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Oboebasics.com  
A Modern Method for Oboe Embouchure

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**Abstract**

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This dissertation presents a method for teaching oboe embouchure aimed specifically at the beginner oboe student, using video instruction via the Internet. This is a two-tiered project involving the creation of the website [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) and a document which explains the project's origins and development. The website includes instruction and videos that address embouchure, breath control, posture, hand position, articulation, pitch, and tone quality. The website's materials are also relevant to intermediate and advanced students as well as teachers, instructors, and ensemble directors. The curriculum is formatted in a progressive manner with an overall focus on creating the proper embouchure.

Chapter one of the dissertation examines past and current teaching methods of oboe embouchure offered in method books, journals, dissertations, CDs, DVDs, and Internet resources. This survey provides an overview of resources available to oboe players. Chapter two details my approach to teaching oboe embouchure, discussing how to evaluate the embouchure, analyzing problems, and finding solutions. Exercises and practice methods to assist in attaining the proper embouchure are also presented.

The second half of the document explains the development and testing of multiple versions of the website, culminating in [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com). Chapter three details the website building process and the technical aspects of script writing, filming, post-production, and the decision-making involved in building this website. Chapter four focuses on the testing of the website, which took place over the course of a year. The testing process included alpha, beta and kappa testing to gain input on the appearance, functionality, and effectiveness of the website as it evolved. The evaluative process aided in the construction of the website and provided a framework for post-doctoral work.

The instruction and exercises presented in the website and document were culled from my oboe studies, my teaching experience, and my knowledge of what works for beginner students and oboists in general. The embouchure remains the focus of the website as the cornerstone of all other techniques. It is a vital starting point for any player and the most unique fundamental of oboe playing.

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presentation of survey data. Thanks as well to all of my aunts, uncles, cousins and other family members. I appreciate your help and I apologize for distracting your parents.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this document and website to my family. Without your help and encouragement I would not have finished this degree. Thank you for being staunch, steadfast, and encouraging. As always, I cannot thank you enough. I love you...but I hope you already know that!

## **Introduction**

The oboe is an old and formidable instrument. It is also one of the most beautiful sounds that comes from an orchestra. I have been playing the oboe for close to twenty-five years and have taught music in various capacities for the past eighteen. Currently, I am a member of the Cape Fear Community College faculty, where I teach woodwinds, voice, chorus, music theory, music fundamentals, and music appreciation. I have taught oboe, other woodwinds, and voice privately in rural, urban, and suburban areas of Ohio, Louisiana, Washington, and North Carolina. I have toured with ensembles and worked and performed with oboists from around the world.

For many years, I have wanted to create my own method for teaching beginner oboe students. My original intention was to write an oboe method book for beginners focusing on the fundamentals of oboe performance, and relying upon illustrations, standard exercises culled from the professionals with whom I have studied, and my own experience of what worked with students. My drive to write this method grew over time as I became increasingly frustrated with having to supplement method books with tracts of music and self-created or learned warm-up exercises.

The fundamentals involve breath control, posture, hand position, articulation, pitch, vibrato, tone quality, and the embouchure. In researching how to create an oboe method, however, I found so much research and writing on how to play the oboe in general that I pared back my plans. I chose to dedicate myself to the embouchure because it is a vital starting point for the novice player, the most unique fundamental of the woodwind and brass instruments, and the cornerstone of all other techniques to be taught.

Initially, I anticipated writing a method book about developing and using the proper embouchure with warm-ups, exercises, and pieces to practice for performance. At the outset of this project, I examined what already existed in oboe embouchure method instruction, including books, dictionaries, treatises, journals, dissertations, CDs, DVDs, and Internet resources. My search revealed no method book or program for oboe devoted solely to the technique of embouchure. While several oboe method books exist, they deal with embouchure only in passing. Moreover, in instances where there are materials prepared on the topic of all woodwind embouchures, the oboe, and bassoon tend to get short shrift with little, if any, mention. Most materials do not explain how to achieve the best embouchure, nor do they provide exercises and practice pieces that will help students attain the proper technique. I envisioned a detailed treatise to address this need.

During my years as an oboe student, player, and teacher, I have consulted with accomplished oboists for their input and expertise on embouchure instruction, and in particular, on how to develop exercises to teach and reinforce the proper embouchure for oboe students. Overwhelmingly, they have been helpful and willing to share their thoughts, practices, and advice through private instruction, seminars, or master classes. These experts include my former teachers, Nathan Hughes (Principal of the Metropolitan Opera/ The Julliard School of Music), Jeffrey Rathbun (Assistant Principal of the Cleveland Orchestra/ Cleveland Institute of Music), John Mack (former Principal of the Cleveland Orchestra), Joseph Robinson (former Principal of the New York Philharmonic), Linda Strommen (Associate Professor, Indiana University), Daniel Stolper (Professor at the Interlochen School of Music), and Danna Sundet (Principal of the Erie Philharmonic, Professor at Kent State University).

I am cognizant of the fact that such a method book would be useful for students switching to the oboe from another wind instrument as well as for teachers who must teach oboe but are not specialists, such as band and orchestra leaders, and methods instructors. But I chose to hone in on beginning oboe players from 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

According to the Seattle Youth Symphony Orchestra, the oboe is one of seven endangered instruments and is thus a part of its “Endangered Instruments Program” (EIP). The EIP was founded in 1990 as an in-school program encouraging music students to learn less commonly played instruments.<sup>1</sup> (website:). This campaign has spread with the adoption of similar programs in New York, Fort Lauderdale, Vancouver, British Columbia, and Australia. Programs such as the EIP, which exist here and there throughout the world, indicate the need for good teaching resources in our secondary schools. Furthermore, as the EIP program is not available in many locations, an oboe method resource could be invaluable to music students and teachers elsewhere.

No doubt, the oboe is a difficult instrument to play, and it is important to start correctly, as with any instrument. Bad habits are hard to break. Many times a student takes up the oboe after playing another instrument (most often having started on clarinet, flute, or saxophone). This switch may be made after several years of playing the first instrument. Sometimes this switch is initiated by the student or parent, but in many cases, the suggestion is made by an ensemble director who is in dire need of players of this instrument. Whatever the reason for beginning with or switching to the oboe, it is very important to arm the student with an understanding of the techniques for using the proper embouchure. One can detail the differences in embouchure between the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.syso.org/outreach/endangered\\_instr.html](http://www.syso.org/outreach/endangered_instr.html)

instruments and provide techniques for switching. Thus, the embouchure method would be designed with these key objectives in mind.

Over time, I have also observed that there are a variety of teachers who might benefit from a method book on the oboe embouchure. First, there are many private oboe teachers who have the knowledge to maintain their own proper embouchure, but are challenged to produce the same in their students. Next, there are many private and public school music teachers, found predominately in smaller cities and rural areas, who do not specialize in the oboe, but who are tasked with teaching all of the woodwind instruments simultaneously. In addition, at the university level, professors of methods courses have the responsibility of teaching their students to learn instruments quickly and are pressed to provide resources in a short amount of time. Finally, there are many ensemble directors today who would like to make better use of a solid oboe player, but who avoid the use of the oboe in their ensembles because they fear that it is too complicated and time consuming for the beginner. They worry about aberrant noise, pitch, and poor tone quality, and they do not have the time, or the expertise, to fix these problems. Teachers in all these categories often lack detailed instruction, exercises, and musical material specifically intended to teach embouchure to oboe students. I hope that my method book will begin to eliminate this scarcity.

Good intonation and tone quality are impossible to achieve with improper embouchure. Tightness and/or biting tendencies with bad technique will make it impossible to possess the relaxation needed for proper wind control, posture, hand position, vibrato, and articulation. The exercises I have created produce positive results and set the foundation for obtaining success in the other fundamentals. They will address

not only the separate components of embouchure but will also strengthen endurance through repetition.

Originally, I intended to create a printed method book, but with the advancements in technology and an increased use of the Internet, I redirected my focus to lean upon these technologies and created a website to house my method. The growing availability of the Internet seemed to match my primary goal of reaching students who might not have access to teachers, such as students in rural areas. I thought a website would not only meet this challenge, but would allow for greater use overall for teachers and students who could access a website, but not necessarily a method book, from almost anywhere.

As you will see, chapter one lays out my research of written materials, audio, and visual resources, both traditional and of more recent vintage, that exist concerning oboe methods and in particular materials about oboe embouchure. Chapter two sets forth in detail the development of my own oboe embouchure method, including how to evaluate the embouchure, analyze problems with it, and correct problems. It also indicates what exercises and practice methods are helpful to ensuring the proper embouchure. In addition, this chapter touches briefly on my methods as they relate to switching from other woodwind instruments. How the method evolved into the website [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) and its current format is explained in chapter three. Finally, in chapter four, I share the results of multiple layers of information gathering and testing that took place over the course of this project, along with my ideas of how this data will impact the post-doctoral work I plan to pursue in continuing to augment the website and method.

I was amazed that within weeks of creating [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) I witnessed the website's immediate impact on a beginner oboe student who had never played any instrument before. It seemed like perfect timing to begin a new student and test out my new website. After three lessons, this student came in and proudly announced that she could play "Mary had a Little Lamb" – a surprise to me, as the ability to play even a song as simple as this on the oboe after a few lessons is rare. I had never seen a student progress this quickly. But having regained my composure, I started her out in the printed method book *A Tune a Day*, as I do with all my beginner oboe students. Out of curiosity, I then asked her how she had learned "Mary had a Little Lamb," and she showed me the copies of the music that she and her mother had downloaded from my site from using the "Play Along" tab<sup>2</sup>. I was very happy to find not only that my method was working, but also that a new student was excited to have access to materials that would let her achieve progress outside of lesson time.

Working with oboe students and striving to create excellence in playing and performance skills has been a mainstay of my professional life. The website and written dissertation are an extension of my dedication to improving and broadening instructional and method materials on oboe embouchure.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the document, the titles of website tabs and subtabs are set off with quotation marks for the sake of clarity.

## Chapter 1: Oboe Embouchure Instruction, Past and Present

It is one of the great problems of the oboe teacher today to know what to use that is effective in the training of young students. The pedagogical literature of the oboe is in a chaotic state. It is obsolete ... (Josef Marx, 1963)<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how embouchure has been taught, and where it has been ignored. The overall pattern in oboe embouchure teaching falls into three main phases: the first half of the twentieth centuries when exercise books dominated, the 1950s-1970s when serious attention to embouchure developed, and the final big shift involving recent technological inventions including CDs, DVDs, and the Internet.

Over much of the twentieth century, oboe pedagogy was passed on in oboe books (or articles) and oboe method books, but there were still some important differences in these sources. The books and articles about playing oboe were usually text-based with some illustrations and pictures, but few if any exercises. In general, these appear to have been written for teachers because even if students took the time to read these books, they are difficult to comprehend. Nonetheless, as these books may have been used by teachers, they are reviewed here. Stretching back to the beginning of the twentieth century, method books explicitly focused on students, both beginners and advanced, and were the only media available besides teaching in person until the 1980s-1990s. The rise of new technology now offers different opportunities, especially with the spread of the Internet.

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<sup>1</sup>Anthony Lamotte, *The Methodical Study of the Oboe*, ed. Josef Marx (New York: McQuinnis & Marx, 1963), p. 1. The materials in this book were drawn from Anthony Lamotte's original book *Basic Scale and Arpeggio Studies* which was originally printed privately by the Conservatory of Bordeaux in Bordeaux, France, year unknown.

There were at least fourteen oboe method books published between 1900 and 1960, including some venerable favorites like the Rubank series and A.M.R. Barret that are still used today. Several instruction books were created by European oboists, which were then translated into English.<sup>2</sup> Gustav Adolf Hinke's *Elementary Method for Oboe*, the standard Edition Peters volume, is a perfect example of the European influence and of standard editions that have lasted across the twentieth century. With regard to embouchure, the Hinke book never uses the word and his method contains mostly music with short messages for the student. Hinke simply wrote that tone is "distinctly made" or "attacked."<sup>3</sup> The Rubank series, for which N.W. Hovey wrote the elementary level, J.E. Skornicka and R. Koebner the intermediate, and Himie Voxman and William Gower the advanced, represents another classic example of this same model. The three relatively short books written for each level provide a brief explanation of basics, which consist mainly of exercises, with no mention of embouchure.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the text, like many others, explains how to hold the instrument, breathing techniques, reading rhythms, fingering, and learning notes.<sup>5</sup>

Other early method books do mention embouchure, sometimes offering a paragraph of information on the topic embedded within a page or two of text covering all

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<sup>2</sup>This category includes works by Barret, Hinke, and Gillet. See A.M.R. Barret, *A Complete Method for the Oboe* ([United States]: Boosey & Hawkes, n.d.); Gustav Adolf Hinke, *Elementary Method for Oboe* (New York: Edition Peters, n.d.); Georges Gillet, *Method for the Beginning of the Oboe, and Studies for the Advanced Teaching of the Oboe* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1936).

<sup>3</sup>Hinke, *Elementary Method*, p. 3 and p. 7. Hinke was a German oboist who lived from 1844 to 1893.

<sup>4</sup>N.W. Hovey, *Rubank Elementary Method: Oboe* (Miami, Florida: Rubank, Inc., 1934, also republished in 1952 and 1986); J.E. Skornicka and R. Koebner, *Rubank Intermediate Method Oboe* (Miami, FL: Rubank, Inc., 1939); Himie Voxman, and William Gower, *Rubank Advanced Method for Oboe: an Outlined Method Designed to Follow any of the Various Elementary or Intermediate Methods* (Chicago: Rubank, Inc. 1940, also republished in 1990).

<sup>5</sup>Another such example would be Valentine Anzalone's *Breeze-Easy Method for Oboe* (New York: M. Witmark & Sons, 1960).

of the fundamentals of oboe playing, typically at the beginning of the book. After these introductory pages, there are few, if any, references to the embouchure throughout the rest of these method books.

In most of these books, the advice is focused elsewhere. The main advice on tone in Hovey's still quite popular book is to "Practice softly – Rest lips frequently."<sup>6</sup> Another text by W.D. Fitch, subtitled "A Method for the Beginner," actually moves quite quickly to the intermediate and advanced levels and claims, "There are no set rules for producing an embouchure."<sup>7</sup> The Gekeler method refers to embouchure but includes it with "The Position of the Instrument." When writing in 1940, Gekeler maintained, "there is nothing new to offer as a means of improving tone quality or intonation other than good playing posture and the conscientious practice of long tones."<sup>8</sup> The famous Barret method book also provides the following limited direction: "The best advice I can give to the Student is to practice carefully, for some hours every day, slow pieces and sustained scales: this will form the lips in the best manner and contribute greatly to improving the quality of tone."<sup>9</sup> During this earlier period, it is not clear whether or not these authors assumed that a student (or teacher) would figure out the embouchure on their own. It is clear that teaching embouchure was not a priority, and was often overlooked.

Moreover, when authors gave advice on the embouchure, it was not always helpful or accurate. Information tended to center on recommending the smile formation and encouraging behaviors that would lend themselves to biting or rolling in too much.

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<sup>6</sup>Hovey, *Rubank Elementary Method: Oboe*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup>Fitch, *The Study of the Oboe: A Method for the Beginner with Previous Instrumental Experience* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The George Wahr Publishing Co., 1952), pp. 1-2.

<sup>8</sup>Kenneth Gekeler, *Gekeler Method for Oboe* (New York: Belwin Inc., 1940), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Barret, *A Complete Method*, p. 3. Apollon-Marie-Rose Barret lived from 1804 to 1879.

The paragraph on embouchure found in Gekeler's method book, for example, offers the following advice, "The embouchure will depend more on the muscles around the upper lip and the smiling position of the facial muscles than upon clenched teeth." Then he recommends that a student "keep the corners of the mouth drawn back in a smile position."<sup>10</sup> Much more emphasis is placed on the upper lip and those muscles, ignoring the importance of the lower lip where the reed rests.

