are looking at the reed, you can fully see the curved cut where the shiny bark begins. If you have two ligature screws, the lower ligature screw can be reasonably tight. The top screw needs to only be adjusted until it is no longer loose. When you are looking at the reed, the screws should sit on the right side of the mouthpiece. Most ligatures will have the screws on the same side as the reed. There are some ligatures that are designed to rotate so that the screws are on the opposite side of the mouthpiece. These are called inverted ligatures. You will recognize this because the screws will still appear to be on the right as you face the reed (although they will appear to be behind the mouthpiece). Most single screw ligatures are inverted.

The accompanying video link in Chapter 2 will be very helpful to you in illustrating how to put the reed on properly.

The job of the reed, is to “vibrate like crazy”, open and shut, against the tip of the mouthpiece. When it vibrates to a closed position, it must entirely cover the mouthpiece hole. If your reed is crooked, or too low, it will not seal properly, and you will find it difficult to play. As an initial guideline for you, I recommend that you place the reed so that it is centered on the mouthpiece, and the tip is

precisely lined up with the tip of the mouthpiece. Later on, you will learn some advanced techniques on fine tuning your reed placement. For now, lining it up as I have recommended, will ensure that you will be able to get a proper sound when you blow.

Congratulations! You now have your clarinet properly assembled, and you can move on to the next lesson to learn how to play your first notes!

Chapter 4: How To Make Your First Sound With The Best Habits To Sound Great And Learn Quickly

Hi, and welcome back! Now that you have your clarinet assembled properly and your reed positioned properly, you are ready to play your first notes.

The Clarinet Embouchure (or how you shape your mouth properly)

In preparation for this, I want to talk a little bit about how you shape your mouth in the best way to make a great sound on your instrument. The shape of your mouth when you play a wind instrument is called the *embouchure*. A good clarinet embouchure will shape your mouth to allow the reed to vibrate as much as it possibly can. The first thing that you will focus on is the shape of your bottom lip. This is important because when the clarinet mouthpiece goes into your mouth, the reed actually rests right on your bottom lip. You want to make sure that you will not muffle the vibration of the reed in any way.

The accompanying videos for this lesson will be very helpful in showing you the three important steps that create a great clarinet embouchure. Click the image below to access part one of the two-part video:



Step One, you are going to tuck the very edge of your bottom lip over the top of your bottom teeth. You then want to hold your bottom lip still, and pull the skin on your chin downward as much as possible. This creates a firm surface for the reed to rest upon. If you feel this shape with a finger, you should be able to feel the concave curve of your chin under your bottom lip. The idea is to pull all of your skin down and away from the vibrating reed, which will rest directly upon your bottom lip. Likely, your muscles are not accustomed to doing this. As you practice in the next few weeks, a good habit will be to have your clarinet in your mouth ready to play, and then reach up with a finger and pull your bottom lip

down and away from the reed. This will encourage your mouth muscles to learn how to hold this shape on their own.

For Step Two, your top teeth are going rest right on the top of the mouthpiece when it is in your mouth. There is an ideal place to position your top teeth. For now, if you place them about half an inch to three-quarters of an inch down the mouthpiece from the tip, you will be close to the optimal position. If you put too much in your mouth, you'll get a horrible, awful squeak when you try and play, so that's easy to recognize. If you have not enough mouthpiece in your mouth, you will still make a sound, but you will only have a teeny bit of reed vibrating. This will give you a smaller, less resonant tone quality. For now, aim for half an inch down the mouthpiece, and place your top teeth onto the mouthpiece.

Finally, in Step Three you should imagine that your lips are round like a rubber band. When you have the mouthpiece in your mouth, the corners of your mouth will wrap inward and gently squeeze the sides of the mouthpiece.

To review the 3-Step Embouchure:

1. You pull your bottom lip and chin down away from the reed.
2. You put your top teeth onto the top surface of the mouthpiece, about half an inch down from the tip.
3. You wrap the corners of your mouth, in and around the edges of the mouthpiece.

How To Blow Properly Into A Clarinet

The single most important thing in producing a good sound on the clarinet is blowing into the instrument properly. You want to get your air stream as focused and fast as possible.

