COLLEGE OF MUSIC

UNT

SOUND FUNDAMENTALS

Understanding the Building Blocks of Clarinet Tone

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DEVELOPING A CONCEPT

Robert Marcellus
- Focus
- Full

Harold Wright
- Flexibility
- Ease
- Elegant

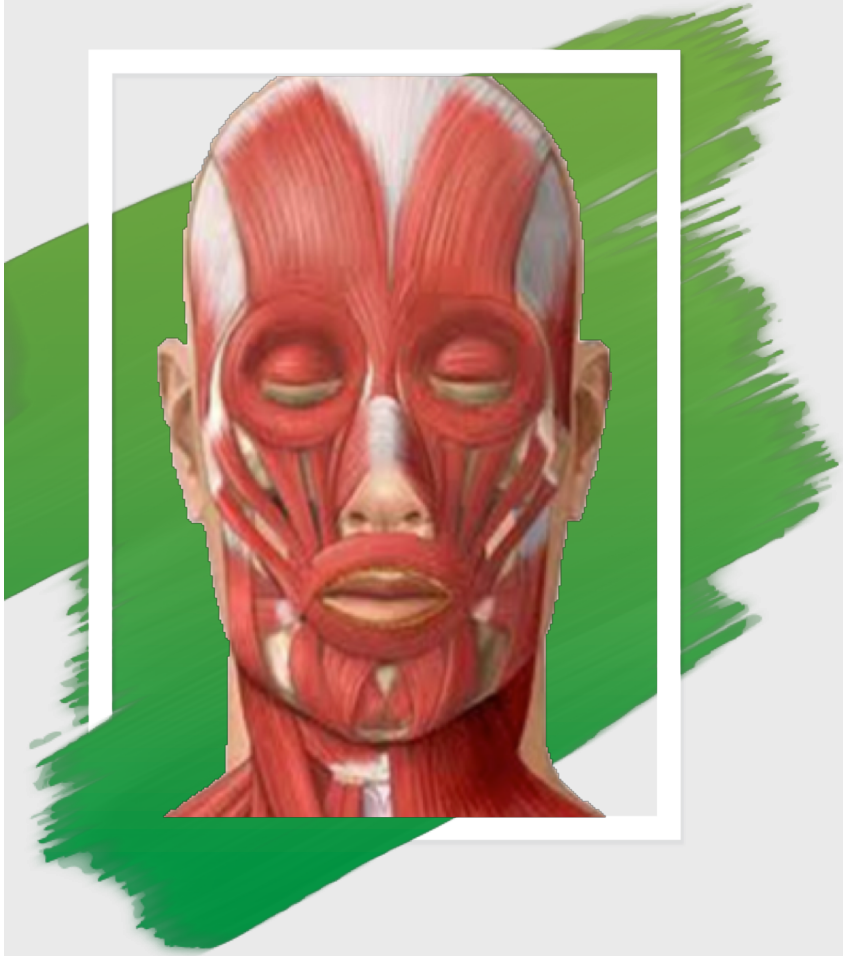
Jon Manassee
- Versatile
- Soloistic
- Fluid

Sabine Meyer
- Homogenous
- Vocal

Anthony McGill
- Cushion
- Consistent

Greg Raden
- Colorful
- Sensitive

FORMING A CLARINET EMBOUCHURE



Embouchure Structure

Developed embouchure facial structure is critical to tonal success

Inherent challenge is natural imbalance of jaw strength to lip strength

A student must understand what muscles are involved and purposefully develop facial musculature

Forming an efficient embouchure: *Students should be able to form their embouchure without clarinet*

