

What's that Sound: How to Produce your Best Tone

One of the best parts about playing the flute is our ability to produce a beautiful sound. Playing with a good tone can be one of the most rewarding aspects of playing the flute, but it something that takes lots of practice and can be challenging to get to a point where you always play with a beautiful sound. This handout will get you set up with a good foundation to begin your tone work.

The Basics:

What is tone?

Tone is a musical or vocal sound in reference to its pitch, quality, and strength.

How is tone produced?

Tone is produced by placing our bottom lip on the lip plate of the flute, and directing our air with the upper lip to hit the opposite edge of the embouchure hole.

A good embouchure shape is crucial to good tone. I like to play with the corners of my mouth lowered, like I am frowning. This allows me to anchor my lower lip to the lip plate, and for my lower lip to have as much contact with the lip plate as possible. I am then able to direct my air stream with my upper lip, and the rest of my embouchure remains relaxed.

Producing Tone:

It is important that when we blow into the flute that use our upper lip to direct our air stream more down into the flute that above or straight across the tone hole. You can practice this with just your hand in front of your face and trying to hit the top of your hand, middle of your hand, and bottom of your hand with your air while blowing with your flute embouchure.

Key to a Beautiful Tone:

Part of practicing a good tone is knowing what you are listening for and being able to describe what you hear. Some buzzwords that are associated with tone are:

- Color – the quality of the sound, also known as timbre. Different instruments have different tone colors, but also a flute can have different tone colors as well.
- Size – is the sound big or small?
- Projection – Even if the tone is beautiful, am I able to hear it if I stand in the back of a recital hall?
- Intensity – How harsh or light is the tone?
- Vibrato – Is the vibrato adding or hindering to the tone?
- Purity – is the tone airy?



Practicing tone:

The key to a beautiful tone is practice long tones. If you are unsure where to start with your long tone practice, recommend the in low register of the flute. This register of the flute has the ability to be very flexible, and it is easy to experiment with all the tone buzzwords.

Some of my favorite exercises are taken out of the *Trevor Wye Beginner Book Volume 1 Tone*:

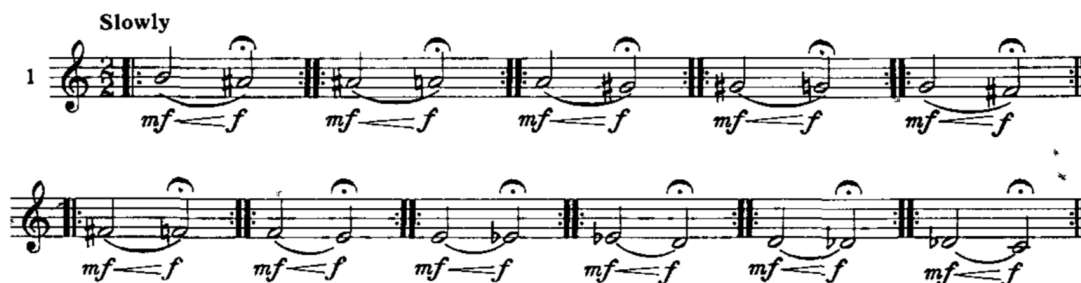
Whether you begin here or on the later exercises depends on your needs and the advice of your teacher. Assuming that you wish to start by putting the roots of your future tone work firmly in the ground, practise the lower register. But first, you must practise B natural, the easiest note on the flute. It's easy because (a) the shorter the tube the easier the notes are to play and (b) both finger and thumb are holding the flute firmly, a security not so readily available for the two notes above B natural. Play this note – B natural – for as long as it takes to play the best, brightest, most beautiful, rich B natural you've ever played in your life. It *may* take 10-15 minutes. Fine! Unless you have a train to catch, you will achieve more by practising this note than by trying to cover pages of exercises.



Don't play a series of short Bs. Play each B natural for as long as your breath lasts.

When you play this B, listen for a *pure* and *full* sound with no airiness in it. Make sure you are playing it with your natural embouchure, and that you are directing the airstream down into the flute. You do not need to play it any louder than *mf*, and try to ensure that the pitch is not wavering sharp or flat. Every time you play this exercise make sure you are highly focused. If you are simply pushing down the keys and blowing without any thought, no progress will be made.

When you are confident in your B, you can move onto the rest of the low register with more long tones. But remember to always begin playing a B as a reference point. The next couple exercise examples are also taken from *Trevor Wye Beginner Book Volume 1 Tone*:



Slowly

2.

3.

4.



All these exercises can be (and should be) transposed into all the registers of the flute.

Things to remember:

- Tone practice can be boring and tedious at times, but stick with it! I recommend spending 10-15 minutes during each practice session on long tones with your absolutely best focus.
- Listening to great flute players will also help you know what a great tone sounds like; Emmanuel Pahud, James Galway, Peter Lukas Graf
 - How would you describe their sound?
 - Try to imitate their sound
- Experiment with different embouchures if you're having trouble getting a sound that you want.
- The only way to improve your tone is through slow focused practice.
- Always play with your best tone possible! There should never be a time when you are simply blowing and pushing down the keys. If you actively play with your best tone anytime you play, your tone will improve!