The way I like to think of it, is to imagine you can see the air coming out of your mouth in the same way you can see water flowing out of a hose. Let's pretend like you are trying to wash your car, and you are aiming your hose at it, using a fast spray to clean it really well. If someone were to go over to the faucet and turn the water down a little bit, you would have less pressure to clean with. You would need to increase your water pressure by using your spray valve to create a smaller, but more forceful, stream of water.

When you play the clarinet, you always want a fast and powerful airstream. When you play loudly, you use a lot of air that is moving quickly (just like having the faucet on your hose turned on high). When you play softly, you must direct a smaller amount of air much faster (just as you would adjust your spray valve if you had less water pressure while washing your car). Your blowing muscles will help you to blow with very fast air. When you blow into the clarinet, you should

imagine that your spray valve is adjusted to the fastest, smallest air stream. A fine mist might get the reed to vibrate, but it will make your tone quality very airy and fuzzy. A fast and focused air stream will get the reed “vibrating like crazy”, which is what you want to give you a clear and resonant tone. I highly encourage you to watch the accompanying video lesson to see and hear examples of how you can train your muscles to blow properly.

Now that you know how to shape your mouth, and you know that you will want to blow with a very fast air stream, you are ready to play some notes!

You will hold the clarinet by placing your right thumb under the thumb rest. It doesn't matter if you're right-handed or left-handed, the clarinet is designed for your right thumb to hold the instrument up. In fact, your left hand actually does more work on the clarinet. That is how the instrument is designed. For now, to make your first note, you can balance the clarinet by simply holding your left hand on the barrel.

If you put the instrument into your mouth and form the three-step embouchure, you are ready to try blowing fast air into the clarinet, and play a note. All of the holes on the instrument are uncovered, and the note you will play with this fingering is a G. The nickname for this note is an “open G”, because all of the holes are open.

Oftentimes when you are new to the clarinet, this note might not work easily on your first try. However, it is easy to correct. There are a few common problems people have when they are new to the clarinet. If you are experiencing any of these, you can learn how to improve quickly using the systems below.

One of the most common challenges people have is that they are excited, and in their enthusiasm to get started, they wholeheartedly put their whole body into action to make that glorious first sound! They are thinking about blowing really hard, and as their body gets into this, they inadvertently clamp their jaw down onto the reed, closing it shut. Absolutely no sound will come out of the instrument at all! That can feel a little bit frustrating. The good news is that this is really easy to fix.

If you examine the tip of the reed, and push it towards the mouthpiece, you will see that it takes very little pressure to close it shut. If your jaw is tensing up, in a closing motion on the reed, you will bite it closed. No air will be able to get into the instrument, and therefore, no sound will come out. You will hear nothing other than maybe some air leaking out of the corners of your mouth. You will feel a bit like you are blowing with your mouth shut.

If you experience this, you need to think of opening your mouth wider while you play, to allow the reed to vibrate freely. You can usually do this as soon as you notice that there is no sound coming through the instrument. If you tend to be a

“biter”, it is great practice to open your jaw to a very loose pressure (still maintaining your three-step embouchure). You will hear a whisper of sound. Then think of blowing a little faster, and usually you will naturally tighten to an optimal level once you hear the whisper transform to tone.

A second common problem when people try to make our first sound is that they produce a horrible, high-pitched squeak. At this stage there are probably two main causes of your squeak. If you have a bit too much mouthpiece in your mouth, you will squeak. Now is a good time for you to figure out the ideal amount of mouthpiece that should go in your mouth. If your teeth are too close to the tip of the mouthpiece, you likely have only a small amount of reed in your mouth. The more mouthpiece you put into your mouth, the more the reed is available to vibrate, and therefore you get more tone and resonance (up to a certain point). Every mouthpiece has a line that I call the “squeak line”. The closer your top teeth get to that line, the better your sound is, and when you cross it, you get a horrible squeak. A simple way to find the squeak line, is to play open G with a very small amount of mouthpiece in your mouth. Next, put a bit more mouthpiece in your mouth, and play the note again. You will notice that it sounds better. Continue to add small amounts of mouthpiece into your mouth and play open G. Most of the time, you will progressively get a bigger and warmer sound, until you get a horrible squeak (oops, too far). You want to establish where the squeak point is on your mouthpiece, and make a habit of placing your teeth just on the inside of that line.

