

**LISTENING**

Listening is the single most important key to developing abilities on any musical instrument. Due to the popularity of the instrument and its rich musical heritage in jazz, saxophonists have a wide variety of listening models to choose from. Here's a *short* selection of my favourite albums featuring saxophonists, both past and present.

<p><u>Soprano:</u>  The Straight Horn of Steve Lacy  John Coltrane: My Favorite Things  Wayne Shorter: Allegria / Without a Net  Yellowjackets: Blue Hats (ft. Bob Mintzer)  Carn/Davidson 9: The History of Us (featuring Tara Davidson) 🇨🇦</p>	<p><u>Alto:</u>  Charlie Parker with Strings  Cannonball Adderley Quintet: Live in San Francisco  Lee Konitz: Subconscious-Lee  Dave Brubeck: Take Five  Dick Oatts: Southpaw  Allison Au: Forest Grove 🇨🇦</p>
<p><u>Tenor:</u>  Lester Young with the Oscar Peterson Trio  Stan Getz: Focus  Hank Mobley: Soul Station  John Coltrane: A Love Supreme  Chris Potter: Gratitude  Melissa Aldana: Visions  Mike Murley: Conversation Piece 🇨🇦</p>	<p><u>Baritone:</u>  Gerry Mulligan / Chet Baker Quartet: Reunion  Serge Chaloff: Blue Serge  Pepper Adams / Thad Jones: Mean What You Say  The George Benson Cookbook (ft. Ronnie Cuber)  Gary Smulyan with Strings  Nick Brignola: On a Different Level</p>
<p><u>Albums featuring great sax sections:</u>  Duke Ellington: Far East Suite  Thad Jones: Consummation  Count Basie: The Atomic Mr. Basie  Maria Schneider: Evanescence  Supersax plays Bird  John MacLeod's Rex Hotel Jazz Orchestra: Our First Set 🇨🇦  Rob McConnell and the Boss Brass: Even Canadians Get the Blues 🇨🇦</p>	<p><u>Great sax "doublers":</u>  Sidney Bechet  Moe Koffman 🇨🇦  Jerome Richardson / Frank Wess  Scott Robinson  Paquito d'Rivera  John Johnson 🇨🇦  Andy Ballantyne 🇨🇦</p>

## TECHNIQUE

### Posture and playing position

1. Sit or stand up straight.
2. Keep equal weight on both feet.
3. Your hands should be in a comfortable hand position (fingers naturally curved).
4. Neck strap height: In general, the neck strap should be high enough allow the instrument to come to the mouth of the player naturally, without craning the neck forward or backward unnaturally. This should also allow the fingers to move as naturally as possible, without undue tension in the upper arms and wrists.

### Air support and proper breathing

Air support involves proper control of the diaphragm, which is aided by the muscles in the ribs and abdominals. The inhalation should be full, allowing the student to feel as though the chest, stomach and back are expanding like a “spare tire” around the belly. **Long tones** are my single most recommended exercise for developing consistent airflow, dynamic range, intonation, and overall sound. Here are some daily long tone exercises:

Play the following pattern at a slow tempo, at a constant volume, to high F#. When this version of the exercise is complete, start from middle C and move chromatically downwards. For a more advanced version, play each pair of notes as a crescendo-decrescendo, from *p* to *ff* to *p*.

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 40-50. The dynamic is marked as *mf*. The notation consists of a series of whole notes connected by a slur, moving chromatically upwards: C4, C#4, D4, D#4, E4, F4, F#4, G4, G#4, A4, A#4, B4, and C5. The word "etc." is written above the final note. The staff is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

### Throat and tongue position

In general, the throat should be as open as possible throughout the registers of the instrument. To emulate this, say the word “ohhhh”, or pretend to blow warm air as through you are defrosting a window. The upper range of the saxophone can be more easily facilitated with a slightly higher tongue position and a fast air stream. To emulate this position, say the word “teu” as if in French. (Source: Joseph Allard)

