

Choosing a Ligature and Mouthpiece

The mouthpiece is your most important piece of clarinet equipment in producing your tone. Because there are so many on the market it's best if you can go to a store that stocks many but if you can't most mail order stores will allow you to try several on a trial bases. I suggest you begin with at least 3-4 different facings or brands you may be interested in from either taking your teachers recommendation, having tried some friends or heard about. It's a process of elimination so begin with even more if you can. That's why I always stock a variety of brands and facings for my students to try. Once you find the brand and facing you like best order 3-4 of them and choose the best one. Every mouthpiece is slightly different no matter who makes it. They're made of hard rubber or different compounds of various materials. The student models are usually made of plastic.

The tip opening is the most popular number that people think about in what makes one mouthpiece different for another but there are many other measurements to consider. The baffle, the lay, the bore, the rails and the materials all make a difference in the tone production and intonation.

When you try them do so with two or three different reeds because some will play better for you with a slightly harder or softer reed. A mouthpiece may have a good sound but may need a different strength reed to feel right. First look for tone quality, then consider comfort, articulation and intonation. Make sure the mouthpiece plays well in tune so check it with a tuner. For the final test play the ones you like for a teacher or someone else you respect. Remember though, it's you that has to be most satisfied and you

shouldn't have to sacrifice tone quality for anything, find a mouthpiece that has it all.

Ligatures:

Ligatures are made from a variety of different materials, metal, string, leather, and synthetics. They also come in different styles and shapes so you have to find the right one for you. Every ligature will react slightly differently for you.

Once you've chosen the mouthpiece it's time to choose a ligature. The ligature can have an effect on how the reed reacts, vibrates and sounds on your mouthpiece. Some ligatures add or detract something to the sound. Some will dampen out some high frequencies while others may make them more prominent. What you should look for is a ligature that takes out the elements you don't like and adds the things you do like. You may want more or less high frequencies in your tone and you may want the reed to vibrate freer or have more resistance when you play. You may be looking for one that makes your tone a bit darker or brighter and you may want one that allows you to articulate easier or help you get more focus in your sound. Different ligatures will affect the reed in different ways so you need to try several types and styles to find the right fit. What's good for one person may not be the right fit for someone else. That goes for any piece of equipment.