The other common cause of a squeak on an open G is from biting the reed a little bit. This is similar to the first problem we mentioned earlier. If you bite a lot, the reed squeezes shut, and no sound comes out. If you bite a little bit, you may just squeak. If you are squeaking, it is likely a combination of biting, or too much mouthpiece in your mouth. Again, bringing the corners of your mouth in firmly can counteract this.

Another challenge that is fairly common when people play their first note is that they only get a small amount of sound out of the instrument. There is a very airy sound, and the instrument feels quite resistant. This is usually caused by air moving through the instrument that is not activating the reed. There are two common solutions for that. First of all, double check that the reed is positioned properly. Take a look at it, and make sure that it is centered. If you push the reed closed, it should completely cover the hole on the mouthpiece. If it has accidentally been moved into a crooked position so that it will not seal completely, it will be very hard to play. It will feel resistant, and you will feel frustrated! If you have broken your reed and there is a small piece missing from the tip, it will give you the same frustrating result. If your reed looks good, then odds are it is how you are using your air that is causing the problem. If you go back to my analogy of your air stream being similar to water coming out of a hose, you are probably set to “fine spray”. You do not have enough speed in your airstream to activate the reed and help it to vibrate. Your slower air is moving

through the instrument, making a hissing sound, but not activating the reed. It is wasting your breath! You need to adjust your imaginary spray valve to make your airstream much faster and more focused. Imagine that you must blow out 100 birthday candles in one quick burst of air. Likely, if you were doing this, you would have an airstream with a lot of power. It is not usual for your body to blow with this kind of speed, but you can learn to do it quite easily.

If you are hearing a mushy, fuzzy, airy tone, practise speeding up your air. A great way to practise is to train your air without your clarinet in your mouth. You can either blow out 100 candles, or a more simpler exercise is to take a piece of paper and see if you can hold it at arm's length, moving it with your airstream. If you can easily blow the paper around, and even push it steadily into a sideways position with your airstream, you are training your air to move properly. A fast airstream will make a loud hiss, like the air hose at a gas station. A mushy airstream sounds softer and more gentle.

These are really important concepts that I have introduced in this chapter. The two most important good habits that you have learned so far are:

1. The three-step embouchure (with the right jaw pressure on the reed)
2. Blowing with a very fast and focused airstream.

If you use these habits right now on your very first notes, you will be able to play most notes on the clarinet with a good tone, and the notes will come out of the clarinet easily for you.

You may not be able to do these consistently at first. However, if you understand that these are your goals, you can work at them regularly, as you train your body to learn these new actions.

Chapter 5: Your Next Important Good Habit – How To Start Notes By Using Your Tongue

I believe that if you understand HOW to play your instrument well, which involves knowing the systems for a good embouchure and airstream, you can sound quite good on clarinet reasonably quickly. One of my goals for you in these lessons is that you develop great habits right away. If you are someone who has already been playing for a while, you will recognize if you have any of the bad habits that I describe, and you will learn how to correct them. Whether you are a total beginner, or a more experienced player, you will progress much faster with these good habits as part of your normal clarinet routine.

Click on the image below to access the video on clarinet tonguing:



So far, we have covered two important good habits. One, is the three-step embouchure, and two, blowing with fast steady air. These habits are the basis for a warm, resonant tone quality. Good habit number three is so important, that I am going to introduce it to you before you learn any more notes.

All wind instruments use a system called called *tonguing*, which helps us to begin each note clearly. Initially, you probably made your first sound on the clarinet, by simply blowing air in to the instrument and listening to the note that came out. Usually, you will start notes with your tongue lightly hitting near the tip of the reed, as if you are saying the word “tee”. If you have several notes in a row, it is as if you are saying “tee-tee-tee” into the instrument, while you are blowing.

Now I have to say, tonguing does not feel at all natural and when it is new to you, it will feel very odd. Many people who are self-taught have created a type of fake tonguing, that imitates the proper style, but causes several problems. It is definitely worth learning and using the correct technique, since tonguing is a big

part of clarinet playing. The accompanying video lesson would be extremely helpful to watch so that you can see and hear a demonstration of this technique.

