

Playing the Bassoon!

Handbook by Dr. Stephanie Patterson
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Online Resources

www.musicandthebassoon.org

A website containing step-by-step instruction for learning the bassoon, including fingerings, tips, etudes, duets (with accompanying tracks), and recordings.

imslp.org

A free online database of sheet music in the public domain. See music list for pieces found on the database. Searchable by composer.

www.trevcomusic.com

An online retailer of double reed music, including all pieces and books listed in this packet. Searchable by composer, publisher, or instrumentation.

www.forrestsmusic.com

Online retailer of reed-making supplies, bassoon accessories, sheet and audio music, and some instruments.

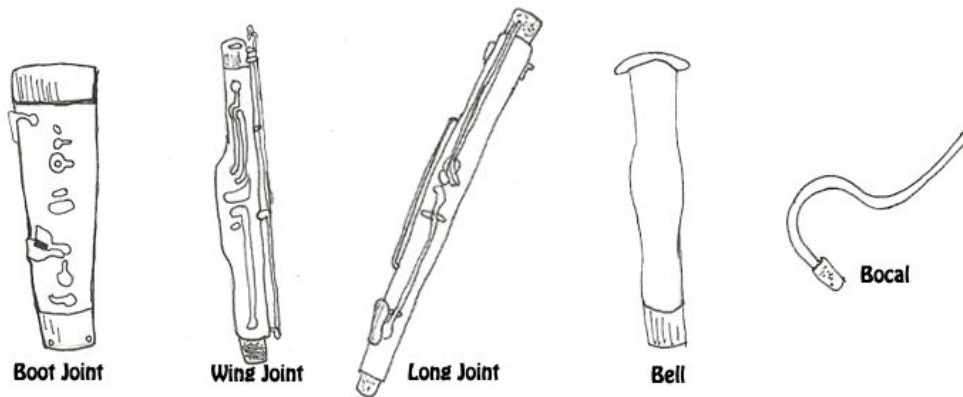
schwobbassoonstudio.wordpress.com

A blog about everything going on in the Schwob Bassoon Studio! Includes links to resources, including links to online GMEA All-State audition clinics. Also, contact Dr. Patterson for additional materials, and clinics leading up to auditions and festivals:

patterson_stephanie1@columbusstate.edu or (706) 649-7267

I. Assembly

Follow the given diagrams and always treat the instrument with care!



1. Always open the case on the floor!
2. First remove the boot joint, and place on the floor.
3. Next, the wing joint fits into the smaller hole on the boot joint (fig A), be careful of the bridge key that extends partially over the boot, and line up the curve of the wing joint with the curve of the other hole in the boot. Push them together lined up straight!
4. The long joint fits next to the wing joint, with the smaller end in the boot joint (fig B).
5. The bell goes on the end of the long joint, be careful of the keys that overlap (fig C).
6. The bocal is very fragile, always hold it by the thicker, curved part. It goes into the wing joint, and the small tone hole lines up with the key that extends beyond the wing joint (fig D).



fig. A



fig. B



fig. C



fig. D

Always lift and carry the bassoon by holding onto the boot, not a different joint!

II. Embouchure, Air Support, and Hand Position

Embouchure

The bassoon's reed is where the sound starts, and it is important to have a good connection to the instrument at this crucial place. To form a bassoon embouchure, say the word "two" (/tu:/).

Notice how the corners of your mouth *pull inwards*. Next, flatten your bottom lip against the reed and circle your lips around the rest of the reed with a slight overbite (see picture below).

The reed should be about halfway into your mouth.

If you play the reed by itself with a correct embouchure, it should sound like the note Eb4 (with correct air support, see below for more air support tips).



Inside your mouth

Just behind your embouchure, the shape inside your mouth is also important to making a good sound on the bassoon. Pretend you are singing "Oh" to make sure your tongue and throat are open and relaxed.

Air Support

Remember, the bassoon is a WIND instrument, which means the MOST IMPORTANT part of playing the bassoon is the wind (aka your air support). Step one is breathing in, since you can't put air into the bassoon if you don't have it in your lungs first. To get a good breath, sit up on your sit-bones and breath the stale air out of your lungs first, then take in a full breath expanding your ribs outward and keeping your shoulders relaxed. If you say the word "home" while breathing in, your throat and mouth will be relaxed and open to allow the maximum amount of air to enter.

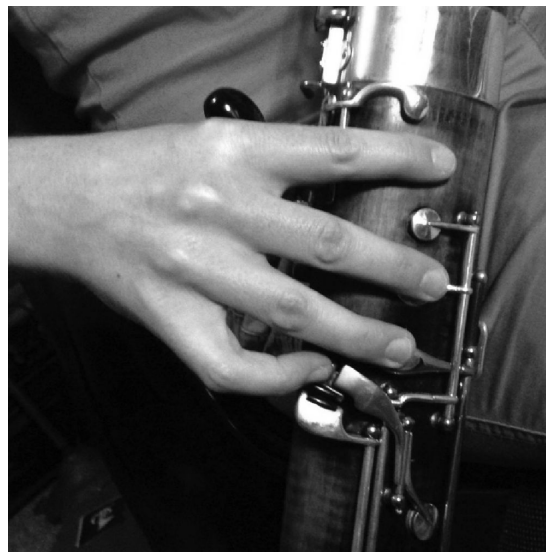
To create a rich sound on the bassoon, you need to blow a steady, fast stream of air. Pretend that you are blowing out a candle (like on a birthday cake) that is across the room from you. You need a very **focused, fast** stream of air. If you play just on the reed, you should get a steady note with a clear sound. Start with your air ready and your tongue on the reed, and then release with a "tah" articulation to make a clean start to the note.