1. Separate upper and lower teeth while keeping lips together:

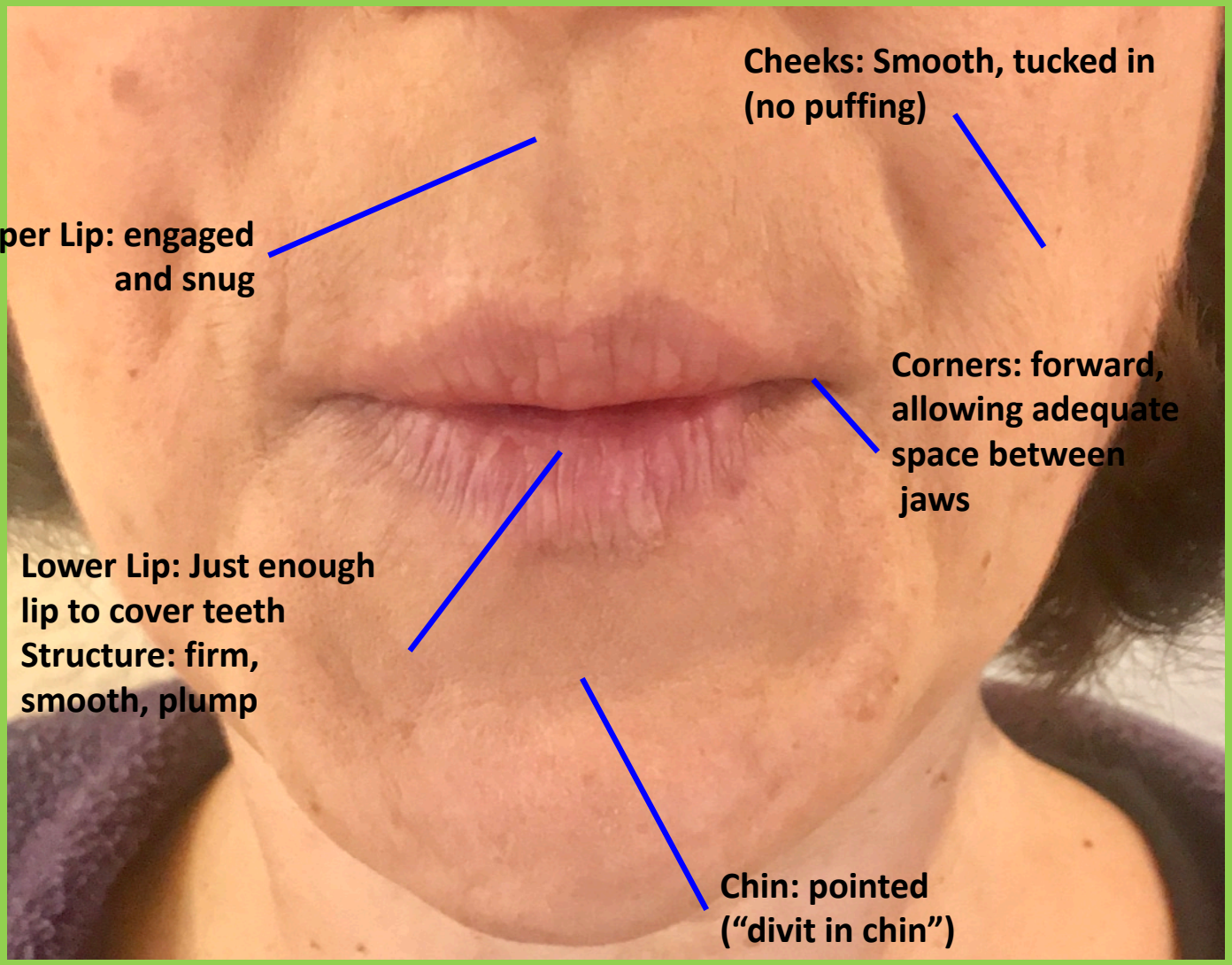
- *Jaw opens naturally with no attempt to pull it back or push it forward.*