Although tonguing will feel a bit unnatural, once you start training your tongue how to do this properly, it only takes one or two weeks until it feels completely normal and natural.

I recommend you teach your body how to tongue without your clarinet at first. You can shape your mouth in a good clarinet embouchure, and blow very fast air, so that you hear a loud, hissing, airstream. As you blow, whisper loudly the words “Tee, tee, tee.” Your air should blow nonstop like an air hose. Your tongue will interrupt the airstream, but you should push the air continuously with your blowing muscles. This will feel strange, because our body naturally likes to put a pause in our airstream after each word that we speak. Concentrate on your airstream as you whisper “tee” to ensure that you are not stopping or changing your air stream throughout this exercise.

Next, I want you to put the clarinet in your mouth and shape your embouchure as if you are playing. Using your voice, I want you to speak “tee, tee, tee” with the mouthpiece in your mouth. This will feel very silly, and you will notice that your tongue is now hitting the reed, instead of the top of your mouth, as it does when you are speaking normally. This is what you want your tongue to do when you are playing notes on the clarinet. Your focus here should be to notice which part of your tongue is hitting the reed, and you may notice that it is hitting the reed near the tip of the mouthpiece.

In the previous chapter, when you were working on your embouchure, I introduced to you a way to get a “whisper” sound when your jaw is very open and loose. In effect, you are blowing air through the instrument, without vibrating the reed. You will just hear the air hissing through the clarinet when you use this whisper technique. If you actually hear a note coming out, that means you are biting down a bit on the reed. For this exercise, I actually want you to whisper, which means relaxing your jaw, until you hear the hiss. Now I want you to try whispering “tee, tee, tee,” while you are blowing air into the clarinet. Whisper as loudly as you can, which will get your air moving nicely. Again, notice that you can feel your tongue hitting the reed, just as it did when you were speaking earlier. You should also be able to hear your tongue hitting the reed a little bit like a small percussion instrument. If you do not hear your tongue hitting the reed, and if you cannot feel your tongue hitting the reed, you likely are not doing it properly. Go back to speaking it. [“Tee, tee, tee”.] When you speak the word “tee” with a mouthpiece in your mouth, your tongue will naturally do the right thing. This will help you get the feel of it. When you whisper, you also focus on using fast, continuous air. Remember that your inclination will be to huff in short puffs of air. Instead, you want to train your body to always blow in one long, non-stop, fast airstream.

When your tongue hit the reed, the reed stops vibrating instantly, and that gives you a clear distinction between different notes. If your tongue wanders too far down (lower) on the reed, the reed will not close properly because it is thicker. It will feel as though you hitting the reed properly, but the sound will be indistinct, as if you are mumbling. If you put the mouthpiece in your mouth you can lick up the surface of the reed until you find the tip, and ensure that you are aiming just below this point.

Here is great warm-up exercise for tonguing:

1. “Whisper” into the clarinet focusing on a loud and steady “hissing” airstream. (If you end up playing a note, loosen your jaw until you only hear the air hiss sound.)
2. As your air moves in one continuous flow, start whispering “tee, tee, tee”. Your tongue should hit the reed as you do this.
3. Gradually increase your air speed and get your embouchure back to normal until you morph into actually playing a real note. This will be again an open G, because all the holes on the instrument are open. As you tongue a series of Gs, ensure that your airstream remains steady, with no pauses after each note.

One of the biggest challenges that most people encounter with tonguing, is that it is natural for the air stream to pause on every note. Everybody that I’ve ever met does this, so you are probably doing it too. This causes the tone to fuzz out a bit, because as you slow your air down between notes, the reed does not vibrate as much. If that is happening, imagine that your tongue is merely interrupting an unstoppable stream of air by gently touching the reed. Nothing else should move or change, especially your airstream. This takes concentration.

The second really common challenge when people learn to tongue is that as the tongue moves, the jaw may move also. Look in a mirror as you play. When you articulate “tee-tee-tee” if you see your jaw moving in a “chewing” motion up and down, you will have some tone trouble or even the dreaded Awful Squeaks. You can usually train yourself not to do this by watching yourself in the mirror, and by focusing on bringing the corners of your mouth firmly in to anchor your embouchure.