Another characteristic is that these materials either overtly or inadvertently encourage students to bite. For example, Barret encourages covering the teeth, rolling-in, and applying pressure that could result in biting. In *Hetzel's Visual Method for the Oboe*, first published in 1939, the paragraph on embouchure instructs students to:

Slightly open your mouth, then place the reed in the center of the lower lip and bring your upper lip down folding *both inward simultaneously* so as to cover the teeth and form a flexible seat for the reed. The Lips should be well drawn in, but a very little 'bite' (as it is called) should be taken on the reed. Not over *one-eighth* of an inch of the reed should extend beyond the lips into the mouth; just enough so the tongue can easily strike the tip to start the tone.<sup>11</sup>

Today, however, it is generally accepted that "folding both inward simultaneously" is rolling the lips in too much, and even a "very little bite" encourages a student to bite. Giving a precise figure such as one-eighth is also not realistic given the variables of playing and the anatomical differences among students with their mouths and lips.

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<sup>10</sup>Gekeler, *Gekeler Method*, p. 2 of Foreword.

<sup>11</sup>Jack Hetzel, *Hetzel's Visual Method for the Oboe for Private or Class Instruction* (Philadelphia: Oliver Ditson Company, 1939), p. 5. (emphasis in original) On the problem of rolling in, see also, Richard Weerts, *Handbook of Woodwinds* (Kirksville: Mills Publishing Co., 1966).

Several books also use the concept of an “attack” for beginning a note. Again, Barret exhorted, “The beginning of every phrase must be ‘attacked’ with the tongue.”<sup>12</sup> The word “attack” is not necessarily the best word to describe how to start a note as it may encourage students to be too aggressive with their tongues on the reed, causing an abrupt sound.<sup>13</sup>

Although there are some exceptions, one also notices a lack of illustrations, images, and photographs in these books. The method books by Barret, Hinke, Hovey, and Anzalone contain no illustrations, photographs, or graphics, except music. Others incorporate drawings of reeds or photographs of oboists sparingly and without many close-ups.<sup>14</sup>

The influence of these materials persisted across the twentieth century due to the popularity of some of these traditional method books.<sup>15</sup> The Rubank series and Editions Peterson have enjoyed solid success, and the Gekeler and Barret books are still used by many teachers. Thus, if instructors want to teach their students about using a proper embouchure, they must supplement these sources with information of their own, or students are simply left to their own devices.

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<sup>12</sup>Barret, *A Complete Method*, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>Ronald Roseman noted in an interview, “attack” is a lousy word for it... It really shouldn’t be called ‘attack.’ I think that maybe the word itself can set you up wrong. It really is awful.” Vaneman, Kelly McElrath, “Sounding Beautiful: A Series of Interviews with Ronald Roseman on the Concept and Particulars of Sound Production, Part II.” *The Journal of the Double Reed Society*, 25, no. 4 (1994-1995): pp. 48-49.

<sup>14</sup>The exceptions include the books by Fitch and Carey that use photographs. See Fitch, *The Study of the Oboe*, and Milburn Carey, *The Music Educator’s Basic Method for the Oboe* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1938).

<sup>15</sup>It is interesting that the few method books that present some good information on the embouchure do not seem to have been influential or long-lasting. See, for example, Carey’s *The Music Educator’s Basic Method*.

Moving into the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, there was clearly an increase in attention paid to embouchure. Before the 1960s, more interest was shown in other woodwinds, partly because the oboe was viewed as too hard to play. In addition, a lack of reed knowledge and reed information-sharing led to few oboe players. People were still figuring out how to make reeds, a field in which major advancements have been made, even in the last ten years.

One particularly farsighted work came from Evelyn Rothwell, a British oboist, who studied with Leon Goossens and taught at the Royal Academy of Music. She wrote the book *Oboe Technique* in 1953 and devoted an entire 12-page chapter to “Embouchure Control.”<sup>16</sup> She was one of the only women to write a method book, and she gave clear and precise information. Some of her best advice focuses on the mouth and lips and what she called a “flexible” embouchure:

The first I shall call the “*tight*” *embouchure*, and at the risk of being controversial, I consider it one to be most strenuously avoided. The teeth are close together, the lips stretched tightly over them, and the reed is pressed between the lips as if in a clamp with a fairly strong “bite.” Control comes mainly from the muscles at the corners of the mouth, which stretch the lips more or less tightly over the teeth. The other I shall call a “*flexible*” *embouchure*, and since it is the one I personally advocate, I shall describe it in more detail.<sup>17</sup>

Rothwell also acknowledged that beginners have a hard time understanding and controlling the right muscles. Not all of her recommendations still hold up today, however. For example, she advised student to “roll in both your lips over your teeth.”

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<sup>16</sup>Rothwell, *Oboe Technique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953). The third edition from 1982 is basically the same text with a few editorial changes as well as references to her later work *The Oboist's Companion* which contained exercises.

<sup>17</sup>Rothwell, *Oboe Technique*, p. 20. (emphasis in the original)

Robert Sprenkle and David Ledet's work, *The Art of Oboe Playing*, published in 1961, also reflected a shift underway. They outlined a good progression from The Concept of Learning, Selecting an Instrument, Selecting a Reed, and Producing the Tone, with embouchure mentioned there. This shows the importance that the authors placed on embouchure, putting it before fingerings and more technical issues. In addition, illustrations and pictures appear throughout a method book for the first time.<sup>18</sup> In both instances, though, the books by Rothwell and Sprenkle and Ledet offer complex explanations aimed at advanced students and teachers, not beginners. For students in the 1960s, Bruce Pearson's *Best in Class* provided a separate clearly arranged section on embouchure and gave sage advice: "Ask your director to check your embouchure" and "Check your embouchure regularly in front of a mirror." Embouchure advice like this is unusual to see in a book aimed at band members; most focus only on notes and rhythm.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Pearson paid attention to the lips and the need to push the corners towards the reed. Unfortunately, he also encouraged too much reed in the mouth.

In an article published in the *Journal for the International Double Reed Society* in 1974, John Mack signaled the overall detrimental effect resulting from the paucity of good embouchure instructional materials.<sup>20</sup> Mack, the principle oboist for the Cleveland

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<sup>18</sup>Ledet had just completed a dissertation on reed styles and most likely supplied the reed information and pictures. See David Arthur Ledet, "A Delineation of Oboe Reed Styles Related to the Properties of Timbre and Tone Production with its Technical Aspects and Pedagogical Implications" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 1960). Other dissertations also indicate new activity in this period, for example the masters thesis by Raymond Moeller called "An Investigation and Evaluation of the Beginning Oboe Method in Use Today and a Beginning Method for Oboe" (master's thesis, Stetson University, 1957).

<sup>19</sup>Pearson, *Best in Class* (San Diego: Kjos Music Co., 1962). Pearson also published a book thirty years later, but here he cut way back on information about the embouchure. Pearson, *Standard of Excellence* (San Diego: Neil A. Kjos Music Co., 1993).

<sup>20</sup>The article was a transcription of John Mack's address to the convention of the IDRS at Augustana College, Sioux Falls, South Dakota in August of 1973. Mack, "Effective Guidance for the Young Oboist," *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society*, 2 (1974): pp. 1-14.

Orchestra at the time, shared his belief that his own training had been somewhat haphazard and filled with conflicting ideas.<sup>21</sup> He claimed, “I had no one to tell me anything, and when I did finally get information, the information really wasn’t too good. And as I have wended my way gradually upward in the world of the oboe, I have discovered, at least it seems that way to me now, there is not that much, or that great, or that broad a supply of first-class knowledge about the instrument and the problems to do with it.”<sup>22</sup> Mack was determined to examine fundamental issues and to share information, something he felt had been discouraged in the past. As he put it, “The very best information in the best possible way must be disseminated so that things can keep from becoming, what shall I say? – too polluted, one of our great concerns today.”<sup>23</sup> Mack himself repeatedly challenged conventional wisdom with his views on breathing, positioning the instrument, and reed-making with remarkable attention to detail.<sup>24</sup>

Mack also addressed embouchure directly and thoroughly. He worried over the use of the upper versus lower lip, and argued against the “smile” formation and “clawed teeth.” He also asked students to play the oboe “with the mouth open, and the reed ... held with the lips, and not with lip-covered teeth.” The issue of how much lip to put in

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<sup>21</sup>John Mack studied with Bruno Labate, Harold Gomberg, and Marcel Tabuteau. Labate himself revised Theodor Niemann’s *Method for the Oboe or English Horn* in 1970 (New York: Carl Fischer, 1927; republished revised and amplified by Bruno Labate, 1970). This book was also not written for beginners. Labate never used the term embouchure, but does seem to be one of the first to tell students not to roll in. Overall, though, his information on producing tones is vague. For a thorough biography of Marcel Tabuteau, see Laila Storch, *Marcel Tabuteau: How Do You Expect to Play the Oboe if You Can’t Peel a Mushroom?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>22</sup>Mack, “Effective Guidance,” p. 2.

<sup>23</sup>Mack, “Effective Guidance,” p. 3.

<sup>24</sup>Mack never wrote a full-length book on his concerns, but he gave interviews and recorded master classes. For example, John Mack, “How to Play the Oboe: Advanced Seminar” (Seattle, Washington: Videotech Partnership, Ltd.; Cinema Associates, 1981), and John Mack, “Beginning Oboe” (Seattle, Washington: Cinema Associates [production Co.]; Shawnee Mission, Kansas: RMI Media Productions [distribution Co., 1982]).

one's mouth was particularly vexing to him. While encouraging the whistle shape, he took up the subject of the red part of the lips:

A lot of people feel that you shouldn't play on the red part of the lips – that's not really necessarily so at all; it depends on the way your lips are. I think that if you'd play on the red part, you're better off; I think you have more sensitivity. I mean doesn't the safecracker go for more and more sensitive fingers? – sanding his finger tips you know? I think the same thing is true. You may feel stronger putting more lips in your mouth, but I think you have less control – *less* control.<sup>25</sup>

An important part of John Mack's method was to pay close attention to the physicality of playing and to consider the individuality of each student. Mack was one of many who studied with Marcel Tabuteau at the Curtis Institute of Music. Marcel Tabuteau studied at the Paris Conservatoire with Georges Gillet and then moved to the United States, where he became Principal Oboe of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Tabuteau is generally regarded as the founder of the US-American school of oboe. Some of his notable students included Rhadames Angelucci, Donald Baker, Robert Bloom, John de Lancie, Alfred Genovese, Harold Gomberg, Ralph Gomberg, Felix Kraus, Marc Lifschey, John Mack, John Minsker, Wayne Rapier, Joseph Robinson, Daniel Stolper, and Laila Storch. It can be argued that because Tabuteau combined the French and German reed styles into one reed, which is now known as the American scraped reed, he also had a major influence on his students regarding embouchure. In fact, he is widely considered to have established the US-American school of embouchure, which promoted techniques that have been passed on for generations through his students. Although oboists today might identify themselves with a specific school of oboe playing there seems to be consistency

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<sup>25</sup>Mack, "Effective Guidance," p. 9. (emphasis in the original)

among embouchures (with the most notable differences consisting of varying regional opinions of musical style and pedagogy.) Mack, who taught at the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Juilliard School, usually taught more advanced students and so did not concern himself as frequently with young students' embouchures. While his article was a leap forward in recognizing the complexity of the embouchure, the density of the article might confuse beginners (and even advanced students for that matter.)

Even with the rise in attention given to embouchure in the 1950s-1970s, many later works still failed to assist students or provided contradictory advice. James Macbeth's 1970 text *Learn to Play the Oboe* devotes just three sentences to embouchure, saying simply, "Your teacher will help you form your lips around the reed in the correct manner. This formation of the lips is called the EMBOUCHURE."<sup>26</sup> C. Paul Herfurth's *A Tune a Day for Oboe*, beloved for its collection of lessons, tunes, and images, again encourages the smile.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, band books, which typically focus on how to hold the instrument, usually offer little, if any, information on the embouchure.<sup>28</sup> James Swearingen and Barbara Buehlman instruct students to "suck in the lips," "pull the corners of the mouth down," and "breathe from the corners of your mouth, not through the nose."<sup>29</sup> Later works offer pictures, but sometimes illustrate bad habits, such as a

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<sup>26</sup>Macbeth, *Learn to Play the Oboe* (Van Nuys: Alfred Publishing Co., 1970).

<sup>27</sup>Herfurth, *A Tune a Day for Oboe* (Boston: The Boston Music Co., 1982).

<sup>28</sup>See, for instance, Ed Sueta, *Band Method* (Rockaway: Malie Publishing Co., 1974); Sandy Feldstein and John O'Reilly, *Yamaha Band Student* (Van Nuys: Alfred Publishing Co., 1988); and Fred Weber, *First Division Band Course* (Miami: Mills Publishing Co., 1990).

<sup>29</sup>James Swearingen and Barbara Buehlman, *Band Plus, Book 1 Oboe* (Dayton: Heritage Music Press, 1989).

relatively recent band book which gives a close-up of a girl biting, with her chin bunched up and corners out.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, even with the increase in interest surrounding embouchure, the scarcity of clear and accurate instruction on the oboe embouchure remains. Few works deal with all of the necessary details, especially not in a simple, clear approach appropriate for beginners. Furthermore, although today's students are much more interested in visual and multi-media, the Barret or Hinke method books are still commonly used. Still, elsewhere there have been developments in new technological and multi-media directions.

### *New Technologies*

The book *Notes Alive!* was published back in 1957 and in some ways resembles many of the other method books discussed above.<sup>31</sup> In one significant and foreshadowing way, however, the presentation of this book was different. The book came with “a record and tape supplements” and celebrated the “audio-visual method of instruction for oboe.” Unfortunately, copies of the audio part do not seem to have survived. The pedagogy encouraged practicing fingering, without engaging the air, while the record played as well as giving 5-10 hours of music to play along with. It is hard to determine the popularity or usage of this collection, although there is no sign that it was republished after 1957.

More recently, compact discs, VHS tapes, and DVDs have offered new possibilities for teaching, but few really good examples seem to exist. John Mack had his master classes recorded and made available to the public, and in 2001, Boston Records

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<sup>30</sup>Robert Smith and Susan Smith, *Band Expressions* (Miami: Warner Bros., 2003).

<sup>31</sup>*Notes Alive! The Audio-Visual Method of Instruction for Oboe* (Chicago: Educational Research, 1957).

put out a CD entitled “Marcel Tabuteau’s Lessons.”<sup>32</sup> Most of the latter consists of Tabuteau talking through excerpts and his number system for dynamics. It might not be instructionally appropriate for a beginner as, for the most part only more advanced concepts are presented. He also has a very thick French accent, which could be difficult for youngsters to understand. Tabuteau talks about long tones being used for control, but not specifically for embouchure. He begins with the reed and then moves to the oboe with the long tone exercises in a pattern of 1-5 5-1.<sup>33</sup> He also goes into long tones from 1-9 9-1 for advanced players.

John O’Reilly and Mark Williams’ *Accent on Achievement* was published on two CDs in 1997 which allowed students to hear their instrument part or to play with an accompaniment.<sup>34</sup> They also gave helpful suggestions on embouchure encouraging students to relax their jaws, use their lips to cushion the reed, and avoid any force from the lower teeth. The collection *Essential Elements 2000* went even farther with a CD Rom and DVDs providing software and play alongs.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Current Internet Sources*

In addition, the last twenty years have seen major developments in technology that have affected how we find information, as well as how and where people learn. Currently on the Internet, there are over 100 websites or blogs that come up in a search

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<sup>32</sup>Tabuteau, “Marcel Tabuteau’s Lessons” (Boston Records, 2001).

<sup>33</sup>I use a similar pattern in my teaching and on my website. See chapters 2 and 3 below.

<sup>34</sup>John O’Reilly and Mark Williams, *Accent on Achievement* (Van Nuys: Alfred Publishing, 1997).