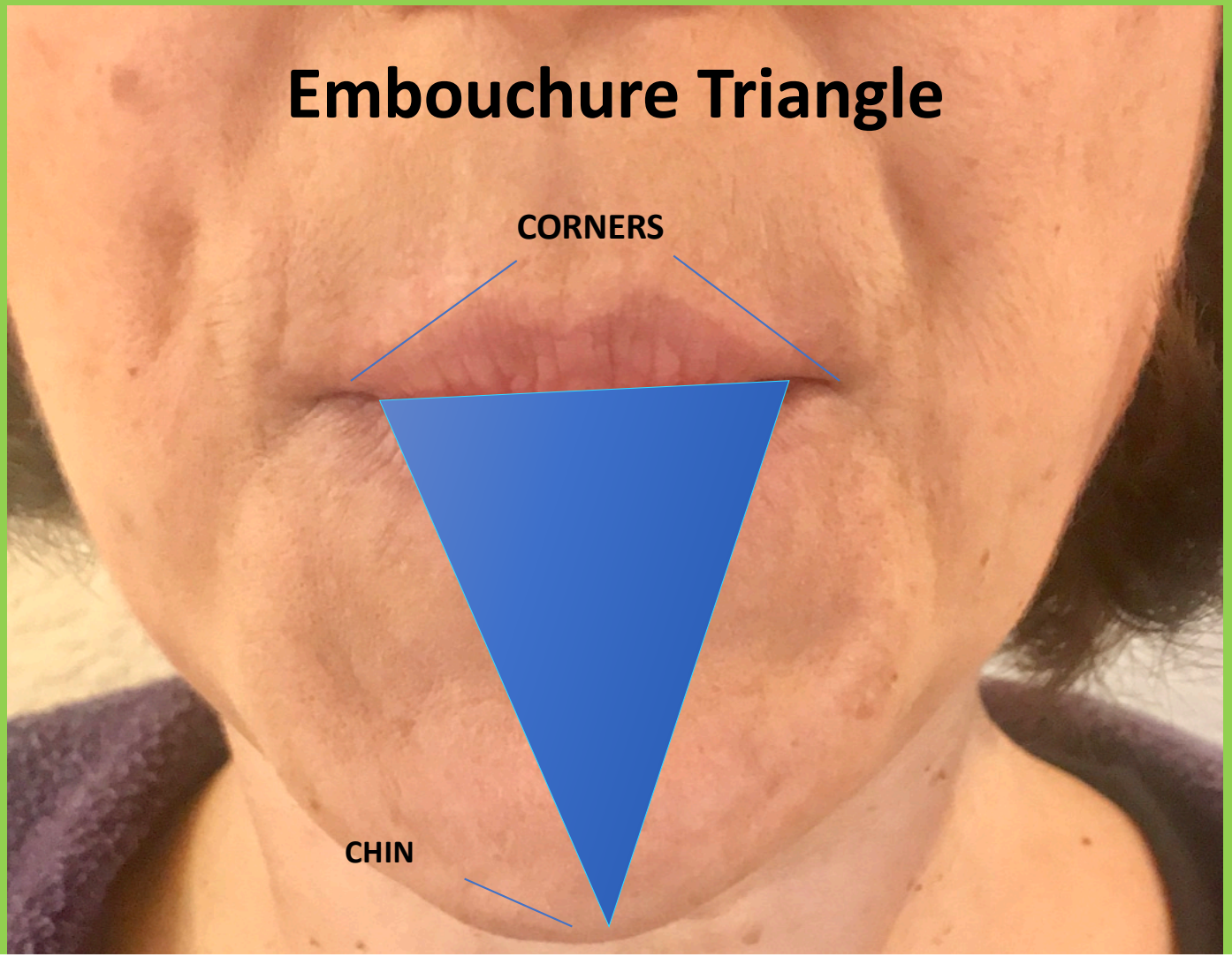
2. Insert index finger between lips with slight pressure against lower lip.