The other really common bad habit, usually found in people who are self-taught, is what I call “fake tonguing”. These ingenious clarinet players know that something must start the note, but perhaps did not know how to use their tongue on the reed to achieve the right effect. Instead, they articulate with their throat, as if they are saying “guh-guh-guh”. Since this is not as distinct as “tee-tee-tee”, they often need to punctuate this style of tonguing by accenting their air on each note. If you are doing this, there are three problems. One is that you are constantly changing your airstream, which will constantly change your tone. Secondly, your “guhing” will not sound as clear and distinct as proper tonguing.

Thirdly, when you move into more advanced music, you will not be able to “guh” nearly as fast as you can tongue. Try it – say “guh-guh-guh” as quickly as you can, and then compare it to your fastest “tee-tee-tee”. Your tongue can move faster than your throat.

This fake tonguing is very common, and learning the proper way will feel strange to you at first. It is worth learning, though. Often using the whisper technique is the best way I know of to train your tongue to work differently.

When tonguing feels easy, you now have a great embouchure and airstream to produce good tone, and you know how to properly start notes. You’re ready for the next chapter to learn more notes!

Chapter 6: Time To Play Your First Five Notes

You have learned some excellent habits so far, and by training yourself to follow them, you will improve on your clarinet much faster. As you prepare to play more notes, I want you to continue to learn with the best possible habits. These will help you to learn more quickly, with fewer frustrations. You can find the video lessons for this chapter by clicking on the video image below:



There is a “best way” to hold your hands and fingers when you play the clarinet. Your first five notes are all controlled by your left hand. Your right hand holds the instrument with your thumb sliding underneath the thumb rest on the bottom piece. Your left hand will cover the holes that are on the upper piece. You want to train each finger to constantly hover over the hole that it will usually cover. On the back of your clarinet, there is a hole which your left thumb will cover. The three holes on the front will be covered by your index finger, middle finger, and your ring finger. The good habit that I want you to learn relates to the shape of your fingers. Your fingers should be rounded and arched. A good way for you to figure out how that feels and looks is to shape your hand like a crab claw, with your fingers opening and shutting against your thumb. Usually, when you create that shape, your fingers will be nicely arched. Additionally, notice which part of your finger comes in contact with your thumb when you close the claw. It is not the very tip of your finger, nor is it the flat part near your knuckle. Instead, it is the softer, rounded part of your finger that is set back a small amount from your fingertip. That is the part of your finger that should cover the hole on the clarinet.

You will soon find out that if you are using the three-step embouchure, and great airspeed, all you need to do is know where to place your fingers on the clarinet to immediately play several notes. When you cover a hole to play a note, your finger should be arched and very relaxed. You should gently cover the hole in an

easy motion. Do not slam your fingers down. Use the round part of your finger that you identified during the crab claw exercise.

Here is a link to a [clarinet fingering chart](#) that will show you how to play most notes that you need to learn. The chart features a diagram of the holes and keys on the clarinet that your fingers will control. If the hole or key is colored in, you will cover that hole, or press that key down.

You can see that on the fingering chart, open G has nothing colored in, because all of the holes are open. If we look at the F that is one note lower than open G, you will see that the thumb hole is colored in. This means that by covering the back hole with your left thumb, you will now be playing an F. Try playing your open G, with a good embouchure and fast airstream, and then add your left thumb to play the F. Move back and forth between the notes. You should train your thumb to stay very close to the hole when you are playing open G. Ideally, your thumb should move very little as you switch between G and F.

If you keep your thumb on the hole and now add your index finger on the top hole in front, you will hear a lower note. This note is an E. Play back and forth between F and E. Your index finger should be arched, relaxed, and should stay very close to the hole as it opens and shuts. I highly encourage you to look in the mirror as you do this exercise. Pay attention to the curves in your fingers, and encourage your fingers to remain close to the holes at all times.