<sup>35</sup>Tom Lautzenheiser, et al., *Essential Elements 2000* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Co., 1999). This was based on an earlier book version: C. Rhodes et al., *Essential Elements* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Publishing Company, 1991).

for oboe embouchure.<sup>36</sup> But these vary widely, from one page with a paragraph on embouchure to a website offering a variety of resources.

Most of the sites are commercial sites -- some created by large companies selling products, others by individuals trying to sell and promote their lessons. Many of the individual sites include ways to pay for online videos, but most of these do not look professional. Their potential audience could include anyone who would buy their product or private lessons, and these sites are not necessarily age-specific. There are also web pages at colleges and universities created by music instructors who have uploaded resources or had their resources uploaded by college IT specialists. There are some websites, which have information about all of the band instruments designed only for band directors teaching middle- or high-school students. The last category of websites includes those created by individuals seeking to make resources or videos available. As is typical of the Internet, I found that some links to the sites did not work at all. Others had a video or two that would not load, and on others, the videos took longer than five minutes to load (by which time, most people would have given up).<sup>37</sup> It is the nature of the World Wide Web that there is little quality control.

The most professional sites located were the college websites where oboe instructors had one or more web pages.<sup>38</sup> These sites with embouchure videos seemed to be geared more toward advanced players, and even the best of them might seem

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<sup>36</sup>A particularly good search software is DEVONagent Pro.

<sup>37</sup>One case is a website by Paul Hatton at <http://www.quacktocrow.com/embouchure.html>. The videos no longer work, but the text is quite humorous and helpful including a funny mnemonic limerick called "NO, OBOE" by Sir O. Hautbois. This website states that you can go "From Quack to Crow in 30 Minutes!"

<sup>38</sup>The International Double Reed Society also offers a video archive of performances and master classes by double reed artists. <http://www.idrs.org>. It has a forum, or blog, for those interested in double reed instruments. See <http://www.idrs.org/publications/controlled/DR/DR24.1.pdf/Fundamentals.pdf>

confusing or vague to a beginner oboist. Most of these sites seem to have been created to recruit students and to provide resources, and are geared toward college students who are going on to teach young students; the sites were not designed to teach beginner students themselves.<sup>39</sup> I discuss the specifics of some of the most representative sites in more detail below.

### *Categories of Teaching Presentations*

In order to present a survey of such a wide variety of websites, the sites can be broken down into categories by how they communicate information about the embouchure. I have divided my list and analysis into four groups: 1. Websites with 6 or more videos; 2. Websites with 1-5 videos; 3. Websites with text and pictures; and 4. Websites with only text.

Overall, I did not find any site focused only on embouchure, and I did not find any websites that had more than 5 videos having to do with oboe embouchure, with the exception of YouTube, a video-streaming site. The majority of the sites that I found with 1-5 videos often have videos filmed in what looks like the creator's basement or crowded office without proper lighting or any consideration given to the background of the filming area.<sup>40</sup> Many of the videos contain confusing information. For example, on the site *Musicas en Linea*, the oboist says that a player should have 2/3 of the reed in their mouth, which is too much reed in the mouth unless you are playing in the upper register.<sup>41</sup> The oboist also says that he will use the correct placement, but never states what that is other

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<sup>39</sup>They do sometimes include information about All-State for younger students in an effort to recruit and bring traffic to the site.

<sup>40</sup>See, for example, The Reedmaker Reed Shop, accessed 4/22/12, <http://www.reedmaker.com/about/aboutmyreeds/aboutmyreeds.html>

<sup>41</sup>*Musicas en Linea*, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://www.musicasenlinea.com/videos/oboe-embouchure-;iYZLNYhQP5c.html>

than to say that, “there will be some pointing.” This direction could be confusing to a beginner student.

The new site Findise gets to the heart of what I found during this Internet survey, the issue of the term “rolling in” and the use of the word “Omm.”<sup>42</sup> This particular student’s video encourages the audience to use “OO,” which is constructive, because it creates the same shape as the whistle shape. The use of “Omm,” however, rolls the lips into the mouth and encourages biting and bunching. Using “Omm” also encourages the lips to spread wide toward the ears and flatten out over the lips, keeping the corners from being centered and causing the lips to be loose at the corners. This video is also contradictory because the instructor says that biting is bad but then plays an example and bites the reed.

Another serious problem becomes evident when one watches videos from YouTube. Although there are professional videos on YouTube, many times it is difficult to separate the good from the bad and the humorous from the serious; for young viewers especially. For example, in one video a young lady says, “The way you do vibrato on an oboe is you say, ‘Ya, Ya, Ya.’” She then demonstrates vibrato by biting and moving her whole face up and down with an improper embouchure and then says, “My vibrato is so good.”<sup>43</sup> Hopefully, students can tell that these demonstrations are meant for humor and not instruction. In another video, Advanced Oboe Lessons with Professor Craft the presenter’s serious demeanor may make it difficult for a young student to realize the

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<sup>42</sup>Findise, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://www.findise.com/videos/index.php?page=video/view/hHB44a0K1Io>

<sup>43</sup>Oboe Vibrato, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://youtu.be/fsZ1F2upRI4>

site's satirical nature.<sup>44</sup> This video recommends that reeds be soaked in orange juice, advises the use of an inhaler when playing even if the student does not have asthma, and describes dynamics as “Creshendo” and “Daycreshendo,” using a paper visual aid floating onto the screen to show “Daycreshendo.” “Professor Craft” outlines five types of music for oboes, including duets, trios, band, orchestra, and solos, and then demonstrates all of these by playing the pieces *alone* and, to further confuse matters, in different musical styles.

In the survey, I found that websites with a combination of text and pictures (including images and sketches) are still less common than sites with only text. And on these websites, while pictures of a good embouchure are scarce, pictorial examples of bad or problematic embouchures abound. Some of these pictures, images, and sketches show students and teachers biting with bunched chins. While others show lips that are stretched straight and flat across the teeth making the corners of the lips reach toward the ears and appear loose looking.

Websites also sometimes contain contradictions between text and images. Dr. Downing Music, which sells Dr. Downing's book *Oboe Technique Doctor*, offers a picture of a woman playing the oboe that is labeled “Good,” and the text below says, “A nice relaxed posture with your oboe at approximately 45 degrees, head in a normal comfortable position, with elbows out and not restricting your breathing, fingers nicely curved.”<sup>45</sup> The text provides sound advice, but the picture contradicts this because the

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<sup>44</sup>Advanced Oboe Lessons with Professor Craft, accessed April 22, 2012 <http://youtu.be/2I3EjLyQI6E>

<sup>45</sup>Dr Downing Music, accessed April 22, 2012, [http://www.drdowningmusic.com/index.cgi?page=oboe\\_technique.html&d=0](http://www.drdowningmusic.com/index.cgi?page=oboe_technique.html&d=0)

woman has her head and chin down, which puts the oboe at a 90 degree angle coming straight out of the mouth as opposed to the 45 degree angle that was advised.

Another example of potentially confusing information on the site Oboe for All exists within the picture of illustrations exhibited that feature the bad embouchure habits. These portray a young student biting the reed and bunching his chin, but there is not an illustration showing a good example of the embouchure to reinforce this information.<sup>46</sup> There is also another picture on this site that exhibits a student who has the reed placed on his lips sideways up and down in the mouth instead of having the reed laying flat on his lips. This website noted using this method to show how much space there needs to be between the teeth so that there will not be any biting which is admirable, but this could be confusing to beginning students. Sometimes younger students observe and retain more information through visual presentation than through video presentation. In this case a student might try to play the oboe with their reed sideways.

Text alone can be an excellent way to describe and reinforce points, especially if the text content is presented accurately and clearly, which some websites have achieved. One particularly good site with several resources is Martin Schuring's Arizona State University (ASU) website.<sup>47</sup> Schuring is an oboe professor at ASU, the editor of the *Barret Oboe Method* published by Kalmus in 2001 and the author of *Oboe Art and Method*, published in 2009. There are currently no videos, and the graphics are limited to diagrams for reed education and excerpts of music when he is referencing specific pieces and musical concepts; but both of these are very helpful. Although videos are not

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<sup>46</sup>Oboe for All, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://oboeforall.com/Embouchure.html>

<sup>47</sup>ASU Oboe Homepage, accessed April 22, 2012 <http://www.public.asu.edu/~schuring/main.html>

included, this is the most outstanding resource site that I found because of the enormous amount of information. This site seems to be for his current and future college students, but it is a great resource for students and teachers alike. The information might be difficult to understand and digest for a beginner, but an ambitious high school student could benefit greatly from this site. He makes no specific reference to the embouchure, but I highly recommend his sections labeled “Daily Warm-up Routine,” “How to Practice,” and “Notes for Beginning Reed Makers.”

With regard to embouchure, the site of Rebecca Nagel, the Professor of Oboe at the University of South Carolina (USC), is helpful. This site is also mainly text, with no videos and limited graphics, but it includes musical excerpts used to explain exercises for warm-ups, technique, tonguing, and vibrato. There are two links on her USC page that I would refer students to depending on their level, as much of the information is geared more toward college students: Oboe Basics and Oboe Links. Under Oboe Basics there are Warm Ups for Oboe, where she addresses embouchure. The text begins with “Form the lips as when whistling.” She presents the information in a very clear manner, using five bullets and one paragraph. In the paragraph she encourages an embouchure exercise by saying, “Using the reed alone, make a tone using a normal embouchure. While sustaining the sound, shift the reed from its normal position to 90 degrees off, so that the flat side of the reed is positioned vertically in your mouth. If you have to open the mouth substantially to do this, you are biting the reed. You can also do this while playing a note on the oboe.” Although I have not used this with students, I believe that Nagel has a good point. She encourages students to use their finger in place of the reed in their mouth as another example, similar to a demonstration in Rebecca Henderson’s video (see

below), so that the student can “feel a soft supporting cushion around your finger with the teeth and jaws apart.” I agree this is a good demonstration to discourage biting.

Finally, there are several good examples that combine some text and video well, and I would recommend parts of these to my students to supplement my own materials. All three of the best videos come from oboe professors, with two of the videos on sites accessed through their universities. The first is a video from Louis Hall, who is a Professor of Oboe and Music Education at the University of Maine.<sup>48</sup> His manner is very professional and inviting to all groups including younger students. Hall brings his audience in by saying, “Not many people can identify with the details of an oboe embouchure.” He also uses a straw as a prop to show the embouchure shape and encourages whistling. His video is quite similar to my “Good Habits” video (see chapter 3 below). He then describes the steps to embouchure and reiterates this with text on the screen as follows:

1. Jaw down
2. Corners in
3. Inside of mouth open and round, saying “oh”
4. Lips slightly rolled in over the teeth
5. Reed and oboe are directioned [sic] more forward than down

I agree with Hall’s points, and I like how he acknowledges that the lips are slightly rolled in instead of completely rolled in like others. Still, I find that telling students to roll in is confusing and causes them to roll in too much and bite and bunch. The way that Hall addresses “biting, or putting top to bottom pressure on the blades of

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<sup>48</sup>Louis Hall has a Master of Education and a Doctor of Education from the University of Illinois. Mr. Hall studied with Jerry Sirucek, Blaine Edlefsen, and Joel Evans. Found on his commercial website Gud Muse, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://www.gudmus.com/products.htm>

the reed” with the use of a mouth mold being filmed from the back of the mouth to show the effects of biting on the reed, which is placed between the teeth, is ingenious.<sup>49</sup>

A second, very professional site is the LIPS (Live Illustrations by Professionals), an online resource housed on the University of Texas at Austin’s Center for Music Learning website. On this site there are several tutorials featuring the flute, oboe, horn, bassoon, clarinet, saxophone, and trumpet teachers from the university’s music faculty.<sup>50</sup> The oboe tutorials are comprised of interviews with Rebecca Henderson, the current Professor of Oboe at the University of Texas at Austin.<sup>51</sup> There are nine videos in total: the Fundamentals; Articulation; Dynamics; High Register; Instruments and Reeds; Low Register; Melody; Middle Register; and Vibrato. The videos appear to be filmed in Rebecca Henderson’s school studio with an interviewer asking her questions out of view of the camera. The conversation is at a level perhaps most useful for college students or instructors.

From the beginning, Henderson analogizes oboe playing to singing “with regards to air use, pitch, stability, and flexibility of tone color and phrasing,” a concept I include in my teaching. In reference to embouchure, she encourages practicing with the reed alone and presents an exercise on the notes, A flat, B flat, and C. She describes this exercise by saying,

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<sup>49</sup>This particular video is the only video of his available online, but his instructional DVD can be purchased from his commercial website Gud Muse, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://www.gudmus.com/products.htm>

<sup>50</sup>Live Illustrations by Professionals, accessed 4/22/12, <http://cml.music.utexas.edu/online-resources/lips/rebecca-henderson-oboe/>

<sup>51</sup>Rebecca Henderson is also a former faculty member at the University of Washington. Ms. Henderson holds degrees from the Oberlin Conservatory and the Eastman School of Music, where she was also awarded the distinguished “Performer’s Certificate.” Her teachers have included Richard Henderson, James Caldwell, Richard Killmer, John Mack, John de Lancie, and Grover Schiltz.

You want to control the movement of the reed and the change in pitch that we're about to do with the upper lip. So the upper lip goes from "OO" to "Omm," right? The lower lip is stable and keeps pulling that lower blade down. Otherwise you're gonna go sharp and you're gonna have sort of a pinched bitten sound. So this is real important that this stays stable and stays down and show a little pink of the lower lip, you know when you're playing.

I have not yet used exercises that focus on specific notes on the reed myself, but I hope to see how this works in my own teaching in the future. However, it is possible that the use of "Omm" might encourage biting. In reference to the upper lip controlling pitch, a player must be careful not to use too much upper lip in the mouth, which could dampen the reed's vibrations. In contrast to Rebecca Henderson, Martin Schuring believes that reed placement is responsible for pitch (not the lips). He also warns that using the sound "Mmm" may be indicative of tension at the center of the lips and that there is a possibility that biting is occurring.<sup>52</sup>

The final website I would recommend is at SUNY Fredonia which offers an impressive range of resources.<sup>53</sup> When referring my students, I would specifically mention two subtabs<sup>54</sup> under the "Oboe Information" tab: "Warm Ups" and "Common Problems of the Young Oboist." The exercises under Warm Ups are beneficial, and the way that the common problems are explained with the categories of problems, possible causes, and solutions is logical.<sup>55</sup> The written information presented about embouchure

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<sup>52</sup>Martin Schuring, *Oboe Art and Method* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 17-18.

<sup>53</sup>Fredonia's Oboe Studio at SUNY Fredonia, accessed 4/22/12, <http://www.fredonia.edu/music/oboe>. The two oboe instructors are Sarah Hamilton, who has a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Ohio State University, and Marc Dubois, who received his Master of Music from the University of Buffalo, and a Master of Education in oboe performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music.

<sup>54</sup>Throughout the document, the titles of website tabs and subtabs are set off with quotation marks.

<sup>55</sup>It was also interesting that some of the common problems listed on this site sound somewhat like the videos on my website, for instance on half-holes and water issues.

under these common problems is helpful and clear. These address biting and bunching, for example, as I would:

Biting-

Problem: “Notes squeak”

Possible Causes:

the student is biting too much, or not rolling out enough

the student is moving his jaw too much

Solutions:

work on keeping the jaw open and steady, while finding the correct placement of the reed on the lips

work on flexibility exercises with your student

Bunching-

Problem: “Student chin 'crumples'- bunching”

Possible Causes:

the student cannot keep air pockets out of the embouchure

the student cannot keep correct embouchure for very long

the student cannot control reed easily

Solutions:

work on pointing the chin, and keeping the chin flat by pulling the lips over the teeth.

practice without the reed, and try checking and re-adjusting at the end of each phrase.

The information above is valuable given that rolling in the lips is a difficult gray area to address in oboe playing and teaching. For example, in the video, the instructor says, “Invert that whistle into your mouth by rolling your lips over your teeth.” The text, in contrast, points out that possible causes for notes squeaking could be that “the student is biting too much, or not rolling out enough.” Some rolling in of the lips may need to occur so that the teeth are covered by the lips and not directly on the reed. However, I actively discourage my own students from rolling in the lips because encouraging them to roll in might result in them putting too much lip in their mouth (which can result in

bunching and biting). Everyone has a different lip, jaw, and facial structure so this issue should be addressed individually with students based on physique. This site is very useful.

