

# Sound Exercises

These exercises will help you develop a full, confident sound across the whole of the saxophone. It is vitally important to always *listen* to yourself when you play, whether you are practicing or performing, alone or in an ensemble.

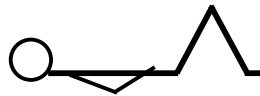
When playing all of these exercises you must make sure that you breathe in properly, filling your lungs from the bottom; breathe out properly, controlling the air with your diaphragm, making sure the flow is continuous and steady; and stand correctly, relaxed but upright and in line.

**Breathing:** – Wind instruments need a lot of air and so correct breathing is fundamental to learn. In everyday life, we use 15-20% of our lungs, Olympic athletes use roughly 50%, but wind players use 85-90%!

## Exercise 1)

This exercise checks we are breathing in correctly.

Lie on the floor with your knees up and your hands just below your rib cage, with your middle fingers touching:



When you breathe in your ribs should not move, but your tummy (your diaphragm) should expand. You can tell if you have done this correctly as your fingers are no longer touching.

Remember, when we breathe in we imagine that we are drawing the air into the bottom of our lungs. Our shoulders should not move up, and our ribs should not move out.

## Exercise 2)

You can improve your control and lung capacity with this exercise:

Breathe in for 2 seconds (completely filling your lungs), hold it for 2 seconds, breathe out for 2 seconds whilst making an 'S' sound (as in hiss).

Breathe in for 3 seconds, hold for 3 seconds, breathe out for 3 seconds.

4 seconds...5 seconds...6 seconds... etc.

## Exercise 3)

A variation on Exercise 2.

Breathe in for 2 seconds, hold for 2 seconds, breathe out ('hiss') for 4 seconds.

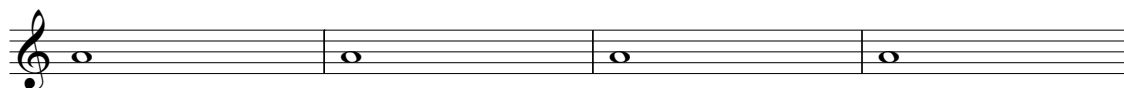
Breathe in for 2 seconds, hold for 2 seconds, breathe out for 5 seconds. etc.

**Mouthpiece:** – These exercises use only the mouthpiece, allowing you to concentrate fully on your sound, away from the saxophone.

Make sure your mouthpiece is set up correctly: leave a tiny sliver of mouthpiece showing above the reed, and make sure the ligature is at the widest part of the mouthpiece, and don't tighten it too much.

### Exercise 1)

Play steady, long notes using just the mouthpiece, reed, and ligature:



Play any pitch to begin with. Once comfortable with this technique, you should aim to play an A (on an alto mouthpiece).

Listen to yourself, aiming for a steady, clear sound.

Imagine your sound like this:  rather than: 

Compare this with a note blown with the mouthpiece in the corner of your mouth.

### Exercise 2)

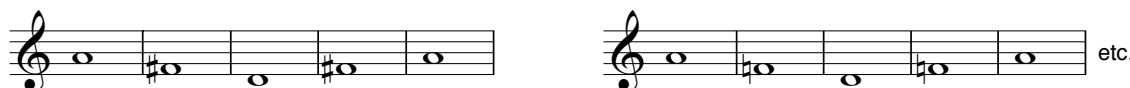
Try to lower the note from the A by a semitone, and then bring it back up. Next, try to lower it by two semitones, and then bring it back up. Continue until you can't lower it any further:



To lower the pitch, you must imagine the note you are aiming for. To help this, sing the notes first, then immediately try and play it.

### Exercise 3)

Now try skipping down from the A. Play arpeggios, patterns, and tunes:



Remember to always imagine the note you are aiming for first.

Once you have mastered these exercises, you can repeat them using the mouthpiece and the crook. This is more difficult and your range will be more restricted, so don't worry if you can't go as far as before! The mouthpiece and crook should play a G# (on an alto).

**With the Saxophone:** – Do not let the fact that you are now holding the complete instrument make you forget the important work learned in the earlier exercises!

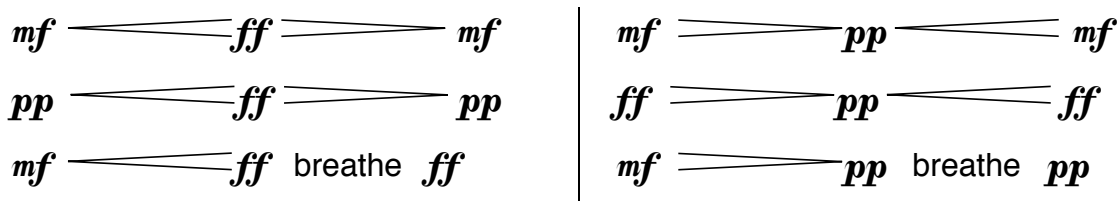
If you have one, use a digital tuner to ensure accuracy. Many digital metronomes often feature a tuner, or, if you have an iPod Touch, Android phone etc. there are several (free) apps.

