Before we begin …

Playing the clarinet is endlessly fascinating.

Some may wish to take the Monty Python approach: *Well, you blow in one end and move your fingers up and down the outside*.[1] Having this book suggests you probably want to delve rather more deeply.

No two players are the same: motor skills, the shape and formation of lips and teeth, tongue, facial muscles, oral cavity, resonating spaces and so much more will vary significantly from one person to another and contribute to every clarinet player's individual and unique voice. Then there is the instrument itself, and the different types of mouthpiece and reed. Playing the clarinet, or any instrument, is not an exact science (or art) and similar approaches will have differing effects for each individual.

> *The purpose of this book is to help you develop your individual clarinet personality, to open doors for thought and to open the way to unlimited progress.*

I have taught some pupils who seem to make a beautiful sound virtually from the first lesson, quite naturally with little instruction. For others, more guidance and experimentation is the way forward.

As such, I encourage you to use this book in the way you find most comfortable and useful, taking into account that all aspects of playing technique are of course interdependent. Whilst books are necessarily linear in construct, learning is not, so you may wish to dart about the book continually cross-referencing ideas and exercises; or you may like to begin at page one and work through systematically. Stop if you feel you have had sufficient input on a particular aspect. And whilst I hope there always *will be* sufficient explanation on all aspects, remember that there is no end to learning and a book can only be a finite number of pages.

From an author's perspective, expressing technical and musical thoughts in words that can be universally understood is often challenging. Much of what we say and think is borne of experience, intuition and imagery, and each of us may have slightly different interpretations of those images. I have occasionally heard two people express the same thing in a seemingly entirely contradictory fashion. Nonetheless, I have done the best I can and additionally have offered scientific and theoretical explanations where this may help understanding. The scientific sections are clearly marked and can be skipped, but I encourage you to persevere. The more broadly informed we are, the more profound our understanding becomes.

For me, playing the clarinet really *is* endlessly fascinating: trying to get the better of its technical conundrums and mastering its wonderfully rich repertoire is a precious journey. Sharing this with you is the *raison d'être* behind this book. But, being a book, this can't take the place of a live teacher. Fine teachers, through their experience, their aural and visual perception and their desire to help, are indispensable.

I had the great pleasure of speaking to one of my clarinet heroes recently. I rang to wish the great Karl Leister a happy birthday. We spoke for a few minutes about the essence of clarinet playing. Is it possible to sum up your thoughts in a sentence, I asked Karl. 'It's all about the line; singing the melodic line,' he answered. That's what we do: we sing and create beauty through our instrument, and in doing so, in each of our own ways, we contribute something special to the world in which we live.

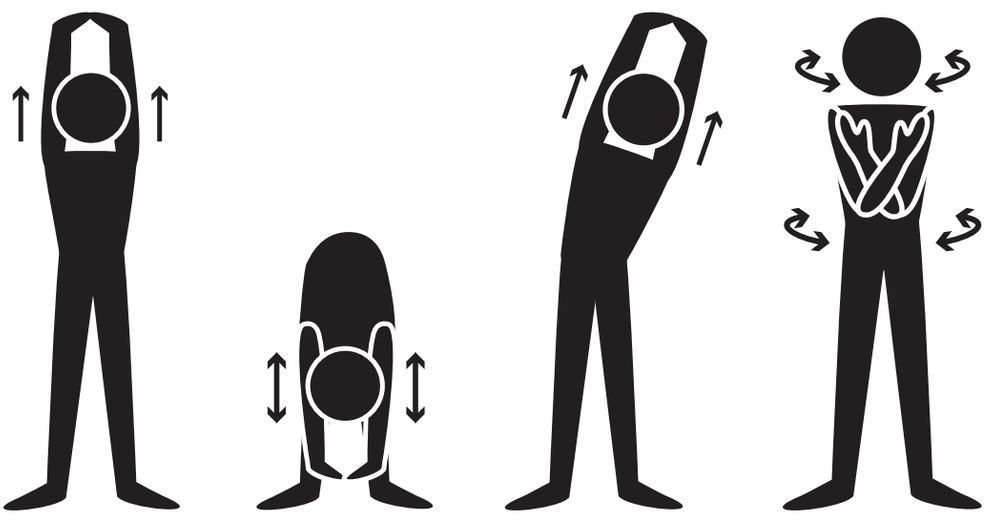
1. This was actually in reference to being asked how to play the flute, but I'm certain the clarinet would have produced a similar answer.

SPINE

Flexion:[4] stand and reach up towards the ceiling with both hands and then fold gently forwards. To return, engage your stomach muscles and uncurl gently to a balanced upright position.

Side flexion: stand and reach up towards the ceiling with both hands. Gently bend to one side and then the other. Return to a balanced standing position.

Rotation: stand and touch opposite hands to opposite shoulders. Keep your knees and hips facing forward while rotating your shoulders left and right. Return to a balanced standing position.



FINGERS

Finger exercises are important to encourage relaxation and blood flow.

With both hands, spread your fingers out as far as you can without straining them, then squeeze them into a fist. Repeat this several times.

Bend your fingers as though you are gripping handlebars, then stretch them out. Repeat several times.

With palms facing upwards, spread your fingers as far as they will comfortably go and then release them to their natural resting point.

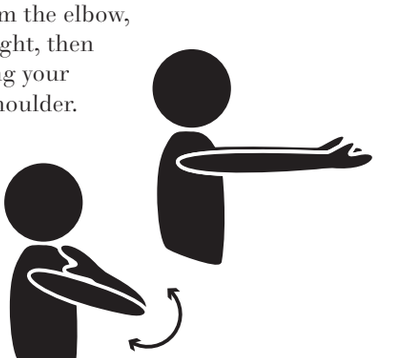
WRISTS

Gently shake out your hands and wrists, as though they are wet.