Overall, even with the recent great expansion of the Internet, there are very few websites dedicated specifically to oboe instruction. The websites that do exist are not geared towards online instruction, and the majority of these sites do not offer enough resources for downloading at the beginner level. For the sites that include videos, the production quality is highly variable while other sites focus on performance issues other than embouchure or provide only limited information. Clearly, a need exists for a site that takes advantage of multi-media communication, demonstrates good embouchure technique consistently, clearly, and thoroughly for beginners, and is dedicated primarily to an embouchure method for the oboe.

## Chapter 2: The Curriculum for Oboe Embouchure

Embouchure, the cornerstone of playing the oboe well, affects pitch, intonation, tonguing, and vibrato, as well as all other aspects of playing. There are other tribulations associated with playing the oboe, but embouchure is the most significant and frequent problem for students of this instrument. Ronald Roseman points to three of the salient difficulties with oboe embouchure,

Embouchure is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of oboe-playing to discuss, primarily because most of the action is taking place inside the mouth where it cannot be seen. Too, the muscles surrounding the mouth are some of the most flexible and refined of the human body. Thus, most of the movements are very subtle ones, allowing for an infinite variety of usage. It's probably fair to say that, just as no two faces look exactly alike, no two embouchures are exactly alike.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of a well-formed embouchure is a challenge not only for beginner oboe players, but also for intermediate and advanced players, who encounter difficulties with higher-level concepts such as phrasing, control, and dynamics when their embouchure is not up to par. The good news is, however, that if a student can fix his or her embouchure, all of the other issues will usually fall into place or will become easier to tackle.

### *Development of the Method*

I developed my teaching method over more than twenty years of playing, studying, and teaching. When I found something that worked and made sense, I kept using that approach, and slowly a method evolved. Conversely, when I have noticed certain things did not make sense to my students or myself, I modified my method, or

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<sup>1</sup> Vaneman, Kelly McElrath, "Sounding Beautiful: A Series of Interviews with Ronald Roseman on the Concept and Particulars of Sound Production, Part II." *The Journal of the Double Reed Society*, 25, no. 4 (1994-1995): 45.

simply abandoned a practice or technique altogether. In my own practicing, I worked intensely to attain the proper embouchure. I have learned through hard work, observation of professional oboists, and experimentation, all of which has helped me explain things in a very detailed and thorough manner to others. Correcting the faults of my own embouchure – which seemed to entail almost every problem (including biting, bunching, air pockets above and below the lips, and not tight enough corners) – I have found it easier to explain to others what is or is not the correct way of resolving problems with the embouchure.

If a teacher does not work to correct his or her own embouchure (because for example, they naturally have a good embouchure or because they do not realize that their embouchure is not correct), he or she may not be aware of the importance of ensuring that their students are forming proper embouchures and avoiding mistakes and bad habits. In addition, some teachers may be less concerned with the fundamental aspects of playing the oboe and may be focused on more technical aspects or other elements of music such as rhythm, pitch, or dynamics. This lack of concern may be especially true of college students who need to perform in a number of ensembles and recitals, and it seems there is little, if any, time to spend on fundamentals such as the embouchure. Nevertheless, my experience in teaching younger students has taught me how important it is to conquer the fundamentals and to be able, almost scientifically, to break down how we learn the basics of the embouchure.

Being scientific, in my view, means that a teacher has to use the process of elimination to solve the problems of oboe playing, including problems a student may be experiencing with the embouchure. There are many variables involved in playing the

oboe, and many times it is hard to know which one is causing the problem. After years of trying to fix everything at once in my own or my students' playing, I decided there must be an easier way and subsequently developed a method for isolating specific variables to create a more effective and efficient process.

For teachers these main questions can help solve problems:

- (1) Does the oboe work?
- (2) Does the reed work?
- (3) What is the student doing?

With regard to the first and second questions, I try things out myself. I begin with my students' oboes and adjust them, or send them out to be repaired to eliminate this group of variables. I also try my students' reeds and ask them questions about how they feel. Beginners need to have reeds that make it easy to blow freely and to get the notes out, while also being light enough for them to play without getting tired too fast as they build their endurance. If a reed feels too hard to me, I am sure that it will be too hard for them. If they say that the reed is too hard for them to blow into or too hard to play on, I scrape the reed during the lesson to ensure that the students have reeds appropriate to their level. This eliminates another set of variables. (Appendix 1 contains additional information on reeds designed to be helpful to beginner, intermediate, and advanced players.)

In examining a student's embouchure, I have to problem-solve and eliminate

variables again.<sup>2</sup> Initially, I introduce the whistle shape, and I make sure that they do not have their teeth on the reed. Then I make sure that they do not have too much of the reed in their mouth so that they can get used to the plateau position. (The plateau position is when the student places his or her lips on the plateau part of the cane section of the reed.) Then I make sure that they are not rolling in their lips over the reed too much -- this kind of rolling motion or position encourages biting -- and I address this first because, as explained below, this is a variable that needs to be eliminated before fully addressing biting. Once a student begins working on the correct placement and form of the mouth and lips, I talk more about the whistle shape again and start to focus on biting until that habit is gone. If biting is being caused by bunching, I try to eliminate that habit first, and then come back to biting after bunching has been eliminated. Although biting is the worst habit, other bad habits can inhibit the ability to stop biting. As fixing biting can take a long time, I intermittently address air pockets or leaks, which are of secondary importance.

Often problems take a long time to fix, so they might not always be gone before a student moves on. Instead, in warm-ups, I encourage students to work on their specific challenges, while they progress in other areas by practicing etudes and solos. I have them focus on playing pieces after their warm-ups without worrying the whole time about embouchure because some problems take years to fix. In the case of an oboe or reed that does not work though, the problem should be eliminated at the outset, so a student can give his or her attention to correcting those things within the student's control.

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<sup>2</sup>This also works for tonguing and fingering at the same time. If a student cannot do both cleanly, I separate the two and work individually on each issue before I put them back together to eliminate the variable or figure out which one is making the student play in an unclear fashion.

Although this may seem odd, my method incorporates humor to communicate ideas and to encourage a student to remember a concern. With regard to air pockets in the cheeks, for a long time I kept telling my students how bad pockets were, but this did not make them stop having pockets. Then, after watching a colleague, Bruce Carpenter, work with one of his students and make jokes to fix the issue, I discovered that humor often works. He would say, “You have balloons in your cheeks. If I see those again, I will have to pop those balloons.” The student laughed, remembered, and thought about not playing with ballooned cheeks, and the balloons went away. To this day, I use this humorous analogy, or another funny analogy such as a squirrel whose cheeks are puffed-out with nuts. (I use this especially with clarinet players, since this seems to be an especially common bad habit on the clarinet because of the instrument’s looser mouth piece.) To break the habit of biting, I also use humor to good-naturedly poke at an alligator’s teeth or, as Marcel Tabuteau said, “Avoid the crocodile’s bite” to break the habit of biting.<sup>3</sup> This breaks the ice and often times the habit of biting over time. I have found that harping on a student over and over about the same problem, without any humor or light-heartedness is less effective. Over the years, I have found that if I am not saying something in a way that can be absorbed by a student, I need to find a way to capture their attention in order to get results. Sometimes, this calls for not only a little humor but also some creativity.

Recently, I had a student who was stopping her air and changing her embouchure every time she switched notes (because she was worrying about the fingerings and the notes instead of her air and embouchure). I explained to her that she had to keep her air

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<sup>3</sup>This was passed down to me through John Mack who studied with Tabuteau.

steady and connect the notes, but my explanation did not cure the problem. I played it for her, but that also did not work. So I said, “All right, I will play the notes and you put your air through the instrument.” I stood behind her and played the notes for her on her oboe, while she kept her air steady, and it sounded wonderful. I asked her if she could hear and feel the difference, and she said that she could. When she played again, this time without me playing the notes, the problem was solved because she had the feel of it! Sometimes you just have to eliminate the variables and be imaginative. This experiment allowed the student to focus on her breathing and embouchure, and helped her endurance because when she was stopping her air and moving her embouchure for every note, she was wasting a lot of energy. Once she knew how to keep going from one note to another, she could play for much longer without getting tired.

In music, as in other fields, the first step of learning is awareness that something is not being done properly or well. The second step is the determination to fix it or to find out how to fix it. The third step is to apply a solution, and the last step is to assess if the issue has been fixed. Although I believe that a student can fix anything with determination and the correct information, I have found conversely that improper information and lack of results lead to frustration on the students’ part. This may cause them to give up and return to improper methods, or quit the instrument altogether.

In going through the steps of learning how to use a proper embouchure, a teacher must also consider that each student potentially brings different factors to the equation. For example, everyone is different physically (especially their chin, face, lips, and jaw shapes). One instance comes to mind as to how these physical differences can impact the embouchure: people with extremely small lips and people with extremely large or full

lips have the most issues with rolling-in. I have very small lips and, therefore, had a hard time telling even in a mirror how much I was rolling in my lips because my lips disappear when I smile or play (which are not one in the same, having different shapes). Once, I even went so far as to draw with a pen around my lips just to see how much of my lips I was rolling in, although I would not encourage other teachers or students to do this. I also learned from other teachers and students with larger lips that it is difficult for them to keep enough lip outside of the mouth as, apparently, larger lips automatically want to collect inside of the mouth. These people are constantly fighting to keep that lower lip out of their mouths.

Another type of student to consider is the one who is in a rush to play things which are too technical, too difficult, or too fast for their abilities because these students often disregard the fundamentals of their playing, making it difficult for them ultimately to succeed. If a student has neglected basic problems with embouchure, such as the bad habit of biting down on the reed, the student will experience short- and long-term difficulties. When faced with the challenge of playing for any length of time (which could happen in a rehearsal, concert, or summer-band setting), the issues are magnified, as playing for several hours with the improper embouchure will cause physical pain and poor tone and intonation. When students play for hours in one sitting, their hands, wrists, and arms will hurt if they have bad hand position or if they hold their bodies in a tense position. In the case of playing with a flawed embouchure, if a student is biting down on the reed through the lips, there will be pain on the inside of the lips from teeth indentations or cuts caused by the biting. It may take longer for these bad habits to physically manifest themselves in a person who only practices for short periods of time,

something which is very typical for beginners. Eventually, however, the pain will become noticeable if they are using their body incorrectly and should serve as a strong signal to a teacher that the student is doing something wrong.

The oboe requires more “chops” than any other woodwind. (The colloquial term “chops” refers to the strength of players’ lips and facial muscles, how long they can play well, and how much endurance they possess.) An oboe player must have stronger lip and facial muscles than players of many other instruments. The oboe reed is smaller than the bassoon reed or the clarinet and saxophone mouthpieces, and while the mouth opening used to play the flute can be very small, muscle strength in the mouth areas is somewhat different in that the lips are not forming around a reed. In playing the oboe, the player has to constantly form the lips precisely around a small opening (“just so”), which causes oboe players to become fatigued more easily and quickly than other woodwind players. Thus, the proper formation of a player’s embouchure is critical.

In general, students do not neglect their embouchure on purpose; they typically do not even know that they have embouchure issues. Not all students have all of the most common bad habits, but having even one can lead to another, like a virus. An improper embouchure can take years to break. Tonguing improperly and poor breathing can also take many lessons to explain and fix but are not necessarily as difficult to fix, and they do not always affect as many other issues as embouchure. There have been players and performers who pushed through their studies with an improper embouchure, but inevitably they had to address this issue at some point. It is much easier, however, to fix embouchure by learning it correctly from the beginning instead of having to fix it later.

Learning it later means having to address the issue, unlearn, or abandon bad habits, and relearn good habits.

### *The Five Most Common Bad Embouchure Habits*

In studying how to create the proper embouchure, there are five categories of common and specific problems that students generally experience. Typically, these include biting, bunching, rolling-in the lips too much, and having leaks or air pockets in the embouchure.

Biting appears to be the most common and, along with bunching, is the hardest problem to address and takes the longest time to correct. The bad habit of biting occurs when a player plays the oboe by biting the reed through lip-covered teeth. Some players put their teeth directly on the reed when they first begin playing due to misinformation or poor instruction, but usually biting occurs with the biting of the reed through the lips. Having the teeth on the reed can break the reed or stop the reed from vibrating at all, or as it should. Biting makes the lips look flat across the top, forcing the mouth into a smile-like formation, and it usually happens because of a lack of endurance in the lips and facial muscles to hold a more whistle-like pose. When players become tired, they begin biting to keep a grasp on the reed instead of resting. Including long tones in their practice sessions can greatly increase endurance. Biting in this manner is serious enough to cause the player to have indentations or cuts on the inside of their top and bottom lips, the top lip indentation being the most common. This can be very painful and take hours to heal. Biting also produces sharp pitch and poor tone quality, and makes it difficult to tongue cleanly and use vibrato, because the teeth are restricting the flow of air into, and the vibration of, the reed.

Players can see if they are biting by checking in the mirror to look for a smile-shaped or un-centered embouchure. Without using a mirror, at the beginning of their playing they may not be aware of the habit or be able to feel it in their muscles. After sustained playing, a player may become aware because of pain in the mouth.

Another common problem, bunching, occurs when a player bunches his or her chin muscles upward toward the lips. This habit runs counter to the ideal embouchure, which requires a flat chin to support the reed. When the chin is flat, it points downward away from the mouth and flattens out across the face. A flat chin, as opposed to a bunched chin, allows a player to control the oboe's sound production, pitch, and tone. If a student is bunching, it will look like all of the chin muscles are bunched or pushed upward toward the lips. A bunched chin will not be able to support the reed as needed and will leave a player without control over their embouchure, sound, tone, pitch, and dynamics. In some cases, a bunched chin may also result in having too much lip on the reed, which in turn dampens the reed's vibrations and causes flatness of pitch and dullness of tone. In extreme cases, bunching will cause the bottom lip to puff out and up. In this situation, the bunching interferes with the jaw's natural placement and may result in the upper lip failing to cover the top blade. The teeth then may hit the top of the reed and the bad habit of biting can also occur. Over time, this bad habit may cause jaw displacement by causing the top jaw to move forward from its natural position (which could require having to consult an orthodontist, as I have seen in some cases). Bunching is the most easily observed bad habit, but it might be hard to feel how extreme the habit is without a mirror, unless it causes pain, as in the case with biting or jaw discomfort.

Rolling the lips in too much on the reed is the next most common type of bad

habit in my experience. Some teachers might not consider this to be a major problem. However, as rolling the lips in on the reed too much goes hand in hand with biting, this can become a big issue. Rolling in the lips, as mentioned above, may be a function of a person's lip size, so a teacher will want to consider this physical aspect of students. With the proper shape, the lips need to cover the teeth so that the teeth are not directly on the reed. But rolling the lips into the mouth too much on the reed can cause the lips to bunch on the inside of the mouth and result in too much coverage of the reed, dampening its vibration.

In contrast to the three bad habits of biting, bunching, or rolling-in the lips on the reed, students should be aiming to form a whistle shape with the mouth, as if they were trying to produce a whistle sound. The lips will be a little less puckered out once the reed is in the mouth, but this familiar shape is closest to the proper embouchure shape. This provides students a very useful mental image of the correct embouchure. Another shape similar to the whistle is that of the lips sucking on a straw, and I use that image if the whistle shape is not working for a particular student. One concern with using the straw image is that it could encourage the lips to roll in a little too much. The whistle shape encourages all of the good habits, including a flat chin and tight corners that are pulled forward and inward. The whistle also discourages all of the bad habits.

