

# Using the Mirror for Tone Quality Observation

Helpful Hints for Flutists seeking great tone

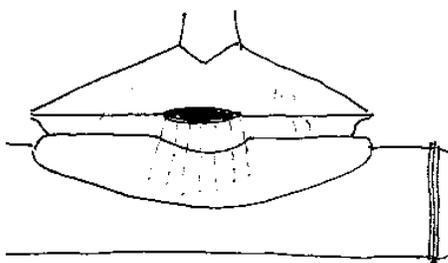
[www.jennifercluff.com](http://www.jennifercluff.com)

Frequently Flute Teachers will ask their students to use a mirror while practicing, not just to check posture, hand position and breathing, but also to very closely observe the embouchure in action. Some students ask: "But what am I looking for?"

The answer is actually quite simple: You're looking to see what the lips look like when you have GREAT tone. Memorize what they look like, so that when your tone is not so great, you'll be able to go to the mirror, and check them.

Optimally, the aperture in your lips should be aiming at the center of the splitting edge. If your lip opening is naturally centered, that would look something like this:

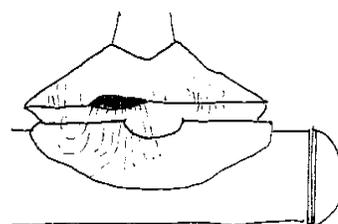
1



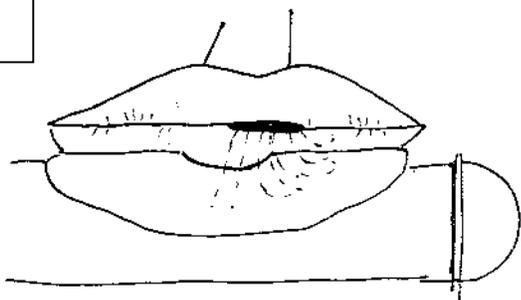
1. **Centered:** Notice how the lip aperture is centered. Notice how it is aiming directly at the splitting edge, without blowing air outside the confines of the blow hole. When you are hearing great tone, go to the mirror and see whether this is basically what you see. (move chin slowly up and down to get a clear view.)

2. **Off-the-mark:** Notice in the picture at right how the lip aperture is off to one side, and not blowing at the centre of the splitting edge. This is often what you'll see in the mirror when your tone sounds fuzzy, or breathy. It's a frequent sight in beginner flutists, but also in intermediates when they become frustrated because they "can't find" their tone. Simply move the lips until they look like they do when the tone is great, and listen to hear if the tone clears.

2



3

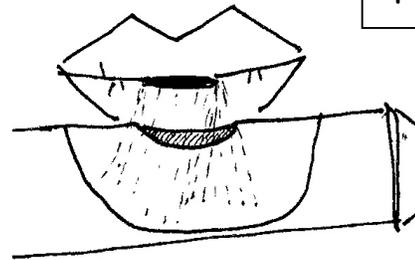


3. **Off-Set Embouchure:** If you naturally have an offset embouchure (ask your teacher), you make the lip aperture wherever you get your best tone. However you still may find that it does not line up with the center of the splitting edge. In this case, you may simply need to move the whole flute under the lip opening in order to center the lip plate under an off-set embouchure.

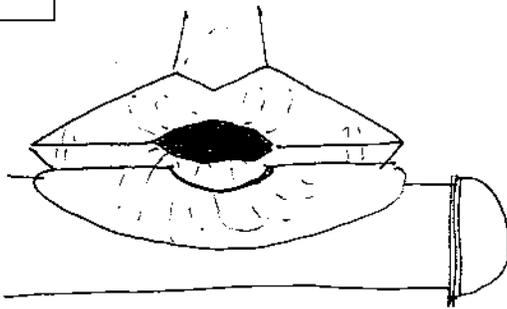
Once you have memorized the look of your lip aperture during your best tone, you will have a good chance of re-creating it in the mirror, and then checking to hear the results. Often moving the lip aperture to the right or left is all that's required.

## Using the Mirror for Tone Quality Observations - pg. 2

**4. Lip opening slightly too wide and diffuse:** If you notice that your tone sounds a little breathy, but is otherwise centred, see whether this picture explains your problem. It's possible that your lip opening is slightly too wide, and there is excess air being wasted on either side of the flute's blow hole. Close down the sides of the lip opening just a tiny amount to make the correction.



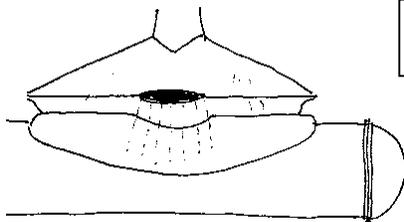
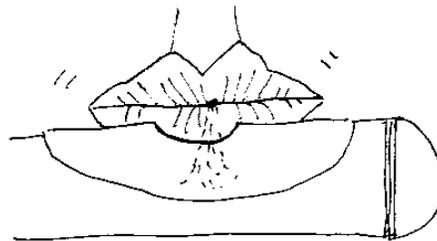
5



**5. Lip opening too large:** This is a common sight in beginner flutists who haven't yet worked on refining their tone. When you hear a very hollow, diffuse and extremely breathy sound, this is likely what you'll see in the mirror. Most teachers would advocate pulling the upper lip down slightly, and aiming the air more downward into the flute. If the lips are too wobbly and uncontrolled it's best to work on low longtones for several weeks in order to build up muscle tone in the lip area.

**6. Lips too tightly drawn:** When the novice or intermediate flutist begins to work on high register tone quality, they may over-contract the lips and create too squeezed a lip aperture. This is what they'll likely see in the mirror. What they'll hear is a hissing sound in the high register, and the occasional "raspberry" when the lips buzz together like a trumpet player. Experiment instead with working with the minimum amount of lip tension necessary to narrow the airstream, bringing the center of the lips forward, closer to the splitting edge.

6



**7. Centered:** Just one more final view of the hypothetical OPTIMAL aperture centeredness. If you see something close to this when your tone is great, all you have to do is re-create it whenever you need to. The mirror and your ears and eyes are all you need.

[www.jennifercluff.com](http://www.jennifercluff.com)

March 2007