Hold your hands in front of you and rotate your wrists a number of times, as though you are turning a tap.

ELBOWS

Slowly extend the arms from the elbow, so they are completely straight, then reverse the motion, bringing your hands back towards your shoulder.



4. 'Flexion' is the scientific term to describe the action of bending.

Embouchure

We now arrive at the point at which we, the player, connect with the instrument. The term 'embouchure' has evolved from an eighteenth-century French word *emboucher* meaning 'to put to one's mouth'. The word is used to describe the formation and operation of the lip muscle and other muscles around the mouthpiece.[25] It is the way that we adjust the mouth to make the most efficient fit with the mouthpiece and has a significant effect on the production, character and quality of tone and on fine tuning.

Forming and developing an embouchure

The reed should be positioned on the lower lip at about the point where the reed and mouthpiece begin to separate (the 'breakpoint'). The lower lip is drawn over the bottom teeth, although exactly how far will depend to a great extent on the shape and thickness of each player's lips. Depending on the shape of the lower lip vermillion (see below) some or all of it may slide over the teeth.

Feel where the lower lip connects with the reed. Experiment and feel what is comfortable and works best for you, ensuring the reed is free to vibrate. The chin should be stretched slightly downwards to avoid any flabbiness in the skin under the lower lip.

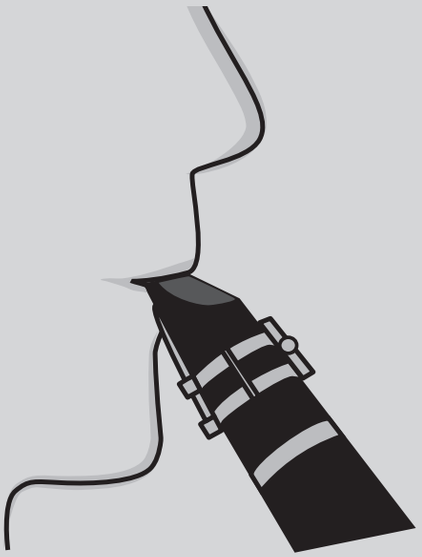
The lower teeth (the jaw) should give support, but always avoid undue tension (see page 37) or biting.[26]

Place the top teeth lightly on the mouthpiece. The upper lip is held firmly and directly on the top of the mouthpiece and it is important to feel both a certain amount of downward pressure and also some pressure backwards (or inwards) onto the upper teeth.

A NOTE ON 'DOUBLE-LIP' EMBOUCHURE

This is where the top lip is drawn under the top teeth in a similar manner to the lower lip over the lower teeth. Double-lip embouchure was probably used exclusively in earlier clarinet playing before the 1820s (where the mouthpiece was generally played with the reed on top[27]) and is the technique employed by double reed players. Interestingly, oboists often doubled on the clarinet when it first appeared in early orchestral music. Many well-known players of the past used double-lip embouchure and it seems, again, to be growing in popularity. Those who use it comment on the increased resonance of the sound, owing to the slight natural change in oral cavity shape and embouchure pressure.

Chin position



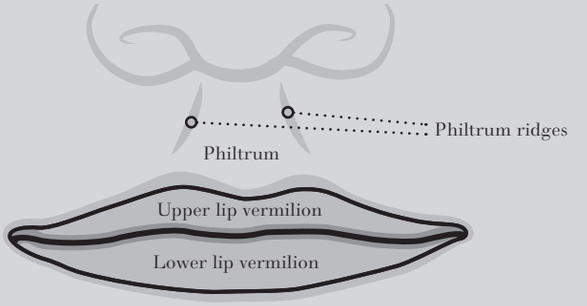
Checklist for determining if you have the right amount of mouthpiece in your mouth

Too much mouthpiece …

- Causes an excessively bright and unstable sound
- Tendency to play louder
- Tendency to play flatter
- Feels less in control

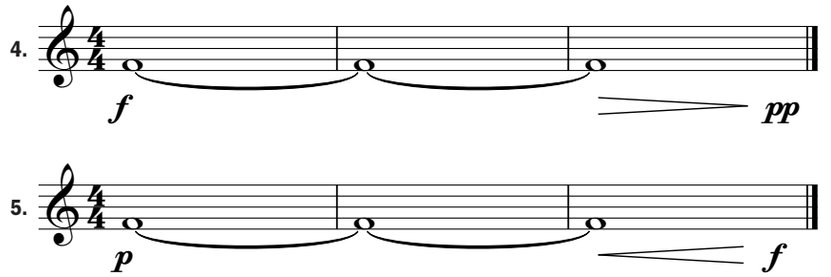
Too little mouthpiece …

- Causes a thin sound
- Limits dynamic range
- Will probably encourage excessive jaw pressure (bite)
- Tendency to play sharper



25. The muscle in and surrounding the lips is called the *orbicularis oris* (from the Latin meaning little circle around the mouth). It is actually a number of connected muscles.
26. 'Biting' is a term often used by many players and teachers, and in this book. It really means using a lot of upward jaw pressure (a *biting* movement) that pushes the reed very firmly onto the mouthpiece limiting its ability to vibrate freely. It can also cause pain (and damage) to the lower lip.
27. Anton Stadler, Mozart's clarinettist, interestingly, played with the reed on the underside of the mouthpiece.

The following two exercises will further highlight the support mechanism:



Listen carefully when playing the next exercises to make sure that your tone does not vary and that the changes in volume are smooth and even.