- *Q/soda straw OR Whistle/smile*

Embouchure points of observation

1. **Chin**: pointed (“divit in chin”)
2. **Lower lip**: flesh firm and following structure of lower teeth.
   Just enough lip to cover lower teeth (not really ‘rolled’ in). Structure: firm, smooth, plump.
3. **Corners:** forward, allowing adequate space between jaws
   Embouchure triangle
4. **Cheeks:** smooth, tucked in (no puffing)
5. **Upper lip:** engaged and snug
   Lip push ups
   Nostrils become more prominent when upper lip engaged


Cheeks: Smooth, tucked in (no puffing)
Upper Lip: engaged and snug
Corners: forward, allowing adequate space between jaws
Lower Lip: Just enough lip to cover teeth
Structure: firm, smooth, plump
Chin: pointed ("divit in chin")


Embouchure Triangle
CORNERS
CHIN

Embouchure sprints:

help students to understand and build facial musculature

1) Just facial muscles

2) With straw (or pencil)

FOCUS

Inserting the mouthpiece into the embouchure structure is merely a sequence:

Form embouchure

Open mouth

Click

Set/engage **U**pper lip

Seal lips around mouthpiece

Step 1: FORM

Form the embouchure

Step 2: OPEN

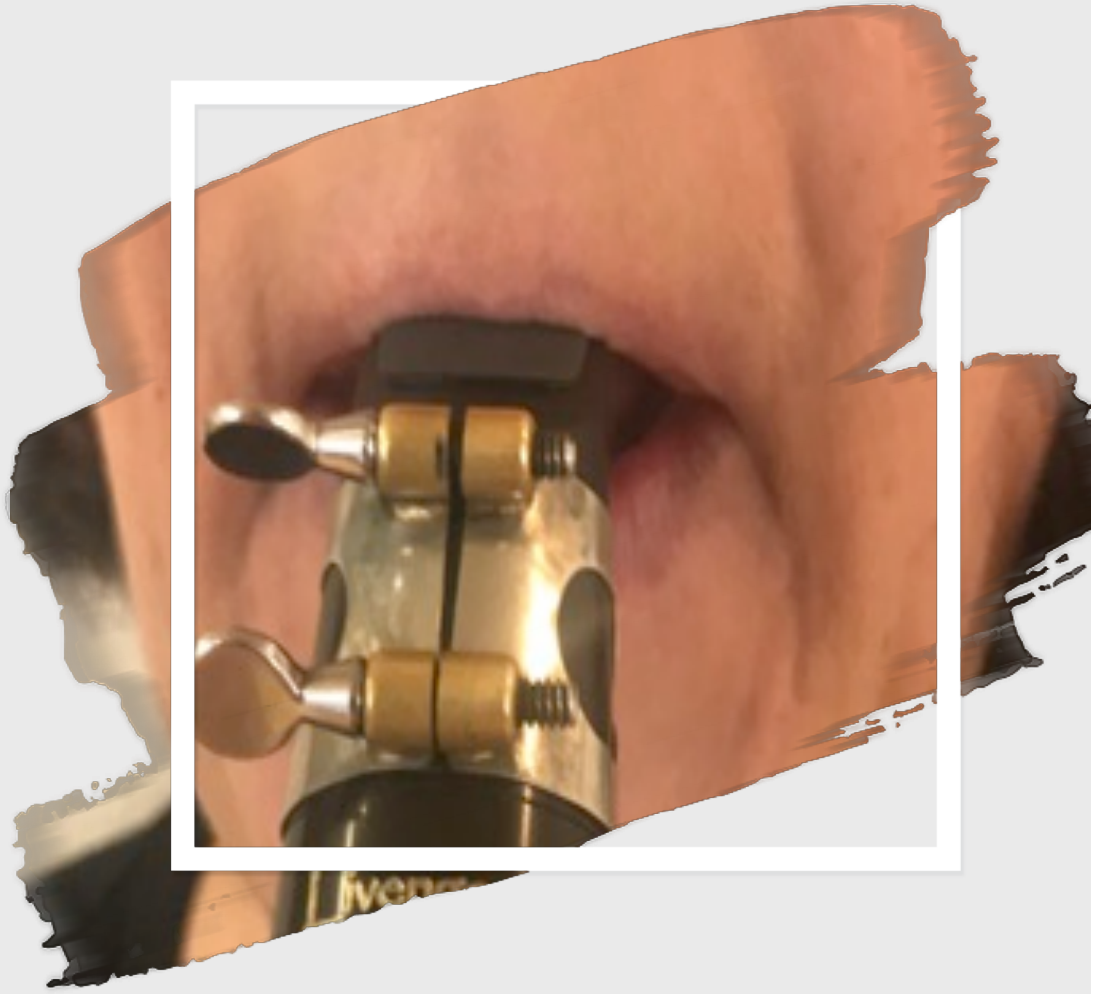
Open the mouth

Step 3: CLICK

Click mouthpiece against the top teeth

Step 4: UPPER LIP

Engage/Set the Upper Lip



Step 5: SEAL

Seal the lips around the mouthpiece.

Practice the FOCUS sequence to make it habitual

- Attention to lack of visible/perceived change in structure!
- Pressure around mouthpiece remains constant all the time.

1. **Mouthpiece/barrel only (no air, no blowing)**

1. **Mouthpiece/barrel only (blow but air only, no sound.**
   Embouchure should be set before blowing. (Bottom lip is often 'flabby', loose or unengaged.)

2. **Mouthpiece/barrel with sound: can you feel vibration of reed against lower lip**

1. **Entire clarinet. Best to start with least resistant notes such as "open G".**

BITING

Simply put, biting occurs when the jaw is allowed to close, which inhibits the vibrations of the reed.