Hand Position

Spend enough time figuring out how to sit with the bassoon so that your hands are relaxed and have a minimum of weight on them. The seat strap should be pushed towards the right front of your chair, so that the bassoon is comfortably away from your body. Sit with upright posture and bring the bassoon to you. The bassoon will cross your body like a seat belt. Rotate the bocal so that the many thumb keys face you, your hands are relaxed and fingers curved. See the pictures below.



Left (upper) hand



Right (lower) hand

Notice that the wrists are relatively straight and relaxed, fingers are curved and can bend at the big knuckle to move up and down on the keys and tone holes. The right hand crutch can be used for students with larger hands or longer fingers.

III. Books and Music

I recommend one of the following books (in the given order):

Weissenborn, Julius. *Practical Method for the Bassoon including Fifty Advanced Studies*. Published by Carl Fisher, New York.

Skornica, J.E. *The Rubank Elementary Method for Bassoon and The Rubank Advanced Method for Bassoon, Vol. 1*. Published by Southern Music Company, Texas.

Hawkins, Alan. *Melodious and Progressive Studies for Bassoon*. Published by Southern Music Company, Texas.

Music

For your first solo, you might pick a piece out of one of these collections:

Classic Festival Solos for Bassoon vols 1, 2. Published by Belwin Mills.

Bravo! Bassoon solos by Carol Barrat. Published by Boosey and Hawkes.

For later solos, here is a list of repertoire from beginning (level 2) up through the intermediate/advanced (levels 3-5) level.

Composer	Title	Publisher	Level
Fauconier, B.C.	Reverie, Op. 114 No 1	B&D Publications*	2
Garfield, Bernard	Two Pieces	Trevco Music Publishing	2
Galliard, Johann E.	Six Sonatas for Bassoon	International Music Co.*	2-4
Vivaldi, Antonio	Concertos for Bassoon	Schirmer*	2-5
Heinichen, Johann D.	Sonata in D Major	Accolade	3
Merci, Louis	Six Sonatas Op. 3	Medici	3-4
Phillips, Burrill	Concert Piece	Carl Fischer	3-4
Saint-Saëns, Camille	Allegro Appassionata Op. 43	Belwin Mills (for cello)*	3
Senaille, Jean Baptiste	Allegro Spiritoso	Southern Music Co.	3
Bourdeau, Eugene	Primier Solo	Rubank	4
Corrette, Michel	6 Sonatas	Schott*	4
Grovez, Gabriel	Sicilienne et Allegro	Leduc	4
Pierné, Gabriel	Concertpiece Op. 35	International	4
Telemann, Georg P.	Sonata in F minor	Amadeus*	4
Devienne, François	6 Sonatas	Musica Rara	5
Hindemith, Paul	Sonate	Schott*	5
Kozeluh, Jan A.	Concerto in C	International	5

*indicates that it may be available through imslp.org, an online database of pieces that are in the public domain. Scores may be downloaded as a pdf for free.

IV. Reeds and Troubleshooting

Tools

You will need the following tools (most of which can be found at a hardware store)

Needle-nosed pliers

Files (fine)

Sand Paper (400 grit)

reed knife (or a folding pocket knife, at least 3 inches long)

Ruler

Plaque* - goes between the blades when scraping, to prevent cracking

Mandrel* - goes into the tube when scraping or adjusting wires, to prevent cracking

*can be purchased through an online double-reed supplier (see online resources)

Troubleshooting Common Problems

1. Response is late or difficult

The reed may be too open or closed (it should measure about 1.5 mm at the middle of the opening). Use the pliers to close the reed, by pinching the top and bottom of the first wire or open the reed by pinching the sides of the first wire.

OR

The tip may be too thick. The very edge of the tip should be paper thin, and then blended back toward the thicker part of the reed.

2. Low register is very difficult to play

The reed may be too open or closed (see above).

OR

The back of the reed may be too thick. Using a mandrel to support the tube and plaque in between the blades, lightly scrape the back of the reed with a flat file.

3. Reed is very flat

Often this is because the reed is too weak at the tip. Check the opening to make sure it is about 1.5mm first. If the reed is still too flat, the tip may need to be clipped shorter. You may use a straight-edge razor blade against a cutting block or a reed-tip clipper for this.

4. Reed is very sharp

The reed is probably too strong for its length. First check the opening of the tip, then use a file to scrape down the overall thickness of the reed but maintaining the proportions of the front to the back of the reed.