### Exercise 1)

Play long tones – hold a note on the saxophone for one full breathe.

*Listen* as you do this and aim for a steady, vibrato-less note that is in tune.

Repeat the same note at many different dynamics:



This exercise is especially important with notes at the extremes of the saxophone (the very bottom, and the very top).

### Exercise 2)

Play long tones between octaves and listen for tuning:



Repeat at several dynamics, from **pp** to **ff**.

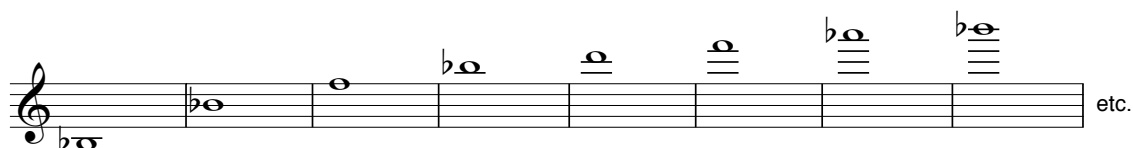
Your embouchure should **not** change at all between octaves.

Sing the notes before you play them to help with tuning.

### Exercise 3)

Using just one fingering, you can play several different notes just by controlling the air flow and your embouchure. These notes are called the ‘harmonic series’ and they form the ‘natural overtones’ of a note.

Play a bottom B $\flat$ , then, by imagining the next note up and increasing the speed of the air flow produce the next note up:

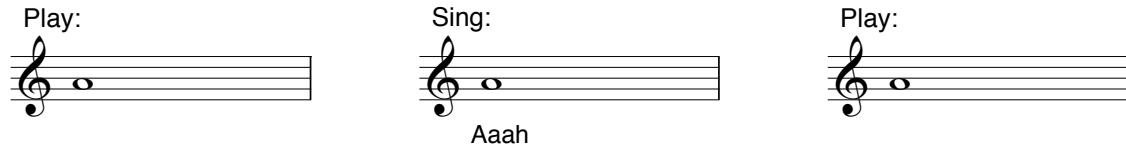


These notes are only possible to play if you can clearly imagine the pitches before playing. Try singing or humming the notes before playing.

## With the saxophone (cont.):

### Exercise 4)

Broaden your sound and increase your ability to play in tune and loudly by playing a note in the middle of the saxophone, then singing the same pitch with your throat as open as possible (imagine you are yawning), and then playing the note again, loudly, whilst trying to retain the same shape in your throat:

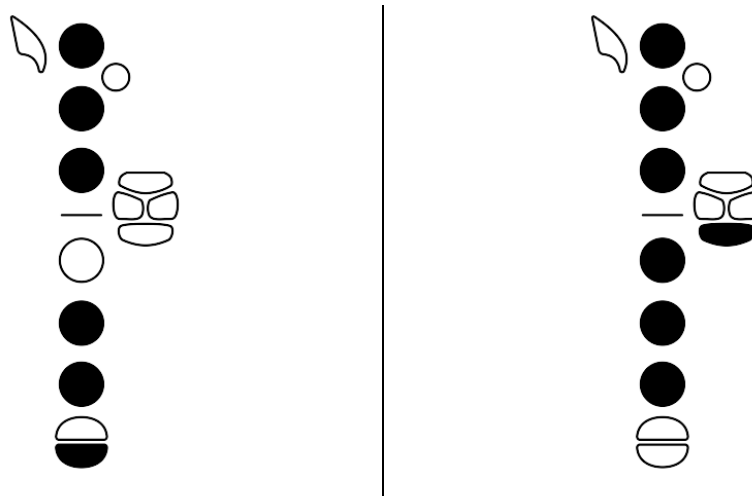


Use the sounds 'Aaah' and 'Eeee' when singing. The first opens the throat, and the second moves the tongue out of the way. Both of these sounds enable us to get more air, more efficiently down the saxophone.

### Exercise 5)

Experiment with the effects of altering the air flow whilst playing 'chords' on the saxophone.

Here are some simple 'multiphonics':



Start each note quietly and listen to how the chord changes as you increase the speed of the air; different notes will emerge as you speed up.