

with a Q-tip; carefully push down the key and swipe with the Q-tip - don't roughly move the Q-tip around or you will damage the key. Stubborn spots should still be approached gently, but to help, dampen (not soak!) the Q-tip slightly in rubbing alcohol. Use only rubbing alcohol, not water or other forms of alcohol, including aftershave, as they will damage the keypads.

Chances are that within the first year of having your clarinet, you may need to take it in to be serviced and or repaired. Some minor problems may be easily fixable on your own though, and it may not be worth taking your clarinet in to a professional. There are also some ways here to prevent these kind of problems in the first place.

Preventative maintenance

Regular Cleaning

Keep your clarinet clean! A dirty clarinet is not a happy clarinet. Moisture buildup on the inside of your clarinet can cause damage to pads which will have to be replaced, and corrosion of the inside, causing your sound not to be as full. After every playing session, be sure to dry the inside of your clarinet and wipe any fingerprints off of the keys. If it starts getting corroded (a black buildup on the keys), send it in to a professional cleaner right away.

Proper Treatment

Often people leave their clarinets sitting on a stand or a chair, just waiting to be knocked down and damaged. If you have to leave your instrument for any length of time, make sure it is in a safe place! Put it somewhere where it's not going to get knocked down, or better yet, put it away. Just memorize the position in which your mouthpiece and barrel were and then you'll be able to keep your tuning the same as it was before. Never keep your clarinet in extreme temperatures or conditions for any length of time, and if it's an expensive one, keep it supervised at all times!

While putting it together, be sure not to grasp it and twist. A lot of people put their clarinets together by twisting the key system; THIS DOES EXTREME DAMAGE TO YOUR CLARINET OVER TIME. If you put your clarinet together this way, expect to be taking it into a repair shop often, costing needless inconvenience and cost.

Take it in for a Regular Check-up and Overhaul

It is a really good idea to take your clarinet in to an instrument technician, even if there's nothing wrong with it, maybe twice every year (once a year is okay but twice is better). This allows the technician to check out your clarinet, fix any alignment problems, clean it, and make it perform to its best. Don't let your clarinet go without a check-up for more than a year, it is very important to keep it in working condition and it avoids having problems when you least need them.

Always remember, to prevent damage in the first place, keep your instrument clean, safe, and in good health.

Clarinet Care and maintenance

Your clarinet should provide you with years of enjoyment, but only if you look after it and provide a minimum of care and maintenance. Here are some useful tips for beginners on how to use and look after your new clarinet.

Putting it together

Number one - do not open your clarinet case upside down! It's usually quite easy to figure out which way the case opens. If it has the traditional latch system, make sure the latches are flipping up upwards.

There are five parts to your clarinet: the mouthpiece, the barrel, two body joints, and the bell.

Start by putting Cork Grease on all the cork joints including your mouthpiece cork. Spread it around with your fingers so that you cover the whole cork surface with grease. You should not put grease on the corks every time you play. You only apply grease to the joints when the instrument is hard to put together. If the instrument is still hard to put together with grease then the corks need to be sanded down at a repair shop. This is not a big job. A repair tech can do it for you for just a few dollars while you wait. Clarinet joints should not be too loose either.

Remember that it's much better to have a tight clarinet when it's new because the corks will compress anyway as you use the instrument. If the corks are too loose when new, then your instrument may wiggle or fall apart in a few months. If your cork joints are too loose, you will need have new corks installed.

To assemble your clarinet, first pick up the Lower Joint. This is the biggest piece in the case. Always pick up the parts at the edge, not by the keys. Remember you don't want to bend any keys. After picking it up turn the Upper Joint around if you have to so that the two large keys and the key cluster faces you. Put the palm of your hand directly over these two big keys so that the keys are pressed down by the fleshy part of your palm just below the thumb. As long as you are pressing straight down on the keys you will not hurt them regardless of how hard you press. The most important thing to remember is to have your thumb up on top of the keys and never around the bottom of the clarinet. Do not grab it as you would a baseball bat. If your thumb is on top you will not be able to bend any of the keys. If your thumb is wrapped around the clarinet, your hand will slip and you will bend the keys sooner or later. Incidentally, that key right below your thumb is the most frequent one to be bent on a clarinet. If

you bend this key you will not be able to play the lower notes. If your thumb is on top, even if your hand slips, you will not be able to bend any keys.

While holding the Lower Joint extend both of your index fingers and pick up the Upper Joint the same way as you picked up the Lower Joint. Wrap your left fingers on the Upper Joint around the Larger Ring Key. Take a close look. If you depress the large ring key on the Upper Joint, the bridge key will lift. This is because the larger ring key and the bridge key are actually the same key. This Upper Joint Ring Key must be depressed in order to raise the Bridge Key.

Now you have both of your hands in the correct position, so you are ready to assemble the Upper and Lower Joints. The Upper Joint ring key has been lifted, so the Lower Joint bridge key will just slide underneath it without hitting it. Now place the Upper and Lower Joints together by both pushing and twisting a bit back and forth. Your hands will move in opposite directions as you twist. Start by placing the two pieces together with the Lower Joint Bridge Key being away from you. Always push and twist back and forth as you assemble the two joints. Do not attempt to screw them together and do not make large movements because the key clusters on both joints will run into each other and then they will get bent and misaligned.

