

Mary Byrne's "Teaching the first flute lesson"

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The instructions below are for the student's very first flute lesson. A copy of this page can be given to the student as a review at the close of their lesson.

Following this, on pg. 3 is the teacher's supplement that explains the "behind the scenes" concepts that are being taught.

This document originally was entitled "Worksheet #5~ Beginning the Flute" and is a work in progress, and part of Mary Byrne's package of handouts available to her flute teachers in training, and private students.

First Lesson ~ Beginning the Flute:

- Step One: Make a really good pout.
 Now while pouting, chew a huge wad of bubble gum
 with good manners! Chew with your MOUTH CLOSED!!!
 Put a couple of jaw-breakers back between those molars.
 Hook a finger under that bottom lip.....
 That's where the flute goes...Hooked under the bottom lip.
- Step Two: Replace your finger with the lip plate of the flute (use the headjoint only.)
 Get a great sound (imitate your teacher's sound.)
- Step Three: Take the flute away from your face (down to your side).
 Put it back in playing position and make another wonderful sound....
 ***On your very first try!!***
 Repeat this ten times for ten perfect notes!
- Step Four: Imitate the rhythm patterns played by your teacher.
 Repeat every detail exactly!!
- Step Five: Put your palm over the end of the tubing and PLAY THIS NOTE!
 It's going to be lower than when the tube is simply open.
 Imitate the high and low pitch patterns played by your teacher.
 Imitate them exactly!
- Step Six: With the end of the tube still covered, play a low note and then a
 higher note. Think: "TAW---TOO!!

Imitate the high and low patterns of your teacher.
Try the same thing with an open tube, but remember:
this will be HARDER!!

Step Seven: Now try something different: Take a low, deep breath, right into your belly-button.
Play a long, slow note, and then add some excitement by sliding your pinky into the tube. Now that you know that doing this makes the pitch go up and down, have some fun!!
See how *long* you can make the sliding sound go down and up.
REMEMBER: ALWAYS A LOW DEEP BREATH.
You could even play a song like Mary Had a Little Lamb this way!

Step Eight: Put the flute together. Follow your teacher's lead.
To get your hands set on the flute, flip your left hand back at the wrist, and curve your fingers into a tunnel.
Slip the flute into the tunnel and rest it on the lowest segment of your index finger.
Curve your fingers onto the proper keys.

Take your right hand and hold it in front of you in the shape of a "C".
Slip the "C" over the proper keys, thus holding up the weight of the flute.
That's all there is to it!!

Step Nine: Hold the flute more or less parallel to the floor, with the **HANDS IN FRONT OF YOUR BODY!!**
Now try to set the lip plate in "that perfect spot".
Push your right hand away from you a little bit to bring the flute's lip plate firmly to your chin.

Lifting your LH (left hand) index finger and pinky, and your RH (right hand) pinky...Play this note.
This is a "D". (I call it a "rabbit ears" D)
Now put your RH pinky down. This is an Eb.
Imitate the patterns your teacher plays using these two notes.

Step Ten: Carefully take your flute apart putting your hands on it **SO THEY WILL NOT CRUSH THE KEYS OR RODS.**
Clean each part of your flute and put it in the case properly.

WHEW!! WHAT A LESSON!!!!

Teaching the first flute lesson: **The Teacher's supplement.**

Basic Pointers:

- 1) Non-verbal, demonstrative teaching is far more effective than wordy teaching.
- 2) Make comments of the "DO" variety, not the "DON'T" variety. DO this gives a specific. DON'T do that...is usually followed by the student asking "Well then...What?" Going right to the WHAT saves time!
- 3) Give lots and lots of feedback!!
- 4) Talk about things with their correct names.
- 5) Try to be as consistent as possible about terminology.
- 6) Err on the side of expecting too much, rather than assuming that the student isn't ready for that yet.
- 7) If you are going to hand them the worksheet (student's version above), wait until the end of the lesson, and then present it in the context of "look what you did today".
- 8) Read each student for how close in physical proximity you can approach them before offending "their space". It is best to demonstrate on yourself, not to touch the student. This maintains your professionalism and will help avoid the obvious complications.

Step One: Here you are setting from the very start a "frowning" embouchure, the concept of space between the teeth and the all important idea that the flute rests UNDER the lip, as opposed to ON the lip.

Step Two: Notice here we are placing the lip plate, not the hole. Too much concern about where the hole is will only confuse the issue. Don't even mention the hole (a violation of pointer #2 above).

You may have to adjust the student's placement of the flute or air stream, but let the student make the first attempt and first few adjustments. REMEMBER....the student needs to be the one who makes the discovery, you already know what you are doing (hopefully :>)

Step Three: This is doing nothing more than building confidence and consistency.

Step Four: This is building awareness on the part of the student to make exact imitations of the teacher, as well as setting in the articulation, without even mentioning the word.

Start every note with the tongue as you demonstrate. If a student isn't getting it, demonstrate with HUH and TOO: say "do the second one" only if necessary, and continue the imitation sequence. You don't have to tell the student what to do, let them figure it out. REMEMBER, it takes on the average a minimum of seven repetitions to settle in a concept.

Step Five: This is starting to introduce pitch and embouchure changes. Again, DON'T explain it, just get the student doing it. When you do imitations, begin each pattern with the note that you finished the last pattern with.

Step Six: More embouchure changes:

TAW-TOO will aid the student to make enough of a change inside her/his mouth to get into the upper partials. If this isn't enough, have the student bring the end of the flute away for the upper partials.

Step Seven: Here is your chance to fix the breathing if there is a problem. Usually there isn't but if there is...

- 1) Get the posture tall and proper.
- 2) Have the student spread their ribs wide to the sides, while putting as much space between the ears and shoulders as possible.

Without any explanation, this exercise gets the student playing on a long breath. Asking the student to place the pitches of a song with the finger is also a good way to find out what kind of ear the student has.

Step Eight: This step emphasizes curved fingers and the points on the hands which will support the instrument. Start with all fingers DOWN!!

Step Nine: The hands go in front of the body 1) for balance, 2) to prevent torquing the trunk and ribcage. Pushing the right hand forward will make the flute into a lever with the fulcrum at the LH and the points of resistance at the chin and RH thumb/pinky. Now you have a balanced, secured instrument which will not fall when you play C#. Keeping the elbows low also helps a lot. Start with middle D and Eb because these notes hold the flute comfortably, plus they don't over or under blow that easily.

Step Ten: Take the last few minutes of the lesson to emphasize proper care of the instrument.

So in the first lesson the student has learned how to:

- 1) Form the proper embouchure (corners down; space inside the mouth; lip plate well placed.)
- 2) Get a sound consistently.
- 3) Imitate the teacher (or other master).
- 4) Play on different fundamental pitches.
- 5) Play on different partials.
- 6) Properly hold the body (posture)
- 7) Take a proper breath.
- 8) Play on a long air stream.
- 9) Use the ear to place pitches.
- 10) Put the flute together.
- 11) Hold the flute properly (fingers and hand position)
- 12) Care for the flute in a basic way.

These concepts are not yet set. It is your job to take the next months to set these in as the foundations of flute playing. Some will take longer than others (like a lifetime! :>) but now your student is off to a great start!!

end***** Mary Byrne "First flute lesson" document.