



Oboe Maintenance

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There are many factors that go into maintaining your oboe. The following list of maintenance items are some of the standard things that should be done and NOT done to your oboe. There are many other things that could be listed here, but to remain on the outer boundaries of chaos I am only listing the basics. Trying to learn all of this as a young oboist can be very overwhelming, so please remember if you are unsure of a maintenance issue ask someone's advise before trying to save the world!

- While assembling and disassembling your oboe, **do not** place your hands around the keys squeezing them while you shove the joints together. Doing this can bend keys and mechanisms as well as make deeper tone hole impressions in the pads which lead to leaking pads.
- Temperature- Keep your oboe out of the extreme heat and cold. Your oboe should be room temperature when you attempt to play it. This is especially important in the winter time. When it is cold out and you are traveling with your oboe, make sure you warm up your oboe from the outside to the inside. This means place it under your arm; hold it in your hands, etc. **DO NOT** blow through your oboe to warm it up. Only blow into your oboe by playing it after it has warmed up to room temperature.
- It is critical that the upper joint be warmed up all the way through the wood. Doing this will warm up the metal octave pips and drastically reduce the chance of moisture forming in the octave keys. There is no true way to avoid getting moisture stuck in your tone holes, but this step will help.
- If your oboe is not being played, it should be in its case. Never leave your oboe sitting in a chair during a break, or set it on a music stand. Either take it with you or **put it in its case**. If you do need to lay your oboe down, lay it on a sturdy surface like a table where it will not be sat on or crushed in any way. When you do lay your oboe down, place it in a way so it does not rest on its low Bb lever. This lever is extremely flimsy and can be easily bent out of adjustment.

- Only you and your private teacher should handle and play your oboe. Letting your friend play your oboe could lead you straight to the repair shop.

- After playing your oboe, it must be swabbed or feathered out. This must be done on plastic and wood oboes to prevent spit build up and any smells that form from old spit. Wooden oboes must be swabbed or feathered to stay clean, but also to help prevent cracking. You also need to make sure there is no moisture stuck in any tone holes. Any moisture that is held in a tone hole for long periods of time will cause the wood to expand and possibly crack. To help remove the moisture build up in any tone hole, place cigarette paper between the pad and tone hole and the water/spit will soak the cigarette paper. Repeat until the cigarette paper remains dry. Another technique that I feel will help remove left over moisture from the trill tone holes is to prop the trill keys open while the oboe is not in use. This will allow the moisture in the trill tone holes to fall out or evaporate, thus one more step towards crack prevention.

- When you have water build up in your tone holes, DO NOT blow the water back into the tone holes. Either use the technique listed above with the cigarette paper, or suck the water out. Blowing the water forces it back into the bore which is what we are trying to avoid.

- If you use a swab versus the feather, only use silk swabs. Cotton swabs produce too much lint, which collects in the tone holes as you pull it through, which in turn attracts water and dust. It is also preferable to use a silk swab with a string on both ends. Using this type of silk swab will allow you to easily remove the swab if it were to get stuck in the oboe.

- For wooden oboes, it may be necessary to place some type of humidifier in the oboe case during the winter months. The heat from heaters in the winter time causes the humidity level to drop, which is not good for your oboe over a long period of time. Personally I keep a humidifier in my case year round just to make sure my oboe is in a stable environment while it is not being played.

- Oiling the mechanism of your oboe is needed a couple times a year, but please have someone do it with the correct oiler. The key oil dispensers that are readily available at your local music store are no good because they dispense too much oil at one time. The best thing to use is a needle oiler which will apply the oil exactly where it is needed.

- Eating and drinking- If you must eat or drink something sugary before you play your oboe, please at least wash out your mouth. The best thing to do is carry an extra toothbrush and toothpaste in your oboe bag so you can brush your teeth before playing. Following this step will help prolong the life of your oboe, its pads, mechanism, and your teeth!

- Turning Screws- You should only turn the screws on your oboe if you have truly learned how to adjust it. If you feel there is an adjustment that needs to be done, do it in the company of your private teacher or someone else that has the needed experience.

- You should take your oboe to a reputable oboe repairman at least once a year. Even if you feel your oboe is in good playing condition, there is always something small that can be repaired. Fixing several small problems is much quicker and cheaper than fixing one large problem, in general. **Preventative maintenance is the key to a long happy life with your oboe!**

Other Helpful tips:

- If your oboe ever cracks do not play it any longer. Place the oboe in its case with an orange peel to help prevent the crack from spreading. Call your favorite oboe repair person right away for further instruction.
- To help prolong the life of your tenon corks, use a non-petroleum based cork grease. Look for synthetic cork grease or my favorite, mink oil. Mink oil is found anywhere shoe care products are sold.
- If a tenon cork falls off or is loose, you can temporarily tighten up that joint by wrapping teflon tape around the cork area. Teflon tape only sticks to itself, is very thin, and easy to apply and remove. Do not use duct tape, electrical tape or any other sticky material.