Don’t fool yourself though, the clarinet embouchure is, in fact, a controlled bite. Everyone bites to some degree when they play the clarinet. We all just have to minimize the upward pressure on the reed to maximize the vibrations.

Exercise: Staying Open

Your jaw is powerful and you must always be aware of how strong it is while playing. To demonstrate this, form an embouchure without the clarinet in your mouth; then use your hand to gently push your bottom jaw closed, but resist. Careful not to get tense while you hold the jaw open!

The Right Hand Thumb Stabilizes the Mouthpiece Against the Top Teeth

The right hand thumb lightly presses the mouthpiece up into the top teeth while playing. This helps to anchor the clarinet, which prevents the desire to close the jaw to stabilize the instrument.

Exercise: Balancing Act

Demonstrate the correct upward direction by holding the clarinet using **only** the **right hand thumb** and the **top teeth**. Find the upward direction that allows it to sit comfortably.

The desire to ‘clamp down’ to stabilize the clarinet mouthpiece is biting!

Alignment of the top and bottom teeth

The alignment of the teeth on the mouthpiece can also help reduce the upward pressure against the reed. Try to keep the top and bottom teeth more or less parallel, but know the problem will be when the bottom teeth get behind the top teeth significantly.

Please don’t let your students play like this!

Notice that when the head falls forward the bottom teeth fall behind the top teeth.

Try to ***sit tall*** so that the top and bottom teeth are more or less lined up. (Note: This still holds true with an overbite or underbite.)

Practicing Playing with a Double Lip Embouchure

Practicing with a double lip embouchure can help students feel the upward pressure of the jaw against the reed. If you bite while playing double lip it will *hurt*!

Don’t overthink the double lip embouchure. Just have students roll the smallest amount of the top lip over the top teeth and play. It is remarkably easy to form a double lip embouchure, but it will not work for marching band so it is probably not a solution for most.

