REEDS!!!

SOME WORDS OF WISDOM:

When the reed comes out of the box, it is not ready for regular use. No matter how good your reed is, it will not last forever. In fact, it only has a useful life of 10-20 hours of playing time.

Do not look for a good reed when you need one. Look for a good reed before you need one.

You are at the mercy of the cane—bad cane means unreliable reeds.

REED SELECTION

Good reeds will possess several important characteristics:

1. Fibers running straight up and down
2. Fibers fairly evenly spaced, especially those that run through the tip of the reed
3. Butt end of reed is the same thickness on both sides
4. When held up to the light, the reed's tip appears evenly thin all the way across; the thin part tapers down the sides; the center, or “heart,” is thicker

Some poor characteristics:

1. A greenish/yellowish tinge
2. Crooked fibers
3. Cut thicker on one side than the other
4. Thick fibers on one side of the tip which are not balanced by approximately equal fibers on the other side

WHY DO WE NEED TO "BREAK-IN" OUR REEDS?

"The reason that players 'break-in' reeds before using them for performance is that fresh cane, more susceptible to moisture absorption, tends to swell quickly and change shape. The newer the cane, the more acute the problem. As reeds become older, a kind of "patina" develops on the outer surfaces and the reed becomes more stable. As this continues, the reed also loses some of its ability to vibrate properly, resulting, ultimately in a brittle, undesirable tone. A reed is ready for performance, therefore, when the profile is at the right shape and thickness and the cane in relatively stable condition as far as warping is concerned, yet at a point where it still has not completely lost its resiliency. Generally, depending on the density of the cane employed, this begins to happen on the fifth or sixth day, and it usually takes seven days for the reed to become fully "broken in".... The matter of exactly when a reed is ready for performance can vary from reed to reed. Harder cane requires less break-in time, but, at the extreme, harder cane produces a harsher tone. Some soft cane is so soft that it never becomes stable. A reed that has been carefully broken-in can last quite a long time—up to 30 or more services, depending upon its length and thickness, before it loses its fullest potential for tone. However, once it has lost its ability to “snap back” to its original straight position little can be done in the way of restoration."

REED "BREAK-IN" PROCESS

1. Fill a mug or small glass with warm water (a size that doesn’t allow the reed to float on the top of the water) and dunk the reeds, tip end down. Leave them in the water for about one minute. Next, play the reed for 2-3 minutes maximum. When finished, remove the excess moisture from the reed with a "rubdown" by squeezing it between the thumb and forefinger and pulling it lengthwise from the shoulder down past the tip. Repeat as many times as necessary until the reed begins to feel dry to the touch. Store the dried reed in a reed holder. Repeat this process with all of the reeds you are conditioning. It is good to do 4 at a time since most reed holders have space for four.

2. Repeat step #1 once a day for at least 10 days. Each day you can add one minute of playing time. Be sure to avoid playing the reed to the "waterlogged" stage (where the reed looks really soaked just below the tip). By the tenth day you should feel that the reeds have stabilized (they will begin to play nearly the same every time). You will also notice that the color of the reed changes from its initial yellowish color to whitish.

REED STORAGE

1. When a reed has warped, it will not be able to completely seal onto the mouthpiece facing, resulting in problems with response, control, and squeaking. Warpage will occur when the reed dries unevenly (do not confuse warpage with a "wavy" tip that will flatten after it is soaked in warm water). Your goal is to store reeds in a holder that allows them to dry slowly and evenly. I recommend the Vito and Vandoren holders that have grooves that allow air circulation around the reed.

BRANDS

There are many brands and styles of reeds from which to choose. Below are some choices that seem to work for many student and professional clarinetists and saxophonists. Visit their websites for more information (including strength comparison charts).

1. **Vandoren** [http://www.vandoren.com](http://www.vandoren.com)
   The most popular reeds. For clarinet there are 3 styles: Traditional, V12, and 56 Rue Lepic. For saxophone there are 5 styles: Traditional, Java, V12, V16, and ZZ.

   There are many professional-quality reeds now available from Rico. For clarinet there are 5 styles: Grand Concert Select Traditional, GCS Thick Blank, GCS Evolution, Reserve, and Reserve Classic. For saxophone there are 3 styles: Grand Concert Select, Reserve Classic, or Rico Select Jazz (These come in either "filed" or "unfiled." The "file" is the area behind the vamp where the bark is sanded off in a straight line. An "unfiled" reed does not have this bark removed, so it will provide a little more resistance).

   A truly amazing synthetic reed! While expensive, they last a very long time and actually sound *almost* as good as a cane reed. Maybe a good bet for marching band?

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