

MCMASTER MUSIC EDUCATION *NOTEBOOK*

Number 4

Fifteen Fantastic Flute Tips

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1. Remember Your Flute Is Delicate.

When you are not playing it, keep it on your lap with the keys facing up. Never leave it on your stand or put it on a flat surface with the keys down. The keys should always face up so any moisture doesn't drip into the pads.

2. Putting Your Flute Together

Wipe any dirt off the joints. Hold each piece without touching the keys. Gently connect the pieces, don't force them or squeeze the keys!

3. Brush Your Teeth and Keep Your Hands Clean

Try to brush your teeth after eating or drinking. Food particles can blow into your flute and onto the pads causing them to become sticky. If you can't brush, then at least rinse your mouth out with water.

4. Swabbing Out Your Flute

Always do this right after playing or if any dripping occurs during playing. Excessive moisture can make the pads swell and shrink or become sticky. Your swab cloth should be soft and absorbent like an all cotton handkerchief. Make sure the cloth covers the rod or you will scratch the inside of your flute. Keep the cloth outside of the case. If you can't do this, fold it as thinly as possible and lay it on top of the flute.

5. Cleaning Outside of the Flute

Never use silver polish on your flute, it will damage the body! Never rinse the headjoint with water, it will ruin the cork. Only use rubbing alcohol to clean dirt and grease off the body, but be careful not to touch the pads with alcohol. Clean the ends of each piece of your flute (wherever metal touches metal) with rubbing alcohol when dirty or gummy. Use a Q-Tip dipped in rubbing alcohol to clean the embouchure hole occasionally.

6. Sticky Pads

Even if you take good care of your flute, you might get a sticky pad when the weather is very humid. Put the glueless side of a sheet of cigarette paper under the key and press down the key. Do not pull the paper out while the key is down!! This will ruin your pads.

7. Check Your Cork!

Check the position of your headjoint cork with your cleaning rod. The line should be in the exact centre of the embouchure hole. As the cork gets older, it can dry out and move when you clean the headjoint. If it is out of position, your intonation will be unpredictable. Ask for help to move the cork back into position.

8. Always Play With Good Position!

When sitting don't slouch, sit up straight and don't let your right arm drape over the back of your chair. Two players per music stand is best, but if there are three (or more) try and position yourself so that your flute is not squashed against your body. Don't let the instrument droop too much! Playing with good position will help you play with good tone and tuning.

9. Check Those Fingerings!

Make sure you are using the correct fingerings. Second octave D and E flat must be played with the first finger of the left hand up- no exceptions (and yes, it does sound better!). The right hand pinky must be down for everything except first and second octave D. Leaving it off makes many of your notes too flat. Take lots of care with third register fingerings. Learn them correctly the first time!!

10. Breathe!!

Don't forget to breathe before you play. Feel "cool air" inside your mouth when you take a breath and don't make too much noise when you breathe- too much noise means that you are not taking in air efficiently. Want to feel what it is like to take a really good breath? Try breathing in while bending over and you will see how good it feels.

11. Practice Long Tones for a Better Sound

Try and play the best B natural you can, with big sound. When you are happy with it, try connecting to a B flat, getting louder and trying to use up nearly all of your air. Then try from B flat to A, A to A flat. Play each pair twice. If your first pair is great, try to make the second one better (and if the first pair is not so great, you get a second chance!). Do this regularly and you will be able to make your sound beautiful and even.

12. Practice Scales

Yes, they are not the most interesting things to play, but by playing them with steady rhythm, the correct fingerings and good tone, you will be able to play more difficult repertoire with greater ease. Don't neglect keys with sharps in them, either!

13. Practicing Tricky Passages

Work them out slowly! (Yes, this is difficult to do, but be patient!). Try starting at the end of a tricky passage instead of always at the beginning. Try tough stuff in small chunks and then put them back together. Be patient! Remember that it is just as easy to play something the right way as it is the wrong way!

14. Learn to Tune

If your tuning note is flat, push the headjoint in a little. If you are sharp, pull it out a little. Not sure if you are sharp or flat? Just do something! If you are wrong, try the other choice. Use a tuner, practice with a friend or check with a piano (as long as it is in tune!). And remember, just because one note is tuned doesn't mean that all of your notes will be perfect. Listen and be aware at all times. With practice, you will be able to tune with confidence.

15. Listen!

Go to concerts and hear music live. If you can't get to concerts in your area, then listen to recordings. Find your favourite flutists, discover your favourite flute repertoire!