Rolling one's lips too far in on the reed can be a difficult habit to break as everyone has different lip sizes and shapes, and, again, the only way for a student to figure this out on his own is to look in the mirror. Once a student knows where the lips can be on the reed, he or she can use their hand to feel how much lip to allow out of the mouth, but this must be decided first visually. In a mirror, the whistle shape can be used

to note how much red of the lips is visible without putting the reed in the mouth. If the amount of red that is seen decreases once the reed is in the mouth, then you are likely rolling-in too much.

Leaks and pockets are amongst the easiest problems to solve, and telling the student to focus on centering their lips usually fixes leaks in a week or two. If they are shown in the mirror that they have pockets, they can see for themselves (some get embarrassed) and usually fix that issue quickly. Leaks happen when air escapes from the corners of the mouth or from around the reed. In many cases, there will be an audible leaking noise while playing which can be disconcerting and distracting, but should signal the problem. Leaks come from not having tight corners of the mouth. With tight corners, it should feel like the top and bottom lips are pushing themselves together in a muscular fashion that can be felt in the facial muscles, almost like a sit-up or pull-up is felt in the abdominal muscles. It takes repetitive practice to build strength in the facial muscles for tight corners; however, for a proper embouchure the corners should be forward, in, and tight. Loose corners often come from the mouth's corners being pulled back and outward from the center of the mouth in such away that allows air to leak and usually encourages the unsatisfactory smile-like embouchure. If the corner muscles are pushing together in the corners correctly, they close the air gaps, support an open and whistle-like shape in the middle of the mouth, and discourage biting and the other bad habits.

Leaking is probably the least harmful physically to the player, and might also be the most noticeable to the player and those around because of the annoying noise that these leaks create. The physical downfall of leaks is that they make a player become fatigued faster, wasting precious air and energy. If the player is forming tight corners,

they should be able to feel those muscles more than any of the other facial muscles, but it is still always good to use a mirror.

Air pockets can cause leaks, but not all of the time, so the presence of leaking and air pockets should be addressed separately. Air pockets occur when air collects in the cheeks or above and below the lips. Air pockets in the cheeks sometimes exist even with an otherwise good embouchure, but they waste air and distort the sound. Air pockets in the cheeks and above and below the lips can cause several problems including bunching, biting, rolled-in lips, and air leaks. This issue can cause the same harmful indentations on the lips and over time extreme expansion of the cheek muscles. As I know from my own students, a student might not realize this is going on without first looking in the mirror and seeing it for themselves. Pockets of air can also be felt by placing one hand on each of the areas that could be affected, and it may take constant reminders (interspersed with humor) to modify this habit.

### *Proper Form and Exercises*

If the five bad habits are biting, bunching, leaks, pockets, and rolling-in the lips, then the five good habits are the whistle shape, no teeth on the reed, no biting, tight corners, and a flat chin. Students can develop these good habits in three ways: 1) By having someone outline what they should aim for; 2) by watching themselves play in a mirror to make sure they are overcoming the bad habits and creating good habits; and 3) by using specific exercises in their warm-ups.

When correcting specific problems, my method begins with the fundamentals; therefore, whatever level he or she is playing at, a student can use the method to improve and progress. More advanced players should be able to process this information more quickly than a beginner, but unlearning and relearning proper technique will depend on how engrained the original poor technique is and how dedicated the student is to changing his or her bad habits.

In the process of teaching the method, I have developed some mnemonics to help students remember the bad and good habits. For bad habits, I use the phrase “Biting Bunched Lips Pressure Reeds.” This phrase goes mostly in order of importance, except the bad habit of rolling-in was moved to the end of the phrase. For good habits, I use either “Will The Best Come First” or “Whistle the Best (you) Can Forever.” Once good and bad habits have been explained, much of a student’s learning comes from looking for the right body position and being aware of what bad habits look and feel like in their mouth and facial muscles.

To teach students how to put the reed in their mouth without them biting on it, I have them practice in front of the mirror and then without a mirror. This is a simple

exercise. I simply ask them to stick out their tongue and bring the reed into their mouth. They usually get this in the first or second lesson. They only have to bump the reed on their teeth and lips once and either hurt themselves or break the reed in order to get this concept.

I also encourage them to practice opening and closing their mouth without changing their embouchure in front of a mirror, standing very close to the mirror so that they can see well. I suggest that they use a compact mirror when they are out of the house for all of the mirror exercises and especially for ensemble use so that they can focus on this during warm-ups. I have them practice this opening and closing ten times per lesson in front of me until they get it correct.

For starting notes, I use a five-step process.<sup>4</sup> With the reed already in your mouth: 1) exhale (to release any stale air); 2) inhale; 3) set or form the correct embouchure while placing your tongue on the reed; 4) set the air in motion by using the diaphragm and then bring the air into the mouth, and finally; 5) release the tongue and start the note. This is a somewhat advanced concept, but I try to cover it early in students' lessons so that they do not form bad habits. I usually practice this with them and introduce one step at a time until they get each of the steps down. I then reiterate each step throughout their progress and then isolate individual steps as needed.

At first most students do not know what part of their body to breathe from, so I talk about the diaphragm, including where it is and how it feels to breathe from there as opposed to just bringing air into the lungs. I have students put their fingers on their belly

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<sup>4</sup> This part of the method was influenced by the techniques of Linda Strommen, with whom I studied while attending Louisiana State University.

button, then have them move their hands to the sides of their bodies, and then have them move their finger upward one and a half inches. I ask them to feel for expansion and have them take five good breaths before they start playing. It can take weeks to months to understand and acquire this process, but we keep working on it until they get it.

To solve the problem of biting, I encourage long tones in front of the mirror so that students can see if they are biting. Doing slow scales on whole notes is also helpful. I encourage them to do these in short spurts throughout the day in mini 5-10 minute practice sessions. I have found teaching students to practice in short spurts especially useful when teaching oboe method classes to avoid students becoming annoyed with how difficult it is to have endurance on the oboe when they are used to being able to play for hours on their own instruments. I also ask my students to feel with their tongue for an indentation from the teeth on the inside of their lips to make sure that they are not biting.

The exercise I use to strengthen the corners of the mouth is intended to make them tight and to support the center of the mouth and the reed. These exercises are called “embouchure push-ups.”<sup>5</sup> There are three steps or types of push-ups. Steps one and two can be done in any order, but the third one should only be done after both one and two have been completed. All three steps should be done together everyday. Initially, these should be done in front of a mirror, but once students can tell how they are supposed to feel, they can do them anywhere. This is a great way for a busy person to practice while doing something else, like sitting at a computer, riding in a car, or reading a book.

For all of these exercises, you should first put your pointer finger in front of the mouth in the center as if to make a “shhh” sound, to give the corners a place to focus and

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<sup>5</sup>I first learned these from Linda Strommen in 1999 and have used them ever since.

also to mark the center of the mouth.

1. First, pull the right corners of the mouth toward the center and crunch them together. The lips and corners on the opposite side will be loose and will stick out to the left. What I mean by crunching together is that the student wants to imagine the top lip in the corner of the mouth pushing down and the bottom lip in the corner of the mouth pushing up so that the two sides are pushing against each other to strengthen the corner muscles. This would be the same for all three “push-ups.”

2. Then pull the left corners of the mouth toward the center and crunch them together. The lips and corners on the opposite side will be loose and stick out to the right.

3. Finally, pull both sets of corners of the mouth toward the center of the mouth and crunch both sets of corners together at the same time. With the third one, keep in mind that the lips might stick out in the center more than they would when playing with the reed.

In addition to these exercises, I use long-tone exercises, which are among the most well known exercises employed by woodwind teachers. (They can be found in some of the early method books.) Long tones played in front of the mirror allow students to focus on the different good and bad habits. Specifically, long tones can help fix biting, bunching, rolling-in, bunching and leaks, which can even occur with advanced players when they get tired and the proper embouchure gives way to bad habits. Done properly, long tones reinforce all of the good habits, tighten and strengthen the corners to keep a player from biting, and help with pitch, tone, vibrato, breathing, and dynamics.

Long-tone exercises are invaluable, I teach several different levels, from beginner to advanced, as set forth in Appendix 2. The long-tone exercises are progressive, and the

various sets must be mastered in order, because otherwise a student will not be able to execute the long-tone exercises for endurance or dynamics. Furthermore, I use several variations depending on the student's level and other specific issues. These exercises can be assigned to advanced students and individually tailored to be longer and more complicated in order to keep students' interest and to challenge their endurance and control of the embouchure and the oboe in general. As students progress, more concepts may be added to the long tones as well. These include tone, pitch, and tonguing, in progressive order for the beginner. For the intermediate student, I add dynamics, and at the advanced level, I add vibrato to these long tones.

For many of these exercises, I encourage my students to use just the reed first and then the full oboe. Breaking the exercises down in this manner permits a student to more easily identify issues. The exercises for embouchure should be done every time the student practices as part of their warm-ups and should be repeated until the skill is mastered. All of these exercises in Appendix 2 can be used in lessons. I recommend that teachers not worry too much if a student does an exercise wrong at first but would advise against moving to the next exercise until the student has mastered the concept being taught such as pitch, tonguing, or dynamics from the previous exercise. Everyone progresses at a different rate, especially from one exercise to another.

### *On Practicing*

I have laid out the method for attaining the proper embouchure in separate steps and exercises, but eventually all the parts need to form one main concept. I believe that embouchure should be fixed before anything else, but I do not want students to lose

interest. They need to work on this in their warm-ups and then move on to play other things until they attain the proper embouchure.

I recommend an equal four-part division of time for practicing.<sup>6</sup> The first part consists of warming-up in front of a mirror. Not warming-up before practicing can hinder endurance. A proper warm-up should include long tones and slow scales, as opposed to starting with a song or solo. Just as with sports, where runners jog before they run, it is vital to warm up before practicing an instrument. I encourage my students to review their embouchure with the mirror at this point in their warm-up and then move on to tonguing, pitch, tone, and more advanced fundamentals like vibrato, later, once they have made progress with their embouchure. The warm-up is the most important part of a practice session and should not be skipped.

Part two of practicing involves doing scales, again with a mirror. Eventually, I encourage students to move on to faster scales in different rhythm and tonguing patterns and more advanced scales. The more advanced scale patterns include: 3rds, 4ths, and 5ths, and can be found in the method books written by Theodor Niemann, Albert Andraud's *Vade-Mecum*, and A.M.R. Barret.<sup>7</sup>

Parts 3 and 4 of practicing should focus on etudes or technical studies and then solos and ensemble pieces. For making music and for focusing on phrasing, dynamics, style, and finesse, I encourage students to end with a piece that they enjoy. I do not think that parts 3 and 4 of a student's practice session necessarily need to be done in front of a

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<sup>6</sup> This was first recommended to me by Danna Sundel in 1993, while studying in Cleveland.

<sup>7</sup>Niemann, *Method for the Oboe or English Horn* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1927; republished, revised, and amplified by Bruno Labate, 1970); Andraud, *Vade-mecum of the Oboist: 230 Selected Technical and Orchestral Studies for Oboe and English Horn*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (San Antonio, Texas: Southern Music Company, 1967); Barret, *A Complete Method for the Oboe* ([United States]: Boosey & Hawkes, n.d.).

mirror, unless there is a larger posture issue that can be seen from farther away. For this part of practicing, one should not be narrowly focused on the embouchure as this would be distracting. Younger students might do parts 3 and 4 in separate practice sessions, depending on their endurance. As a player matures, parts 3 and 4 will lengthen.

In terms of practice length, beginners should work in 5-10 minute spurts (up to 20 minutes as they are building their embouchure) 5 days a week. If they have a lesson, the lesson could count as a day's practice, but I discourage them from taking both Saturday and Sunday off, in case they have to take another day off for a heavy homework night. Intermediate students should aim for 30-45 minutes, 5 days a week. An advanced student should practice 1 to 3 hours daily, based on his or her commitment and goals.

Earlier in the chapter, I noted the importance of endurance (or good chops). Practicing long tones and slow scales correctly and consistently is the fastest way to improve endurance. By "consistency" I mean that it would be better to practice long tones 20 minutes a day, rather than for an hour on two days of the week. Consistency is critical; practicing everyday, at the same time and in the same place is ideal. As with all instruments, taking time off from practicing the oboe will be felt when one returns, but oboists seem to suffer more from taking time off, perhaps due to the acute definition of their muscles. As previously stated, practicing with an incorrect embouchure will cause a player to fatigue easily and quickly and hinder a player's endurance. Not taking sufficient breaks between practice sessions can also undermine endurance.

Because I believe even beginners should not be "stuck" just doing exercises or learning the basics, I use melodies to introduce the notes. The music book that I use for

all woodwinds is *A Tune a Day*.<sup>8</sup> I use this series for all of the woodwinds because it has a lesson per page, with just the right amount of material to assign a beginner per week. What I like the most about *A Tune a Day*'s typical format is that it introduces a note with the fingering and gives five or so easy exercises on just that note. Then, as more notes are introduced, each page of the book has a solo melody or two for the student, and at least one duet.

*A Tune a Day* also introduces the notes of each instrument in an order close to that which I generally use – closer, in fact, than several other books that I have surveyed. Under my method, I introduce notes beginning with the notes that are the easiest for the student to play physically with their beginner embouchure and fingers. Some woodwind students start when their fingers/hands are too small to cover or use all of the keys. *A Tune a Day* introduces notes in this order: B-A-G-C-F- B flat, while I introduce notes in this order: B-C-A-G-B flat-F. I, therefore, assign the lessons from the *Tune a Day* in the order of the notes I think they should be learning and supplement with more melodies from other sources until they are ready to learn the F. I think it is best to introduce B and C first because playing B to C is the best way to practice plateau position. I spend a lot of time on these two notes outside of the book in order to work on embouchure from the beginning. I introduce B flat before F: F, a low note on the oboe, is difficult to play on the oboe at first, which can be discouraging to a beginner oboe player. To avoid this, I introduce B flat before F, giving students plenty of melodies with B flat before moving on to F to ensure they feel confident when they get to F. Moreover, B flat is one of the tuning notes used for band, so it is helpful for them to know this note before F.

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<sup>8</sup>C. Paul Herfurth, *A Tune a Day for Oboe* (Boston: The Boston Music Co., 1982).

There are duets throughout *A Tune a Day*, and for all of my woodwind teaching, duets have been the best way for students to hear what they are supposed to sound like. I have discovered that they also enjoy duets because they are playing with someone else instead of practicing alone, which sometimes gets boring for the student. When students play duets with their teacher, they hear how their instrument is supposed to sound, and can pick up on tone quality, pitch, intonation, length of notes, and style. This method can be a quick and efficient way for students to learn, while also preparing them to play with other players when they are ready to be in an ensemble.<sup>9</sup>

#### *An Aside About Embouchure and Pitch*

Embouchure directly correlates to one's ability to play in tune, to have proper intonation, and to produce a good tone. "Playing in tune" means being able to match a tuner and to make one's instrument play in tune within its own scale and tendencies. A "tendency" means the propensity of specific notes to play in tune, sharp, or flat. This is something that can take years of practice and requires the manipulation of a player's skills with respect to many different facets of the oboe. The proper set-up for playing consists, at a minimum, of good reeds and an oboe that one can rely upon. Figuring out one's pitch tendencies and the instrument's tendencies is of the utmost importance.<sup>10</sup> Beginners should use their tuners all the time but then move away from using the tuner as they develop their own ear. They also need to understand their tendencies for each note and learn what they need to do to play in tune automatically without the use of a tuner.

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<sup>9</sup>The "Play along" and "Duets" tabs were created on the website to prepare students for ensembles and provide fun in addition to the method. See chapter three below.

<sup>10</sup>A player must learn these tendencies and figure out a way to overcome them to play in tune. This is an advanced concept, which, on the oboe, requires adjusting reed placement, air speed, air pressure, and several other aspects of playing.