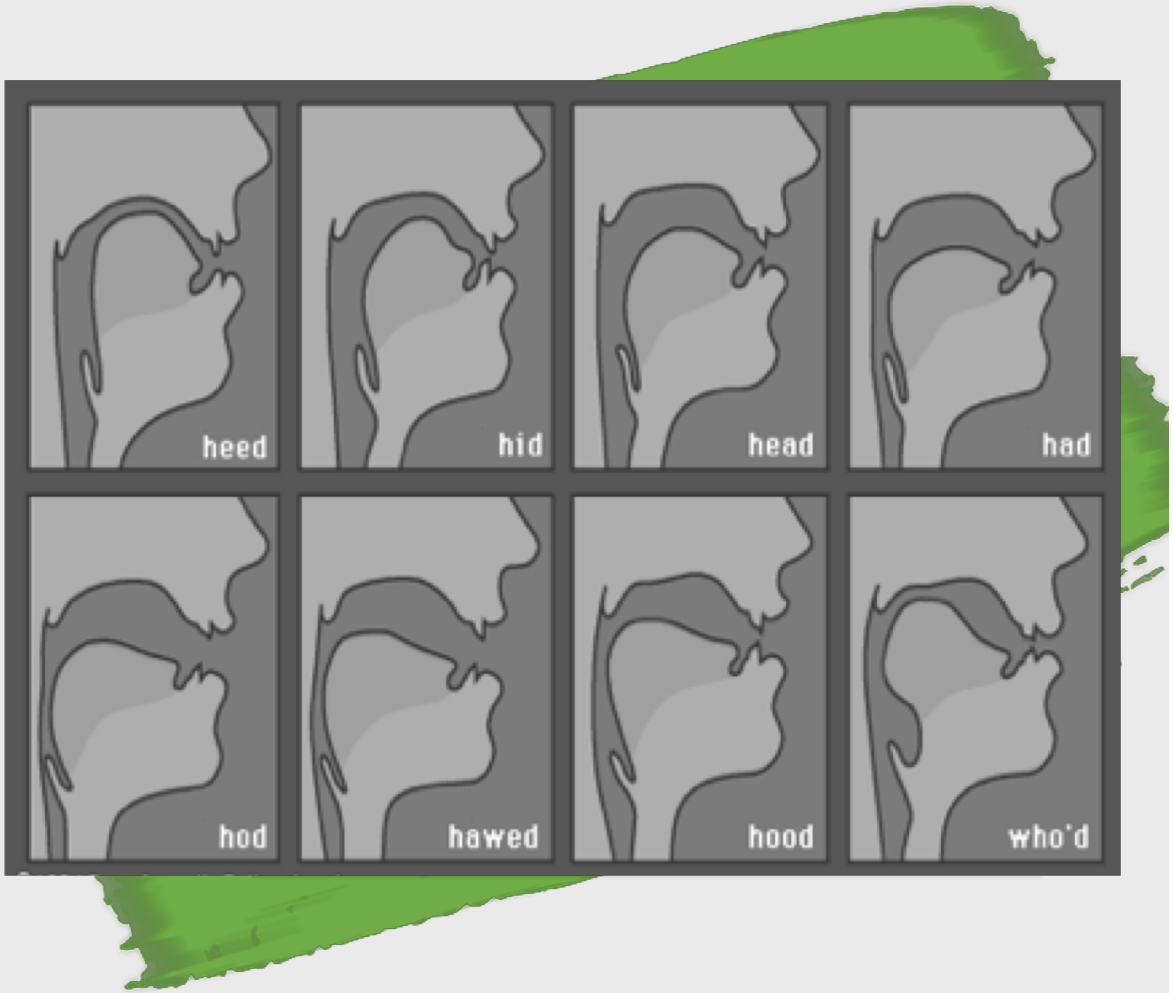
VOICING

The often neglected importance of the tongue in shaping the clarinet tone and pitch.

The tongue plays an extremely important role in tonal production and tuning by controlling the air flow, speed, and direction of the breath to create a colorful, warm, resonant sound.

So many choices!

