

Flute

First Day of Class

Preliminary Instruction

1. Students enter the classroom and go directly to their seats without opening their instrument cases.
2. The teacher briefly reminds students that they are here to learn to play a musical instrument. The process is not as easy as they might think. It will take their undivided attention and cooperation. If they listen to you and practice regularly they can be successful.
3. At this time or as the class proceeds students should be reminded of the importance of respecting the efforts of each student in the class. Everyone needs to feel comfortable in order to do her or his best. All of the students need to know that no one will ever laugh at them regardless of the sound they may produce. It is up to the teacher to create this “safe” environment for each student in the classroom.
4. Be positive but firm. Give instructions simply, clearly, and directly.

Assembling the Instrument

Note: Depending on the amount of time allotted for the lesson, the teacher may want to skip instrument assembly and finger exercises and spend the entire lesson working on embouchure formation and tone production on the head joint alone. Assembling the instrument, hand position, and playing on the entire instrument would take place at a subsequent lesson.

1. Students take instrument cases to another area of the room and set their cases flat on a table(s). If no table is available, students put cases on the floor and sit or kneel beside his/her instrument.
2. The case must be opened with the handle below the opening.
3. With the left hand students carefully pick up the body of the flute and hold it palm up where there are no keys. Grasping the end of the foot joint with the right hand assemble the two pieces using small back and forth turns. The rod of the foot joint is aligned so that it is in line with the center of the D key (the last key) on the body of the flute.
4. The teacher needs to check each instrument at this time.

5. Remove the head joint. Grasp the non-keyed top of the body with one hand. With small back and forth turns, insert the head joint. The embouchure hole is aligned so that it is in a straight line with the tone holes on the main body of the flute.
6. This also needs to be checked by the teacher before proceeding.
7. Students now return to their seats. Be sure students carry the instrument with both hands almost perpendicular to the body.
8. Remind the students to be patient and not to play. They will be very excited at this point and it is easy for them to lose control.

Note: Students will need reinforcement of this procedure at each successive class. If not, they will become sloppy and the instrument will be assembled incorrectly, causing incorrect embouchure or hand position, or damage to the instrument.

Producing a Sound

1. Students remove the head joint from the instrument and place the body of the instrument in a safe place (keys up) so work can be done on the head joint alone.
2. Students slide out to the edge of the chair, sit up tall, and put their feet flat on the floor. Shoulders are relaxed, head is straight and facing forward.
3. The teacher asks each student to put his/her lips together in a normal relaxed position and place her/his right index finger parallel on the bottom lip with the finger resting at the edge of the pink of the lip.
4. The students now blows air across the finger as if blowing out a candle two feet away. The bottom lip should remain very relaxed. The opening in the center of the lips should be in the shape of a very small oval.
5. The teacher then individually places the head joint on the student's bottom lip with the edge of embouchure hole resting at the edge of the pink of the lip. The lips need to be relaxed and natural with the lower lip covering a small portion of the embouchure hole and the head joint parallel to the lips. The center line down the face should match up to the center of the embouchure hole. The aperture is an oval shape
6. With the teacher holding the head joint and covering the end of the head joint with the palm of the hand the students, one at a time, direct the airstream across embouchure hole as if blowing on a candle 2 feet away.

7. Once the student can get the correct sound, the student tries the same procedure without the teacher's help.
8. Work to get each student to sustain the sound for 2 or more counts. This is very difficult for most beginning flute players, as the flute offers no resistance and students run out of breath quickly. Make sure the bottom lip stays relaxed. Don't allow students to push the head joint against the lower lip.
9. After each student has completed this procedure, the entire group sustains the pitch for 4 counts (or as long as possible) with the teacher maintaining an audible beat. Be sure to take time to help students who are having difficulty. Make sure that a steady pulse is maintained.

Holding the Instrument/Finger Exercise

1. Students reassemble the instrument and slide out to the edge of the chair, sit up tall, and put their feet flat on the floor. Shoulders are relaxed, head is straight and facing forward.
2. Instruct students to rest the flute on the right knee and left shoulder.
3. The right thumb is placed under the F key on the side of the thumb where the nail and the skin meet. The wrist is straight with the right hand forming a backward C. The right pinky is curved and over the Eb Key.
4. The left hand thumb is placed on the elongated thumb (B) key. The left index finger supports the flute between bottom knuckle and first joint. The left wrist is slightly bent. The left pinky hovers over the Ab key.
5. Students should put fingers on the appropriate keys. Fingers are curved in a C hand position with the fleshy part of the fingers covering the center of the keys
6. With the flute supported by the right knee and left shoulder, students lift all eight fingers and left thumb slightly off the keys. The right thumb remains below the F key for support. Then in rhythm, with the teacher counting out loud, students replace the fingers one at a time -- Thumb, 1,2,3,4,5,6, pinky (on the Eb key), pinky (pinky on the Ab key). Do this exercise very slowly many times. Insist that students stay with you as the fingers are called off.

7. Check students carefully to make sure that hand and finger position is correct. Students can and should watch their fingers while doing this exercise in order to see as well as “feel” what is happening.
8. Students now bring the entire flute to the mouth with the flute parallel to the lips and the head straight and facing forward.
9. The elbows are away from the body as naturally as possible with the wrists and hands positioned as above.
10. As before the right thumb is placed under the F key on the side of the thumb where the nail and the skin meet. The wrist is straight with the right hand forming a backward C. The right pinky is curved and over the Eb Key.
11. The left hand thumb is placed on the elongated thumb (B) key. The left index finger supports the flute between bottom knuckle and first joint. The left wrist is slightly bent. The left pinky hovers over the Ab key.
12. Have the students finger F (thumb, 1,2,3,4,and pinky). Fingers are curved with fleshy part covering the center of the keys
13. One at a time, using the same procedure as with the head joint alone, each student tries to produce the F. Do not force the high octave (top line F). The low F is perfectly acceptable.
14. If a student is having difficulty producing tell pitch tell her/him to 1) try blowing the air faster, 2) get the head up a little, or 3) change the angle of the air stream slightly. Do not allow students to tighten the lips or play with incorrect posture or hand position in order to try to get a sound.

Note: It is not uncommon to have one or two flute students who cannot produce a pitch at the first lesson. This does not mean that they will not be able to play the flute. With correct, patient instruction, time, and practice all students will eventually be able to produce a tone.

15. Once the students have gone through this procedure individually, try it with the entire class. The teacher must be sure to maintain an audible steady pulse.
16. Constant and consistent reinforcement of these fundamentals will be necessary at each class session if students are to develop proper playing fundamentals.

Disassembling the Instrument

1. When the lesson has ended the students return quietly to their instrument cases.
2. Grasp the head joint and body (where there are no keys), and with small back and forth turns remove the head joint.
3. Remove the foot joint by grasping the body and foot joint as described in assembly and place the foot joint followed by the body in the case
4. The cases can now be gently closed and latched. Do not allow students to put anything in the case, as anything extra in the case will damage the instrument.

Note: Do not worry about swabbing out the instrument at this time. The focus of the first few lessons should be on correct playing habits. Swabbing can be dealt with at a later lesson.

Always remember that the goal of the first lesson is to get the students started correctly. It is probably not possible and/or desirable to get through every step listed above during the first class. Since every classroom situation is different the amount the students can accomplish will vary from school to school and class to class. Their progress will be dependent on the experience of the teacher, the time allotted, the number of students in the class, the make up of the class, and the sophistication of the students. A wise teacher will guide the students through these first steps in a careful and thoughtful manner, teaching only what the students are able to learn in the time allotted and not simply “cover” the material to “get through the entire lesson.”