If you add your next finger to the E, you will be playing a D. Train your middle finger to stay arched, relaxed, and to barely move at all, as you switch between E and D. Your fingers must cover the holes completely for the notes to speak properly. If you have a bit of an air leak as you cover a hole incompletely, it will feel very challenging to play. Your tone will be very airy and fuzzy sounding. Sometimes you will feel tremendous resistance, as if the clarinet is blowing back at you. You may also squeak. If this happens, look in a mirror to discover which finger is not quite covering the hole. You can usually correct the problem by adjusting to a different position.

Once you have mastered G, F, E, and D, you are ready to cover the last hole on the upper joint with your ring finger to play a C. To help train this finger, play back and forth between D and C. Look in a mirror to ensure that you continue to use the good finger habits studied earlier.

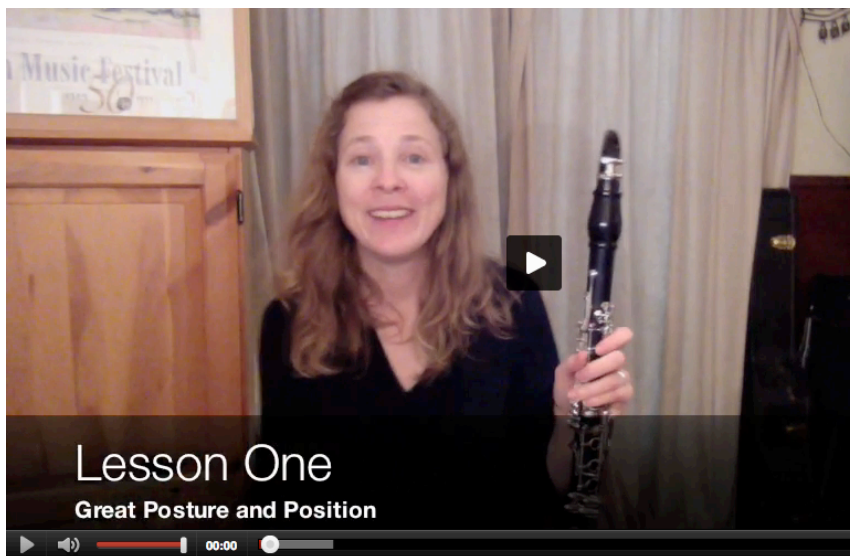
I encourage you to play all of these notes in a row, looking in the mirror to monitor your finger positions. Try playing G, F, E, D, and C. You want to get comfortable moving easily between these notes.

Now, you have a good understanding of the correct position for your left hand as you play your first five notes.

Chapter 7: How Your Posture and Position Can Help You Play More Easily

This book covers many of the most important good habits that you will help you to play well on the clarinet, and to avoid some of the most common frustrations that many people encounter. I don't expect you to master all of these good habits right away, but if you understand them, and have some exercises to work on, you will eventually find that they become natural for you. If you are not a beginner and you already have some experience, you can definitely benefit from comparing the habits presented here with what you are currently doing.

Click on the image below to access the next video:



Your posture and playing position have a great impact upon your clarinet sound, and the ease of air movement into the instrument. There are many different theories on how someone should sit, and different teachers will describe it with slight variations. I like to focus on one basic main principle, which directs you to focus on the mid section of your body. The muscles that you use to blow fast air into the clarinet are located right around your belly button. If you put a hand on your belly button and huff some bursts of really fast air, you will feel those muscles working in and out against your hand. You want those muscles to have lots of space, and not be squished, which happens if you are inadvertently slouching.

Here is a good way for you to create room for your “blowing muscles” to work best. Find the bottom of your rib cage. If you feel along the side of your body, you can usually feel where your bottom rib is. To help you find your ideal posture, put a hand on your bottom rib, sticking it out to your side as a marker. Next, with your other hand, reach down, and find the top of your hip bone. Place that hand as a marker, sticking out perpendicular to that hip bone, below your other hand. You

now can look at your hands and notice how much space is between them. Stand up. In this position, your hands will be open, and far apart. This is the ideal posture for clarinet playing. Keep your hands in place and sit down. Slouch. Notice how your hands suddenly get much closer together. When you slouch, your ability to produce fast air and good tone is greatly diminished, because you are squishing these blowing muscles. While you are sitting, try to lift your ribs up and away from your hips as much as possible. (Your marker hands will be as far apart as possible.) This basically will put you into a good position to produce good tone. It is also good to occasionally practise standing up so that you get used to blowing with good posture.