We have numerous choices using both embouchure and tongue position.



Why is the sound better when slurring?

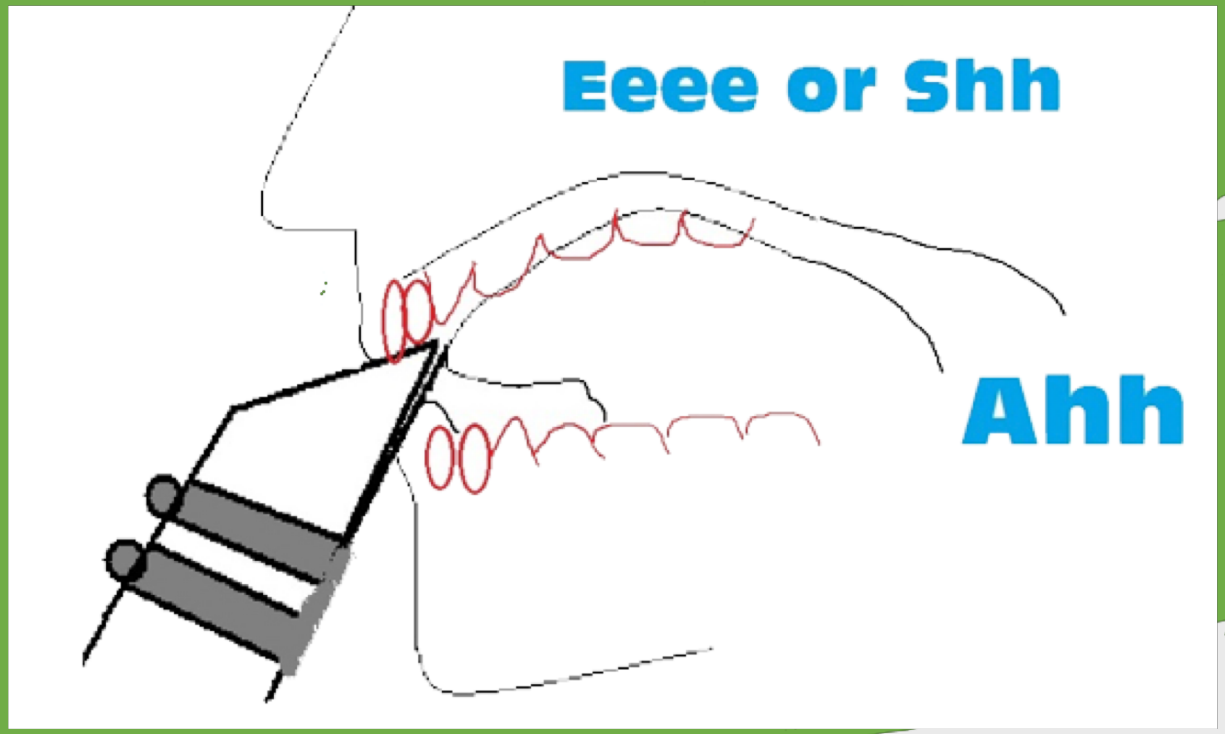
- Articulate and slur with the same tongue position for proper voicing.

Techniques to find the correct tongue position

Make it a priority to develop good Tonal Concepts

Use language to demonstrate correct Tongue Position

Use mouthpiece to demonstrate voicing.


Eeee or Shh
Ahh


“
if there’s no wind the kite don’t fly
John Scott

BUILDING A SECURE AIR COLUMN

Inhale

Breathe through the bell (or barrel) for relaxed open throat – feel the wind go deep

Support

Use the swab in the bell to ensure the core stays engaged.

Exhale

Use a soda straw to teach compression of air

THAT IS TO SAY…

- The overarching goal is to have a constant air column that is unflinching in the face of the natural resistance changes of the instrument.
- All music should be like a long tone in motion, that is to say one note that changes pitch.

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