Next, you put on the Bell. You do this by holding the clarinet in your LEFT hand and you put the Bell on with your Right hand. Your thumb can wrap around the instrument because this part of the instrument (the Lower Joint) will not move. You will just hold it stationary while your right hand twists the Bell into position. Your Right Hand holding the Bell will move as you wiggle the Bell on the Lower Joint.

Next you put on the Barrel. First hold the instrument in your left hand in the exact same position that you had when assembling the Upper and Lower joints.

Make sure you push the Barrel all the way down. This is how you tune a clarinet by pulling the Barrel out a bit if you are too sharp. If you are a beginner, you shouldn't worry about this. You have more important things to consider like playing good, strong, clean notes, regardless of your tuning.

Now with the Barrel assembled you must put on the Mouthpiece. First turn the clarinet so that the Register Key faces you directly. You must do this so that the alignment of the Mouthpiece will be correct. Hold the clarinet so that you are holding both the Upper Joint and the Barrel at the same time. If you do not do this, the Barrel may turn when you are trying to install the Mouthpiece. Slip on the mouthpiece the same way you did the other parts. Remember hold the clarinet in your LEFT Hand and the Mouthpiece in your RIGHT Hand. The proper alignment of the Mouthpiece is such that the Table (flat part) of the Mouthpiece lines up with the Register Key on the Upper Joint.

Putting the Reed On

Moisten the reed in your mouth for a minute. Place the Reed on the flat part of the Mouthpiece. Center it and hold it in position with your thumb. Slip on the Ligature being careful not to hit the reed because you will crack it. Next, center the Ligature over the reed making sure that the Ligature is quite low on the Reed and over the unshaved part of the Reed. Tighten the screws nice and tight and you are ready to play.

Making a Sound

After putting your clarinet together its time to try and play. Cover your bottom teeth lightly with your lower lip, put the reed on top of your lower lip and then put your top teeth firmly (but don't bite!) on the mouthpiece. Finally close your mouth and smile. Practice blowing softly then harder until you get a sound. For best results, have some lessons or buy a Clarinet Method book to learn from.

Keys and your Fingers

It may look like there's a lot of keys and there's no way that you can possibly play all of those with only ten fingers but some of these keys are never even touched at all and move with other keys. Refer to your teacher, a method book or fingering chart on which keys to press to play the notes.

What to Play

Now that you now how to put your clarinet together, how to make a sound, and where to put your fingers, try playing a few notes. Stick to things in the middle range (don't attempt really high or really low notes at first). Get a

fingering chart and try playing a C (not the first C on the chart but the second one on the third space of the staff). Now try all of the other notes from an A below to an Eflat above.

Now that you have a few notes you need some music.

Now that you know the basics of clarinet playing you can gradually improve your skills. If you have not already done so, check with someone who knows how to play the clarinet to make sure that you're doing everything properly and that you haven't developed any bad habits. Even if you can't afford lessons full time, maybe try going to just a few when you're starting out to set you on the right track, or get your music teacher to help you.

Cleaning and care of your clarinet

Items you should will need:

Large, soft square cleaning cloth

Cork Grease

Cigarette papers (Tally Ho)

Cleaning the inside of the clarinet

As you play, your clarinet collects moisture from your mouth throughout the inside tube of the clarinet. If you do not clean this moisture out after each playing session, it can accumulate in your keypads and cause air leaks. To clean the inside of your clarinet, take the weighted cleaning cloth and drop it down through the top of the instrument (with the mouthpiece off) and pull it through gently. Better yet leave your clarinet to air dry if you can, but never put a damp clarinet into a closed case as it won't be able to dry and will damage the instrument.

Cleaning the outside of the clarinet

WARNING: NEVER (ever!) USE SILVER POLISHES ON YOUR INSTRUMENT In fact, it's wisest to leave any major cleaning to a professional. Silver polishes, even polishes that claim to be safe on silver instruments, are not meant for the keys. Not only do polishes strip precious silver from the surface of your instrument, but they ruin your keypads and can badly damage the metal of your key system. The entire clarinet can be seriously damaged in this way.

While tarnish can be pesky, especially between keys, resist the urge to try and remove it on your own. By putting pressure on and between the keys while you clean, you may accidentally change key alignment, causing air leaks when you play. Instead, try to prevent it by gently wiping down your clarinet with a soft cloth and never playing just after eating. A clean mouth (rinse with water even after brushing to keep toothpaste residue out of the clarinet) will prevent food particles from building up in keys. Good care and precaution with your clarinet will keep professional cleaning bills low.

Sticky Keypads

If you have pads that stick as you play, take a sheet of cigarette paper and place it beneath the sticky key. Gently push the key down, but with a little more pressure than when you play the keys. The idea is to wick the moisture out of the pad with the paper. Repeat as necessary, but be careful not to push down too hard or your pad may be worn or torn. Prevent sticking keys by always rinsing your mouth with water before playing.

Tenons and holes

Don't forget to wipe the tenons (the places where your clarinet joints fit together) of your clarinet regularly. They accumulate grease and dirt particles, which make it difficult to connect the joints of your clarinet. Never force the joints of the clarinet together, if it is difficult to join put some cork grease on the corks and this should help.

Remember to clean the holes of your keys. Particles can build up in these places and can easily be cleaned