## Embouchure

1. The top teeth should be placed on the mouthpiece, approximately at the horizontal point where the mouthpiece meets the reed.
2. The lips should close around the mouthpiece, forming a seal. The corners of the mouth should be firm.
3. The bottom lip should be slightly rolled in, acting as a “cushion” underneath the mouthpiece for the bottom teeth. The bottom teeth must never make direct contact with the mouthpiece. The amount of bottom lip rolled in is variable.
4. One should never have to bite too hard on the mouthpiece to produce a sound. If bleeding or blistering occurs, biting could be the cause.

## Articulation and Accent

In general, I describe tongue articulation as the “edge of the tongue to the edge of the reed”, when the area striking the reed is likely just *below* the tip of the tongue. Legato tonguing is generally used: use the “doo” or “dah” syllable to articulate notes. For long passages of eighth notes in a swing style (bop or post-bop), off beat tonguing is used frequently. For example, have students practice the following scale pattern in a swing style (metronome on every downbeat, or on beats 2 and 4). Only a slight amount of tongue should be required here, while using a constant air stream. Practice this pattern through the full range of the instrument, using different scales and tempos. Excellent models of offbeat tonguing in eighth note lines include Hank Mobley and Johnny Griffin.



**Breath accent** is an important and often misunderstood concept. In many cases, notes in jazz are articulated with a breath accent (ie. slightly more air) with or without a light tongue articulation. Typically, these accents happen at the top of an eighth note line, or the end of a line, particularly on the off beats.

For written examples of swing articulation, check out *Jazz Saxophone Duets* by Greg Fishman or the *Jazz Conception* books from Jim Snidero. These books also come with excellent play-along CDs.

## Intonation

In general, the saxophone tends to be sharp in the upper register and flat in the lower register. Also, if the saxophonist blows too loudly, the pitch can go flat, unless the student has developed the embouchure and air support to be able to control this volume. When tuning the instrument either to concert A or Bb, play a note in both octaves and try to find a happy medium between the two.

## GEAR!

### Mouthpieces

The following mouthpieces are all reliable, consistent choices for jazz students:

- Soprano: Hard rubber Selmer C\*
- Alto: Hard rubber Meyer 5M; rubber Otto Link 5 or 6 medium
- Tenor: Hard rubber or metal Otto Link 5\* to 6; hard rubber Meyer 5\* or 6
- Baritone: Rubber or metal Otto Link 7 or 7\*; Rubber or metal Berg-Larsen 110/0 or 110/1

More pointers:

- Baffles can work well for baritone and perhaps tenor, but generally should be avoided for alto or soprano.
- Try to avoid extremely large or small tip openings. If the tip opening is too small, it can be difficult to produce a consistent sound at medium to high volume. If the opening is too large, this can result in a “loud” sound, but with inconsistent intonation and control.
- Mouthpiece patches can help to reduce vibration on the top teeth. These are especially useful on a metal mouthpiece but are recommended for hard rubber pieces as well.

### Reeds

The following brands and strengths are recommended for beginner to advancing players.

La Voz medium to medium hard

Rico Jazz Select (2.5 or 3)

Vandoren Java, V-16 or ZZ: 2.5 to 3

### Ligatures

I recommend Rovner or BG rubber ligatures and Vandoren Optimum metal ligatures.

The Vandoren ligatures are quite malleable; handle with care! Otto Link metal mouthpieces also come with their own ligatures, which also work well. Please remember to follow the manufacturer’s instructions as per mouthpiece placement; if the ligature is meant to be facing “screws down”, don’t flip it the other way, and vice versa.

### Neck straps and harnesses

I use Marmaduke and Saxholder harnesses and straps, as I find them to be the most comfortable and versatile. I have also used Neotech harnesses in the past, but their hooks proved unreliable. Harnesses are useful for alto and tenor but are essential for baritone players.