Intonation involves using one's knowledge of pitch and being able to play in tune with other players. Tone combines the timbre of the instrument and the quality of the sound that the player produces. If an oboist has poor tone, it might be difficult for the player to have good intonation. Intonation is also determined by the blending of tones or sounds at the advanced level. Playing perfectly in tune with the tuner does not automatically mean that you will play with good intonation with another player or within a group of players. Each instrument used in the group will have different tendencies within itself, as will each individual player. This means that a player has to rely on his or her ears to play in tune with other players. Good intonation comes from listening to the general pitch level of the group and adjusting accordingly. Playing with a tuner helps develop a good ear, but it is a more mechanical approach to fixing the problem compared to correcting intonation by learning to listen well and adjusting one's intonation to that of other players.

I have found from playing duets or in ensembles that blending with another player's tone fixes pitch and intonation issues more quickly than overanalyzing who is sharp and who is flat.<sup>11</sup> If a student is struggling with intonation at school, I will play along with them and have them focus on matching my tone. Inevitably, including this type of play along with exercises, as a regular part of the lesson, leads the student to play more in tune. Also in teaching, I have found that if a student is struggling to be in tune with the tuner, having them turn away from the tuner to focus on centering their tone

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<sup>11</sup>Not everyone can hear if something is in tune or not. Most people notice when something is flat more readily than they do when something is sharp -- hence the tendency of orchestras to play sharp or go sharp during performances. But most people can hear or tell if a player's tone sounds good or bad, even without being a musician.

helps them find the center of the pitch more easily. At the core of good tone, pitch, and intonation lies the embouchure, without a proper embouchure; accomplishing these aspects of oboe playing is rarely, if ever, possible.

At one point, I realized that I had pitch problems and was not able to play in perfect tune, I worked diligently to fix this issue and improve my ability to play in tune. The first step I took was to book a practice room with a baby grand piano. (When you practice with a baby grand piano, it will vibrate with you when you are in tune.) The University of Washington had excellent and regularly tuned pianos in their practice rooms that I could rely on for a strong foundation of pitch. Practicing under these circumstances proved very affirming in my struggle to play in tune.

Pitch and intonation are two habits that coincide, so that once I got my embouchure correct and in good shape physically, I was able to focus on pitch. I realized the importance of fixing things individually and through the process of elimination. I did not know until then that oboe playing could actually be very scientific.

#### *Specific Issues Involved In Switching Instruments*

In addition to playing and teaching the oboe, I have learned to play and teach students of all the other woodwind instruments. I have also had the opportunity to help students switch to the oboe from various woodwind instruments and have been able to draw upon this experience in formulating what embouchure problems students are likely to encounter when moving between other woodwinds and the oboe.

In terms of embouchure, flute appears to be the hardest woodwind to switch from. In teaching flute players how to play the oboe, I focus on the corners of the mouth and have students use the mirror regularly. If they have a frown embouchure on the flute that

is turned down, I use my regular embouchure exercises, especially the embouchure push-ups, to bring their corners up and into the center of the mouth. Some students have a very difficult time switching from a frown to a whistle shape, especially if they are playing both instruments regularly. I have had several students who play multiple instruments. After so many years of playing the oboe, I keep in mind when teaching others how I still struggle with forming the proper embouchure when playing the flute.

The last and easiest woodwind embouchure I learned was the bassoon. Switching between the oboe and bassoon is usually the easiest change because the bassoon reed is a double reed and very similar to the oboe, except it is larger in size. Although many bassoon players also play oboe (because the double reed embouchure and concepts are very similar), most teachers hesitate to switch a bassoon player to oboe because bassoon players are even more rare than oboe players.

For those switching from clarinet and sax I focus on making sure that they are not biting on the top blade of the oboe reed, as they are used to placing their top teeth on the top of the clarinet or sax mouthpiece. As I do for those switching from the flute, I use embouchure push-ups to make sure that they are getting accustomed to having their corners more toward the center of their mouth and watch for leaking that may result from switching to an instrument with a smaller opening for their air. Lastly, I check that their cheeks are not holding air pockets. I do this last, because in getting used to the size difference of the reed, air pockets are likely, given that oboe allows less air into the reed. Once they have the other basics of embouchure down, I then work on breaking any bad habits of air pockets and leaks.

With regard to the fingerings for all of the woodwinds, I point out the similarities

and differences as they learn the notes on the oboe. For hand position, I focus on the fact that the oboe has open holes in its keys. This is easy to grasp for clarinet players and flute players using an open-holed flute because they pay attention to covering these keys. This is much more problematic for sax players and close-holed flute players because they are not used to having to cover the holes. These players may have a learning curve with respect to covering all keys, but the problem should be evident given that the notes may not come out or there may be squeaking noises.

Obtaining the proper embouchure on the oboe requires a good deal of trial and error, a keen focus on how the mouth works on the instrument, many exercises, and a considerable amount of practice. It is a very personal experience for the teacher and the student. One that is enormously dependent upon a willingness to closely analyze what is or is not working and to modify one's habits. While it may take time to develop the proper embouchure (especially if it is already problematic), the proper embouchure is attainable provided the students learn or are taught to be aware of what they are doing. This method is a guide to teach students how to correct bad habits and to adopt good habits. The ultimate goals are that they will enjoy playing the oboe, and will play the oboe beautifully.

### **Chapter 3: Building the Website OboeBasics.com**

The development of the method described in the last chapter came about as a result of years of teaching and practicing oboe. The next challenge I faced was how to translate the in-person method that I was familiar with into one that would be clear and accessible in an Internet format. Originally, I had intended to create a printed method, but with the explosion of YouTube and the increased utilization of commercial and educational websites, I began to consider the advantages of creating and using a website to convey the method that I had developed. The more I researched this option, the more convinced I became that a website could be a highly effective means of sharing basic oboe methods with music students. Over the last year, I created, tested, and remade four versions of the methods website. The test results and issues of effectiveness will be discussed further in chapter four. This chapter will set forth the benefits and drawbacks of using a website to share this method, who the target users of the website are, and the decisions that went into its design.

#### **Fundamental Issues**

##### *The Original Plan*

As mentioned above, the original strategy to disseminate the oboe method was to construct a printed version and make it easily obtainable in the United States. The publication was intended to serve students who did not have the financial resources for private lessons or who lived in places without access to an oboe specialist. For example, the place in which I reside, Wilmington, North Carolina, is a town of approximately 100,000 people, consisting of a population probably typical for a town or city located a

distance away from a major cosmopolitan area.<sup>1</sup> I was interested in creating a method that would allow students coming from these areas or without financial means for lessons to be able to teach themselves.

Originally, I thought that I would be writing some sort of method or practice book, but an online method was suggested. That is when I began to believe that a website might provide an inexpensive means of reaching a larger audience while also enhancing the delivery and teaching of the method. To ensure that this had not been done before and to evaluate whether a website could meet my objectives, I surveyed the Internet to determine what was already available and how educational and commercial music sites were functioning. I also looked at what was available on DVDs (although these would likely be an expensive alternative to in-person teaching, or even to the purchase of a book). As outlined in chapter one, there are currently very few good, creative teaching guides for the oboe.

Nonetheless, I discovered that there are websites for other instruments, which confirms that an Internet website could be a better option than a printed method. An inspiring method, in spite of its name, was “The Complete Idiot’s Guide to the Piano” found on DVD.<sup>2</sup> The presenter is very professional, and the videos are short and clear enough to keep a viewer’s attention. Each lesson provides a concept and explains how to work on that concept. The progression of lessons is clear, and there are several added graphics for playing and note reading that keep a student interested in participating. I

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<sup>1</sup> List of United States cities by population, Wikipedia, accessed February 27, 2012, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_United\\_States\\_cities\\_by\\_population#Incorporated\\_places\\_over10.22C000\\_population%5D](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_cities_by_population#Incorporated_places_over10.22C000_population%5D)

<sup>2</sup> *The Complete Idiot’s Guide*, accessed March 25, 2012, <http://idiotsguides.com/> Currently, this method can only be found in DVD and book formats, but eventually the videos on the DVD may be used to create a commercial website. There is currently no Complete Idiot’s Guide to the Oboe.

was impressed by all aspects of these videos and inspired to adopt some elements of this presentation of material when putting my website together.

Creating a website would not, however, solve all problems. There are both benefits and drawbacks to teaching via the Internet. The first and most important advantage of a website is that it offers the simplest and most accessible way for a much wider range of students to receive and use the curriculum that I have been teaching and developing for years. Many of the good printed methods are currently out of print or only available in Great Britain, which means that students who are trying to learn from a printed method are likely unable to access these works. In smaller cities or towns, there tend to be few, if any, music stores, and the majority of those stores cater to guitars, drums, and keyboards. Locally, in Wilmington, there are three music stores that carry method books for oboe. The books available are limited in number and consist of ensemble methods that have not been written by oboe specialists, which I believe is essential to self-instruction. These stores are willing to order books for students or teachers but in my experience the Internet has been cheaper and more efficient. Therefore, I would normally refer my students to online-purchasing options.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a student wanting to play the oboe is likely to visit and use Internet websites for one reason or another, whether to purchase a book or to use a website that itself teaches a student the basics of how to play the oboe.

A website created to communicate my method would be accessible to anyone who had access to the World Wide Web, whether by computer, phone, or other electronic

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<sup>3</sup>The oboe player would also need to have a good reed source which is possible online. Several individuals who sell on-line make their living from making reeds by hand. Music stores tend to sell reeds that are made with machines. Although there are good types to buy, handmade reeds still sound better and are more stable for the beginning student. Therefore, I have provided buying reed links on the resources page.

devices. In addition, Internet availability and usage is expanding all the time, especially with the younger generation. Now that students may interface with the Internet at anytime of the day or week, website lessons may serve students who otherwise may not be able to fit private lessons into their schedules or who live in places without an oboe specialist on hand. Students and parents who cannot afford lessons would also benefit from learning from a website.

Recent advances in technology have allowed people to teach themselves almost anything. Obviously, some things are harder than others to learn, like playing a musical instrument, which typically requires a long-term commitment, dedication, and regular practice. Furthermore, learning and understanding how to play an instrument may be significantly easier than actually playing that instrument well. In my opinion playing well includes but is not limited to playing with good tone, pitch, and technical facility.

My experiences with students presented another critical justification for creating a method website. In my experience, not only are students today comfortable with using the Internet, but they also seem to retain more information from both hearing and seeing examples, as compared with reading text or hearing material where one is not able to see how something is actually done. In teaching music appreciation, I have found that just playing examples of music from a CD does not educate students effectively, nor does it “stick with them,” as much as using both audio and visual lessons does. Another example of this phenomenon are those students who have never been to a “classical concert,” such as an orchestra, a ballet, the opera, or a chamber music concert. It is not unusual for these students to lack fundamental knowledge about orchestral instruments (having never seen them) and an understanding of classical music. Unfortunately, this

lack of exposure to seeing, hearing, and experiencing music simultaneously may cause students to be dismissive of classical music. Consequently, I have found that using good videos to supplement a text and accompanying CDs can be essential to helping students understand and appreciate music. Publishing companies such as Pearson are continually promoting the “complete package,” which includes a textbook with CDs, DVDs, and Internet website access regardless of whether the course is offered as an Internet, hybrid, or in-person course.

Along these lines, there is no doubt that our youth are more oriented toward visual learning than previous generations. Many are constantly learning information due to an increased amount of time spent on the Internet, and on YouTube specifically. They are quick to dismiss poor quality videos because they have seen so many videos of high quality, and they move on rapidly if a site does not convey what they are looking for, which creates high “bounce rates” for videos and websites.<sup>4</sup>

Embouchure can be a very tedious fundamental to learn and then to practice. I have observed many young and new students, lacking the required discipline, who move past this fundamental too fast and without proper attention. Students are more interested in playing fun songs as soon as possible and do not spend the time needed on developing the proper embouchure. Sir James Galway also recognizes that students do not want to put in the time doing this tedious style of practicing. In his educational video recorded from a public master class, he refers to his method by encouraging the audience to try to get an A 440 and then the A an octave above just using the flute head joint. But, he says,

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<sup>4</sup>A Bounce Rate, Wikipedia, accessed February 27, 2012 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bounce\\_rate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bounce_rate). A bounce rate is an Internet marketing term used in web traffic analysis. It represents the percentage of visitors who enter the site but then leave immediately rather than staying to view other pages at the same site.

Now this takes some time. I think it took me about a month before I could figure this out. Before it really worked for me. And my old teacher Muriel, she said, “Now don’t play anything, just do that everyday.” Like I was gonna do that everyday, I was bossing to play the Carnival of Venice with variations you know (laugh) like every normal kid you know, and of course when she wasn’t watching, I’d have a go at that. (laughs) And then my dad would come home from work and it was back to (sounds A-A). You see this simple exercise in fact stood me in good stead throughout my whole life, because I never had a problem with my embouchure and I could play most flutes that I ever owned very well.<sup>5</sup>

With a website that is dedicated to teaching embouchure method, students would be able to focus on this key element of playing the oboe with a variety of material, demonstrations, play-along practice, progressive exercises, daily instruction, and encouragement.

It cannot be denied, however, that one drawback to teaching through a website is that an instructor cannot see what the student is doing in person to correct a student on the spot, which could lead to bad habits that are time consuming and frustrating to break. In addition, a lesson might go in a different direction if a teacher sees a problem that needs to be fixed. Still, these disadvantages also apply in the case of a student who is attempting to learn through an oboe method book and who is operating without the assistance of a teacher or other means of physical demonstrations. In that case, the student may truly be stuck with a “trial and error” or “hunt and peck” approach to obtaining the most effective embouchure. Thus, as discussed below, the website was built to focus not only on the good or proper embouchure, but also to illustrate how to avoid bad habits.

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<sup>5</sup> Sir James Galway Masterclass – Embouchure, Good Tone, YouTube, accessed March 25, 2012, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQg0vScnQ8E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQg0vScnQ8E)

There is also always the concern that a student will skip or ignore certain lessons while using a traditional approach of practicing from a book or in using a website. However, to counter this problem, a site could encourage a carefully planned, prescribed order by providing a home page website use tutorial and through links at the bottom of each page to guide the student to the next page that they should complete. While this does not mean that students will follow this order, the format and directions of a website can strongly encourage the student to do so, in an effort to improve the effectiveness of the website and the method as a whole. Clarity and repetition would also be essential.

Without a teacher present when a student is studying an oboe method from a book or from a website, there may be no one to observe how the student is playing the instrument. A website would need to be planned and developed to counteract these drawbacks by repeatedly reminding a student to use a mirror to assist in performing the website activities correctly through self-evaluation. A student compares each action with the actions being performed or exhibited on the website.

Finally, if a student uses a book or website alone, there is no teacher who can initially interview a student during the first set of lessons to determine what the student already knows, is doing right, or is maybe doing wrong. It is easier to teach a student when you can evaluate the student in person. Without this evaluation you have to assume that the student does not know anything about the oboe and may have a minimal amount of knowledge about the basics of reading and playing music in general. Some students who are new to the oboe understand how to read notes and rhythms from having experience on another instrument, whereas others do not have any basic knowledge of these music fundamentals. Fortunately, the Internet already offers many sites and

resources to further a student's studies of fingerings, note reading, rhythm, and theory.<sup>6</sup> There are also several applications available for a variety of smart phones and devices that have resources and quizzes to help students learn note reading, rhythm and theory in a very quick manner.<sup>7</sup> Although software applications have not yet been created for oboe instruction, there are oboe-fingering applications available.<sup>8</sup>

In building a website in order to share my method, I struggled with how much time to spend on these aspects of music before deciding to focus on embouchure and other fundamentals of playing the oboe. I designed the website to include embouchure-specific information that does not currently exist in its entirety on any website that I have surveyed, along with additional lessons that might be necessary to support the basics of oboe. For example, my site includes information about the notes and oboe fingerings that a student would need in order to understand and be able to play the long tones exercises included on the site. Although the fingerings video is very clear in a Suzuki-method way, a student might need to access more information about reading music and rhythm before they proceed to the "Play Along" tab<sup>9</sup>. I made this decision in order to keep the attention directed towards the primary goal of teaching oboe methods, and, in particular, oboe embouchure. For the sake of easy access, I have located and posted links on the website to several resources for both music and rhythm under the "Resource" tab.