You also want your spine to be lifted and straight, which will help to open up that belly button area. I like to imagine that I have a little hook at the back of my neck, and I am basically being lifted from that hook. That gives me strength in my spine. Once your spine is upright, you want your shoulders to release all tension, and hang loosely from your frame. You can practise this by lifting your ribs and neck up so that you have an upright spine, and then letting your shoulders drop, and have your arms move in a loose and relaxed manner. It is natural to hold tension in your shoulders, but you want your shoulders, throat, arms and hands to be very relaxed when you play. Tension can create barriers to easy playing on the clarinet. Aside from the video in your Clarinet Is Easy member's video area, you can also watch this video for more pointers on clarinet posture:

<http://youtu.be/Bt9SRHDIkC0>.

Your head should look straight forward. It is very tempting to look down at your clarinet as you learn to play. However, if your head is looking down, you will be restricting your air passageway. More importantly, when you look down, you affect the angle that the clarinet makes with your mouth. Moving your head up or down while you play will greatly affect your tone quality. There is an optimum spot for each person, and that can vary depending upon your jaw structure. For most people, it involves having their head up, and their clarinet pulled inside of their knees if they are sitting. You can experiment with how you sound by pulling your clarinet in quite close to your body, and then moving it out to an extreme angle. Notice where you sound best, and aim to make that a habitual position when you play. For more ideas on these good habits, you can watch this video:

http://youtu.be/zFJR_M8kHlg.

Chapter 8: How Do You Master The Five Most Important Good Habits?

I would like you to now combine all five of the good habits that we've talked about so far into one exercise. It is tricky for your brain to concentrate on five things at once. A good way to practise is to try this short exercise several times, each time focusing on a different major habit. Your goal is to eventually be able to play this using all five good habits:

1. Three-step embouchure
2. Fast, steady air
3. Tonguing
4. Relaxed, arched fingers
5. Proper posture

Click on this video link that explains this valuable exercise:



For this skills training exercise, you are going to review your first five notes. You will start on open G, add your thumb for F, add your index finger to play E, add your middle finger for D, and your third finger for C. I want you to play each note, tonguing it, three times before moving to the next note. That gives you the opportunity to practise tonguing these notes with non-stop, smooth air.

You should be sitting up straight with good posture. Shape your embouchure in the three-step embouchure before blowing. When you are ready to blow, focus on fast, steady air. As you tongue each note, “tee, tee, tee,” ensure that your air does not fluctuate and pause between notes. Keep your fingers relaxed, arched and close to the holes. As you add a new finger, place it down gently, rather than smacking it quickly into position. This gives you many things to consider, but if

you train your body to use these habits, you will have much better success on the clarinet.

I encourage you to record yourself and if you can do it on video, even better. Watch yourself, and review your habit checklist. Did you have great posture? Was your embouchure looking like you were pulling your skin and bottom lip away from the reed? (You can see this better from the side, so take a video with the camera facing your profile.) Were your fingers arched and rounded, or were they sort of collapsing on their knuckles? Was your tongue hitting the reed? Was your air really steady or did you find yourself falling into that habit of huffing?

This relatively simple exercise actually has some really sophisticated concepts within it, and if you can pull all of those together, you are off to a great start in playing the clarinet! You are going to save yourself hours of bad habits and frustrations.

This skills training exercise puts all of these great habits all together, and I want you to work on that until it feels easy for you. This might mean 10 minutes a day for a week or two at the beginning of each practice session.