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<sup>6</sup>See, for example, The Woodwind Fingering Guide, accessed March 25, 2012, [http://www.wfg.woodwind.org/oboe/ob\\_fing.html](http://www.wfg.woodwind.org/oboe/ob_fing.html); Name This Note which includes quizzes, accessed March 25, 2012, <http://courses.wcupa.edu/frichmon/usetech/musicalflashcards/tcnotes.html>; Read Sheet Music, accessed March 25, 2012, [http://readsheetmusic.info/reading\\_rhythms\\_exercises.html](http://readsheetmusic.info/reading_rhythms_exercises.html); and Music Theory.net, accessed March 25, 2012, <http://www.musictheory.net/>

<sup>7</sup>These include the applications Notable, Music Theory and Practice by Musicopoulos, and Music Theory Pro, accessed March 25, 2012, <http://appadvice.com/appguides/show/music-theory-apps>

<sup>8</sup>Applications that can be downloaded for the iPhone and iPad include Oboe; Fingerings Woodwinds; Fingering; and FingeringChartsPro, accessed May 26, 2012.

<sup>9</sup>Throughout the document, the titles of website tabs and subtabs are set off with quotation marks for the sake of clarity.

*Who is the Website Built for?*

The site is specifically designed for children between the ages of 12 and 18, or 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders, which is my target audience, although the site should also be able to assist any individual who is beginning to play the oboe at any age. The website may be best for teaching beginners, because they have not yet developed bad habits that need to be overcome. Nonetheless, the site could also benefit students at every level who need specific help on embouchure and students who are switching to oboe in high school, college, or beyond. In my experience, it is not unusual to run across even college students who have studied for several years and are struggling to correct or perfect their embouchure, to obtain the best tone quality, or to improve their endurance. These students have explained that their need to correct or improve the embouchure has resulted from misinformation or from rushing through the most important fundamentals without proper practice.

Though the website is largely targeted at beginning oboists, it does contain some exercises for more advanced students to use, with or without a teacher. The website curriculum could work very well for a student who is having regular lessons with a teacher, if the teacher decided to assign specific videos for his or her student to work on between lessons.

Just as it is possible that the site could be used by those older or even younger than the targeted age group, different interest groups such as parents, ensemble directors, and method instructors could also use it. Many ensemble directors, parents, and owners of music stores discourage starting students on the oboe before 6<sup>th</sup> grade or even before high school because it is considered to be a very difficult and complicated instrument.

True, the oboe is a challenge, but oddly enough it may actually be the answer to teaching smaller children a woodwind at an early age. Most woodwinds are not made or available in the same variety of sizes as the string family instruments. Woodwind students do not have the luxury of  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ , or  $\frac{7}{8}$ -sized instruments. The exceptions would be the piccolo, E-flat clarinet, and soprano sax. But all of these are more difficult to play than their core instruments -- the flute, the B-flat clarinet, and the alto sax. The former instruments are usually taken up after a student is comfortable playing one of the core instruments. The delicacy of the oboe actually fits young children's hands better than the other woodwinds, as compared, for example, to the clarinet. Whereas a younger student playing the clarinet is likely to have difficulty reaching the third finger open hole on the left hand, on the oboe this key can be reached and covered much more easily. One can also adjust the kinds of reeds given to younger students so that they are using easier reeds than advanced students, which will permit them to focus more on embouchure until they learn proper techniques. Because of these factors, I do not agree that young students should be discouraged from playing the oboe as their first instrument or at an early age. There is no need to wait until their fingers are big enough to play the oboe as it accessible for small hands and large hands alike.

In the course of designing and building the site, it became evident that use of [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) could extend not only to students but to method teachers and ensemble directors as well. College and university level method teachers, graduate students, and professors teach music education majors how to play the oboe (or any instrument needed for their future jobs), often in a short period of time. Thus, they need to obtain correct information about the instrument and ways to practice the fundamentals

very quickly. Although many method teachers are specialists in their instruments, they might have a limited number of classes with their students, or they may need to divide their attention among many students. A website such as [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) could supplement their methods class. The information offered is similar to private lessons, since a teacher can assign specific videos and concepts to be mastered between classes in the interest of time, and then progress can be reviewed at lesson time. Even though it would be more beneficial for oboe teachers and method teachers to be familiar with the methods covered to make specific assignments, this is not a requirement in order for a teacher to refer a student to the website to study the methods introduced there.

Depending on future feedback, as post-graduate work I would consider adding a tab for teachers or including teacher-specific instructions under the “Resource” tab. Another feature of the site is that band and orchestra directors who are not oboe players would not need to know or be versed in the method to direct students to the website.

As explained in the prior chapter, a proper embouchure gives a performer the optimal skills to perform well. A performer will develop a fine tone quality, pitch, endurance, and strength with the least amount of effort when the proper embouchure has been practiced and attained. Every step will take time and practice, but each step along the way will improve the facets of the student’s playing and will better enable the student to focus on other fundamentals and musical aspects of playing.

## **The Design Process**

### *Software Options*

Once I concluded that a website was the best way to disseminate my method, I had to find the right software to construct the website. My first objective was to make a

website that was as clear and easy to navigate as possible with professional quality videos. My second objective was to make the content comprehensible to students through video demonstrations, text, and illustrations.

Prior to beginning work on my oboe dissertation project, I had previously made several commercial websites hosted by Network Solutions (an Internet service provider or ISP), who supplied the Java Café website builder tool with their hosting package. I used these websites to recruit private students for lessons, rather than as a teaching instrument. The websites contained information in a text format describing what lessons I offered, what to expect from private lessons, general information about instruments, and a few non-instructional videos showing footage from former and current students' recitals. The Java Café tool builder was very easy to use, but difficult to customize, and it was impossible to produce a professional-looking website because of the software application's limitations.

Most importantly, Network Solutions did not easily permit html coding, and it was difficult to customize the site's templates. Network Solutions offered several templates, but aside from those, I could not create my own. This meant that self-contained video modules could not readily be placed on the website. Videos would have to be uploaded onto another site such as YouTube and then embedded to my website, which made them more public than they would be on a personal website. YouTube also has slower load times than other streaming sites, a major drawback because I consider videos to be an integral part of teaching my curriculum. Furthermore, having students access the videos on YouTube would not have allowed me to control the organization and direction of the curriculum, and YouTube can be quite distracting since it constantly

posts advertisements before videos and lists other videos alongside the video playing, which could lead a student away from the curriculum. Use of YouTube would have undermined my goal of having students learn the embouchure method in a focused and organized manner.<sup>10</sup> Thus, I found that for this dissertation project the curriculum would need a different website set-up than I had used for my commercial sites. I also discovered that the most easily created website would not give me a website that displayed the best teaching method.

*The [www.windsongstudio.info](http://www.windsongstudio.info) Version*

GoDaddy, another domain name registrar and web-hosting company, using the Dotnetnuke builder tool, hosted the next set of websites that I created. I started with the name [www.windsongstudios.info](http://www.windsongstudios.info) because that branched off of my original commercial site. This work was done with the assistance of a computer programmer, Douglas Cabot with the Greenward Company, L.L.C.<sup>11</sup> Initially, I concentrated on getting the website structure framed out, but encountered a steeper learning curve with the Dotnetnuke builder tool than with Network Solution's Java Café. Nonetheless, the final product looked much better, and the videos on this website could be self-contained, instead of streaming through YouTube. As a consequence, I felt I was headed in the right direction. In this second building process, I originally created a structure with a home page and 14 tabs. I then shifted to a 12-tab navigation system positioned on the left side with shorter

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<sup>10</sup>If I were to use YouTube in the future it would be to take advantage of its popularity and reach. I would post a few videos (for example, Embouchure Lesson 1, Reed Lesson 1 on Long tone 1) to lead prospective students and teachers to my website.

<sup>11</sup>We also created a separate site for my professional woodwind and voice business. This can be viewed at <http://www.windsongstudios.com>

names. (See Figure #1.) After consulting with website specialists, however, I had to shift once more to the more manageable range of 7-10 tabs. The tabs were standard Internet fare such as the “Home,” “About Us,” “Credits,” and others that were specific to this project. I also created a resource page containing a bibliography of works, method books, and websites pertaining to playing the oboe. On [www.windsongstudio.info](http://www.windsongstudio.info) there was only one set of subtabs under the “Duets” tab. Each page had text at the top, followed sometimes by illustrations, then a spot for 1 or 2 videos at the bottom. Overall, the site looked polished and organized. But the site’s name was not evocative of the project of teaching basic oboe method; nor was it searchable, for example, with Google or Bing. At this point, I was not cognizant of how important the name of the site was for Internet searching designed to draw as many students and teachers as possible. As explained below, I later learned how the adoption of a website name closely associated with the oboe would enhance access to the method.

To teach the curriculum, the [www.windsongstudio.info](http://www.windsongstudio.info) site was to include videos for instruction, Camtasia for screen captures of the videos and play alongs, and artwork to illustrate the embouchure with more depth than a camera could display. The artwork was the most straightforward element of the website feature and was easily carried over from the [www.windsongstudio.info](http://www.windsongstudio.info) website to the subsequent [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) site.

For the artwork, I commissioned a professional artist, Brandon Guthrie, Chair of the Humanities and Fine Arts at Cape Fear Community College, to draw four

Windsongstudios.info (July 2011-September 2011)

Home  
Credits  
References  
Background Information  
Tutorial of Website  
Basics of Oboe Embouchure  
Switching Instruments  
Reed Placement  
Reed Exercises  
Oboe Exercises  
Duets  
Resources  
Survey  
CV

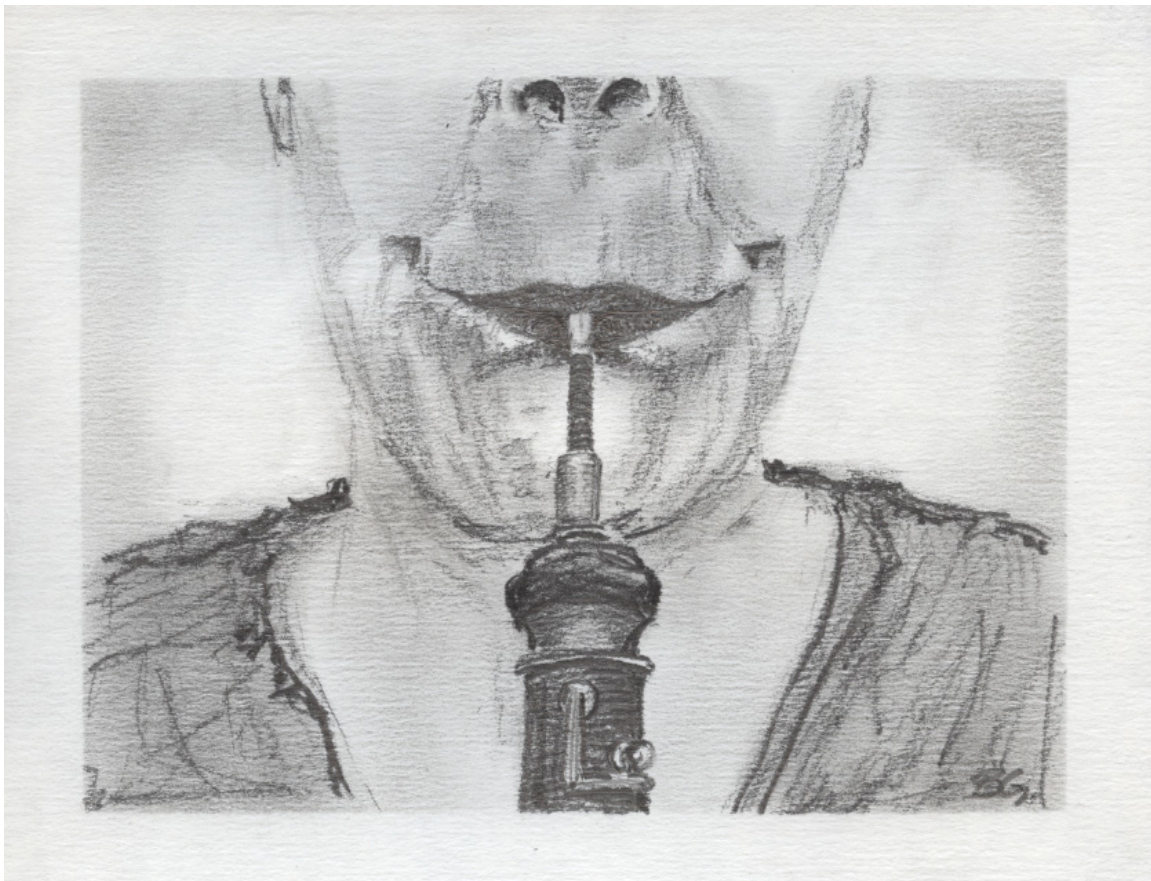
Windsongstudios.info (September 2011-December 2011)

Home  
Website Use  
Embouchure Basics  
Reed Placement  
Reed Exercises  
Oboe Exercises  
Switching to Oboe  
Survey  
About Us  
Credits  
Resources  
Duets

**Figure #1: Windsong-Tab Navigation System**

illustrations. (See figures #2-4) These included two sketches that illustrate the embouchure and two that illustrate the oboe reed.

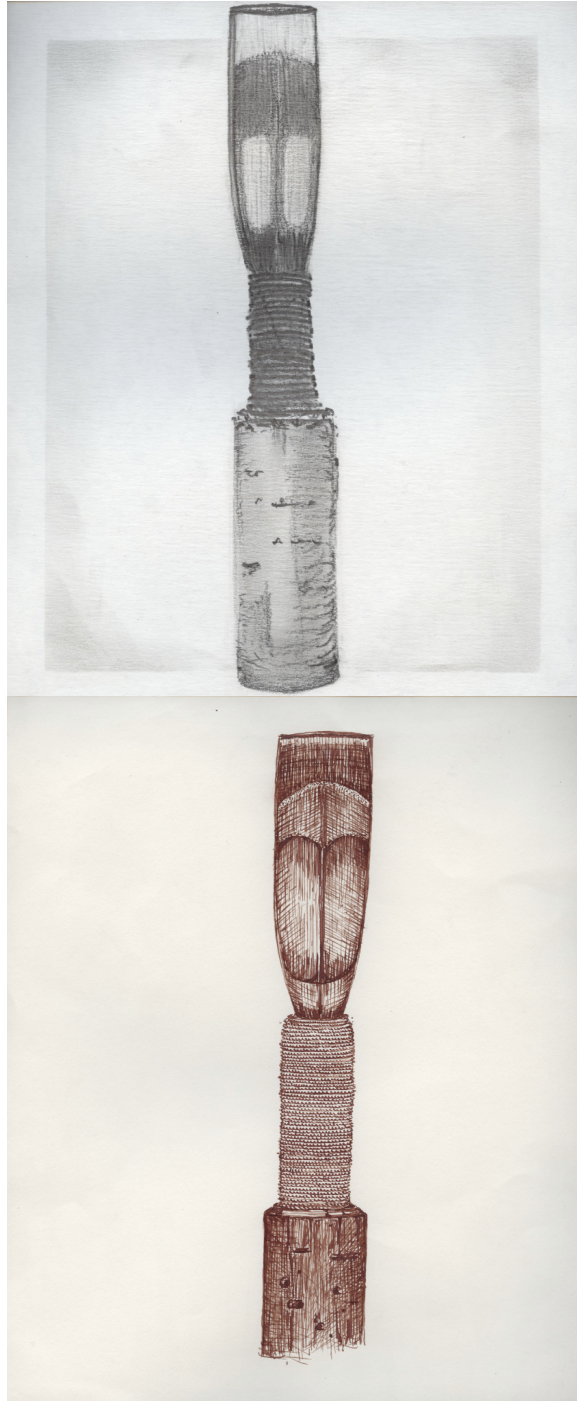
For the embouchure illustrations, the artist created one from the front and one from the side of the face to exaggerate the depth of the lips and facial muscles for learning purposes to accompany the embouchure tutorials. He took digital images of me with my oboe and then grafted these pictures into sketches. We then revised the sketches so that they portray the details of the embouchure. Specifically, the artist was able to show in-depth how the lips and the muscles as the corners of the mouth look to better portray the proper embouchure. The work required great attention to the area around the mouth so that students could focus on this area. (These embouchure illustrations now appear on the “Embouchure” tab under the “Illustrations” sub tab of [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com). They are labeled as Embouchure Illustration 1 and Illustration 2.) Illustration 1 is an image of the embouchure from the front of the face that zeros in on the lips and face muscles. (See figure #2.) Illustration 2 is a side view of the embouchure that gives more definition to the muscles at the corners of the lips as seen from the side. (See figure #3.) In addition to these illustrations, the artist completed two sketches of an oboe reed for the website. These appear in several of the thumbnails for the reed education and reed exercises videos to show the parts, blades, section, and overlap of the reed. (See figure #4.) The reed illustrations proved very valuable, as photos and videos of the reed’s yellow color look washed out even with good lighting, making the various parts of the reed difficult to see for students. These illustrations greatly improved the website’s reed sections and the interaction of these sections with the embouchure method.