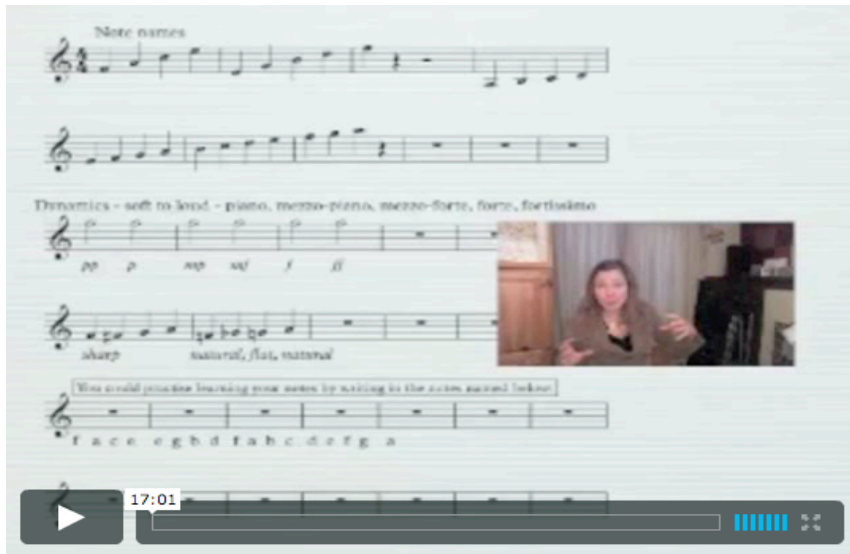
At this point, you are ready to work on some written music. The next section of this book (Appendix A) has a special bonus for you. You can access the written materials and the three videos lessons that go with it from the Clarinet Is Easy course, lesson one. If you are new to reading music or you'd like a review on reading music, be sure to check out the special introduction to "How To Read Music". You will also be able to work through any number of good beginning clarinet workbooks.

One book that I recommend is the [Yamaha Band Student, Book 1 – Clarinet book](#). This is used by school bands and will give you many easy songs to help you get familiar with the notes and fingerings on the clarinet.

Appendix A – Special Bonus Material

Bonus #1 – How To Read Music

Are you new to reading music? Do you need a refresher course on the basics of music reading? Click on this video link which will explain the basics of what you see on a page of music:



Do you find reading rhythms to be tricky?

If you have signed up for the free videos, you will also find some good videos to help you learn how to count rhythms such as this one. Click on the video link below to discover a good system for learning rhythms:



Bonus #2 – Three more videos with written exercises.

If you have signed up for access to the free videos, you will find that there is also a worksheet with some great written exercises, and some music using the first five notes that are presented in this book. You can find the worksheet in your members' area at:

[Exercises 1-3](#)

Bonus #3 – A Free Newsletter to give you more valuable clarinet tips and pointers every two weeks:

www.learnclarinetnow.com

Michelle Anderson, author of this book, invites you to join the Clarinet Mentors community for free. You will find several other videos for you to access, and Michelle answers clarinet questions from clarinetists such as yourself regularly. Every month you will receive a clarinet newsletter with a free video and clarinet-related pointers. If you ever decide you do not want to continue this, you can easily and instantly unsubscribe at the link at the bottom of every **Clarinet Mentors** newsletter.

Appendix B: Other Helpful Clarinet Resources:

Connect with Michelle through the following:

Clarinet Mentors Community at <http://www.learnclarinetnow.com>

Clarinet Mentors website at <http://www.clarinetmentors.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ClarinetMentors>

Clarinet Is Easy free preview videos: [FREE Preview Videos](#)

Michelle's sample videos for Clarinet Mastery courses:

Faster Clarinet Fingers: <http://www.fasterclarinetfingers.com/getstarted>

Better Clarinet Tone: <http://www.greatclarinettone.com/getstarted>

Mastering Clarinet High Notes: [mastering-clarinet-high-notes-sign-up](#)

Better Clarinet Articulation: [free-video-course-on-better-clarinet-articulation](#)

Michelle's other Clarinet Mastery courses include: Mastering Clarinet Music Mini Free Course, Clarinet Mastery Live Monthly Training, and Mastering Clarinet Music Club.

Find Clarinet Mentors Videos at YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/ClarinetMentors>

Other helpful clarinet resources:

[The Clarinet BBoard](#) – a free online forum for clarinetists to share ideas

[Virtual Sheet Music](#) – a site with hundreds of downloadable pieces of music for clarinet.

[International Clarinet Association](#) – a resource for clarinetists worldwide dedicated to research and clarinet performance.

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