**Figure # 2: Embouchure From the Front of the Face  
Brandon Guthrie, July 2011**



**Figure # 3: Embouchure From the Side of the Face**  
**Brandon Guthrie, July 2011**



**Figure # 4: Sketches of Reeds**  
**Brandon Guthrie, July 2011**

Planning the videos was another critical stage in this process, because in the videos I had to effectively translate my curriculum from thoughts and paper to the spoken word and physical demonstrations that students would be able to follow and practice. The [www.windsongstudio.info](http://www.windsongstudio.info) site could house videos on the website, but only, it turned out, with serious drawbacks. When I began filming the videos for this project, I realized that the self-contained videos on the [www.windsongstudios.info](http://www.windsongstudios.info) site were not going to load fast enough to keep a student's interest. During trials, these videos took a minute to load, and a page with several videos would take up to five minutes to load. The slowness of the site was particularly noticeable when watching the videos on a PC computer. In addition, the videos would not pause, rewind, or fast forward. Other issues included having videos stop sometimes in the middle without the user initiating a pause, or the videos becoming distorted and freezing so that a user would have to re-enter the site to continue use. These were all problems that I believed would lead most students to leave the site. I did not want students to give up and leave because the site was unworkable, or to get "timed out" of the website due to a lack of digital activity. Watching my early alpha testers and their interactions with the original site confirmed that people did not have the patience to wait, having become more and more accustomed to high speed sites on the Internet. Fortunately, the obstacles experienced with regard to speed, load-time, and moving easily through the videos were eliminated on the new [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) site.

Moreover, in figuring out how to overcome the deficits of each of the earlier websites, it had become clear that it would be most expedient if I could modify the website on my own to respond to input from the beta testers and future students. The

builder tool that Dotnetnuke utilized on the Windsong site was too complicated for me to manage personally. The logistics of making the videos compatible with Dotnetnuke and a variety of browsers and devices also seemed impossible. Once I discovered that the Dotnetnuke builder tool would not be compatible with the videos, I had to research new software seeking a whole new website framework.

### *Creating [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com)*

As previously stated, the most important considerations in picking new software revolved around support for high-quality videos and not requiring a computer programmer's assistance to make changes. Having identified these two issues, I made the decision to move to the WordPress builder tool accompanied by the use of Exposure Room as a video-streaming website that would upload videos to my site. The new website, now named [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com), would still reside on GoDaddy as the host. The fact that WordPress works directly with Exposure Room-based plugins was a major benefit to this project. The plugins that I incorporated into the [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) site solved several specific problems and were obtained from the WordPress open source forum. The most important WordPress plugin I used was one that reads the individual website user's device and browser types and then modifies the format of the videos accordingly. In contrast, Dotnetnuke is not an open-source community and does not have the same capabilities of advanced plugins.

Toward my goal of ensuring that the videos would be of a high quality and professional caliber, I secured the assistance of a professional videographer, Joe Stauffer from Shutterblade Media, who could film and edit my curriculum. The use of WordPress and the services of a professional videographer seemed to be the best combination. In the

initial phase of creating a new website with new software, there was again a steep learning curve. The technology on this final site is different, but the videos load quickly and more successfully; the final product looks more professional, and, most importantly, the site is compatible with all browsers and devices.

Before beginning any filming, I created several storyboards with a script for each video. This planning represented the foundation of the filming process and was critical to translating my method into an effective teaching tool. Along with outlining the text, the storyboards entailed making decisions such as whether to use wide or close angle shots and which parts of the videos would have live footage or voice-overs. Other videos needed text or outside images from the Internet. I felt that I needed a complete script going into the filming session but then had to be flexible enough to re-design or create new parts in the script on the spot. As Joe Stauffer and I worked through the scripts together, making additions and deletions to the original narrative, I became aware that filming the videos for the site was much more in-depth and complicated than I had ever imagined. It was fundamental to have a set space with a white screen and proper lighting, to film with a high-end Red camera, and to have location lighting to make the videos look professional.

The first set of videos required more than 100 pages of storyboards, but the storyboards had to become fluid when I got into the studio and began recording. (See figure #5.) I had to constantly rethink and reprioritize what was important to film in order to teach the oboe embouchure curriculum and oboe basics as a whole. Originally, my plan involved creating 10-20 videos that would be 5-10 minutes long, but when we began filming, I immediately realized that anything more than a minute was too long. In

KEY-

Green = Video Titles

Blue = Head/ Face Zoom

Orange = Body- Full Oboe Caption. (Focus on thighs and up.)

Purple = Focus on Illustrations

Red = Jennifer has to do this physically

**Original Storyboard:**

**VIDEO 1- EMBOUCHURE TAB:**

This video is meant to teach you how to form the proper embouchure on the oboe. The word embouchure comes from the French word root *bouche*, which means mouth. The embouchure is the shape of the lips and facial muscles. This shape forms around the oboe reed. The reed is the oboe's source of sound vibrations. Without the reed you would not be able to create sound on the oboe.

All of the following examples and exercises should be practiced in front of a mirror. Using a mirror will confirm if you are forming your facial muscles and lips properly. It is difficult to feel what your muscles are doing at first. The mirror is the easiest way to tell if you are doing these exercises correctly.

**Revisions, Once the Filming Process Commenced:**

**VIDEO 1- INTRODUCTION to the EMBOUCHURE TAB:**

Orange- Hello, my name is Jennifer Muehrcke and I'm going to guide you through Oboe Embouchure Basics.

The word embouchure means comes from the French word *bouche*, meaning mouth.

Blue- Embouchure is the shape of the face and lip muscles around the oboe reed. (Red-form embouchure).

Orange- The reed is the oboe's source of sound vibrations. (Red- Crow reed)

Without the reed the oboe can't create sound. (Red- Blow into the oboe alone)

Without having the proper embouchure you won't be able to play the oboe to its fullest potential. (Red- Play the first two phrases of the oboe solo from Brahms, Symphony No.1, Second movement.)

Without the proper embouchure you will sound more like this... (Red- Play the third phrase of the oboe solo from Brahms, Symphony No.1, Second movement.)

**Figure # 5: Example of a Storyboard**

watching other videos and DVD sets, I had noticed that shorter videos were better for my targeted audience. I also found that a storyboard might sound great on paper, but in the studio it could sound too long, overly formal, and perhaps too complicated for a beginner's to understand. To focus a student's attention or to teach a single task required me to continuously break the method into smaller and smaller pieces. Therefore, I made the videos shorter and more specific and found that I needed to make many more videos than I had projected.

My original goal had been to cover only the basic aspects of the oboe embouchure, but as I became more and more involved in trying to communicate the method, the project expanded to many more videos. For example, I decided it would be helpful to include a video on how to put the oboe together, since the site could potentially attract a brand-new student. In total, we produced 80 videos for the first draft and another 40 for the revisions.

After teaching students for almost twenty years in person, standing in front of a camera seemed very awkward for me initially. To begin with, I had to create a "persona" that was enthusiastic without being condescending, hoping to draw the students into the material and keep them interested. I also wanted to look and speak as professionally as possible. (Having researched other websites on-line helped me decide what to aim for and what to avoid.) Finally, I learned how to teach in front of the camera the way that I have always taught, as if I were teaching one-on-one. I knew I had to speak as clearly and as accurately as possible about the curriculum, but also be comprehensible to a wide range of students including younger children. I became more informal and relaxed as the filming process continued, seeking to be more personable. When I first recorded the

videos they tended to be too wordy, too formal, and too difficult for the beginner-age group to understand. So when I re-shot the videos, I chose to sacrifice a level of sophistication in exchange for a higher level of understandability. In doing so, I concluded it was more important to engage the viewers and capture their attention than to explain the information in a way that was too far over their heads. Of course, it is hard to tell how people receive your videos on the Internet, since there is no direct response. This made the testing performed throughout the project even more important.

To edit the videos into small, precise clips, the Final Cut Pro software was used. This allowed the videos to be edited frame-by-frame, and enabled supplemental live footage to be imported. Some of the voice-overs were re-recorded for clarity. Other than the voice-overs, no outside sounds were added to the original videos after shooting, but the Pro-T tools software was used to equalize sound levels and to remove sound distortions. The Photoshop CS5 software was used for the thumbnails shots and for some of the graphics in the videos. A helpful technique that was added from Photoshop allowed the use of arrows to highlight parts of the embouchure displayed in the videos on the “Embouchure- Bad Habits” and “Illustrations” tabs. Another great example showing the use of Photoshop CS5’s graphics is the Dynamics video on the “Oboe- Long tones” tab. I now use this with my music appreciation classes, and they learn more from this video than they would from reading about dynamics or from a lecture about dynamics. Because Photoshop and Final Cut Pro are completely compatible, there were many options to properly portray and model the embouchure method and to present related curriculum. I found that using these two programs combined the best artistic software with the best film-editing software.

The video-production process and knowledge of new website software led to further changes in the overall look and structure of the website. The home-page banner was altered to beautifully display the oboe, and the name of the site changed to [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com). The layout of tabs moved to a horizontal arrangement to follow the movement of people's eyes in reading from left to right. The most important tabs were placed in the middle of the menu so that they are prominent and easy to find.

The major redesign of the site clarified how students are to progress through the videos. Having "Reed Placement," "Reed Exercises," and "Oboe Exercises" as they were on [www.windsongstudios.info](http://www.windsongstudios.info) caused students to have to jump from one tab to another in confusing way. The renaming of tabs to be "Embouchure," "Oboe," and "Play Along" simplifies and highlights the core curriculum of the tutorials and signals to the student that they should complete each of these tabs in order, and each video in order on a given page. (See figure #6.) This was done to make it as clear as possible to the student how to access the videos. The separate tabs indicate that "Embouchure" is to be done with the reed only, "Oboe" should be done with the oboe while addressing basic oboe concerns, and that the "Play Along" tab is for intermediate and advanced players and meant to reward those who first complete the embouchure and oboe tabs.

The website is arranged to allow for the student to watch and master the lessons in a specifically planned and prescribed order. The ordered layout stresses completion of one concept before moving on to the next to provide a clear site map for the student. The site might seem repetitive especially when addressing the good and bad embouchure habits, but the repetition of these concepts is key to getting the point across. That is why there are close-ups on the embouchure, explanations through text, and illustrations to

Oboebasics.com (January 2012 – March 2012)

<u>Embouchure</u>	<u>Oboe</u>	<u>Play Along</u>
Getting Started	Reed Exercises	Notes
Good Habits	Oboe Exercises	Songs
Bad Habits	Long Tones	Duets
Illustrations	More Long Tones	
Reed Education		

Oboebasics.com (March 2012 – May 2012)

<u>Oboe</u>	<u>Embouchure</u>	<u>Exercises</u>	<u>Play Along</u>
Getting Started	Good Habits	Reed Exercises	Notes
Oboe Basics	Bad Habits	Oboe Exercises	Songs
Intermediate	Illustrations	First Long Tones	Duets
Reed Education		Long Tones	
		More Long Tones	

**Figure # 6: Tab Menu for Oboebasics.com**

make these good and bad habits as clear as possible to understand and remember. These concepts can be confusing, and clarity and repetition can make them much easier for the beginning student to understand what is expected and how to form the good habits in their studies.

To create the musical examples for the “Play Along” tab, Finale (composition software made for musicians) was used. At this point there are more than twenty excerpts included in the “Play Along” menu tab. Simple tunes were chosen based on the number of notes that a beginner would be able to play, including the notes B, C, A, G in that order, because that is the order that I would introduce the notes to a student in a private lesson. I also tried to keep it interesting with simple tunes for a beginner. Unfortunately, Finale proved to be difficult and time-consuming to work with because it is not very user-friendly, especially for users trying to access the basic functioning procedures of the program. The program would freeze up, and many examples that I used on the website had to be recreated several times. After working with Finale, it seems that this software is appropriate for composers performing high-level procedures, who can take advantage of its higher-level tools. These include keystrokes and Midi entry, which were not necessary for this project. Finale did not prove to be very satisfactory for this project, since I did not have the keystrokes memorized and also did not have a Midi-compatible keyboard.

The final software element that needed to be used to complete the site was Camtasia which was used to screen capture the Play Along excerpts and to create the Website Use tutorial for the home page. I decided to use the Camtasia software because I was impressed with its use in the orientation and registration videos used by the Cape

Fear Community College advising center to teach students how to register for classes online. As advisors, we used the CFCC Camtasia videos to teach our students how to register, and my videos achieved outstanding results.<sup>12</sup> Originally, I intended for more of my videos to be created using Camtasia, but once I was exposed to the capabilities and saw the power of live videos within the software arrangement, I decided to limit the use of Camtasia.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Camtasia was used solely for the play along and website use tutorials videos.

The final work for the beta version of the website involved designing and recording the main Tutorial video on the home page to guide students through the website without confusion. This was a very important step. While I had declined to use Camtasia for recording most of the videos, Camtasia's screen-capturing ability was the best software to explain to the students precisely how to navigate the website. The tutorial addresses the order in which tabs should be viewed, which tabs may be viewed at any time, which videos should be re-visited to practice, and which tabs should be practiced until completed. While the website tutorial on the home page strives to advise students about everything they need to know, they may decide not to watch it. This video was placed on the home page instead of on its own page to encourage the viewer to watch this video right away, when they are most interested.

The final task I undertook to increase the effectiveness of the site was to make it more visible to Internet searching. Changing the name of the website from

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<sup>12</sup>At the Advising Center, I made contact with a math colleague Jonathan Shands who has created more than 200 videos using Camtasia for his students. His experience also convinced me to use Camtasia. His work and dedication to include technology in the classroom inspired my website work.

<sup>13</sup>I also took into consideration the fact that Camtasia software records from a head-set microphone which does not have as high a sound quality as the software mentioned above, especially for the oboe sound recordings.

[www.windsongstudios.info](http://www.windsongstudios.info) to [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) was a start, since the term Oboe would help the site to be listed more frequently in web searches. When I knew I needed better technology for the videos, I searched for a new domain name that would increase “hits” (those connecting) to the website. The fact that no one had claimed [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) reinforced my supposition that there is a lack of oboe method teaching sites and that this website would be useful to people in search of such tools on the Internet. To let people know the site is available, I was able to work with Google Analytics and keyword searches to make it easier to find on the Internet and was able to publish some of my videos via uploads on YouTube, another avenue for students to link to [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com).

## Chapter 4: Testing for Functionality and Effectiveness

Between the summer of 2011 and spring of 2012, three sets of tests, referred to here as alpha, beta, and kappa testing, were administered on the two websites created. The informal alpha testing process consisted of seeking input, information, and evaluations of the initial website, [www.windsongstudios.info](http://www.windsongstudios.info), from August through December 2011. The beta testing of the new website, [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com), occurred in two parts from January through March 2012: one through a survey mechanism and the other via a usability study conducted with a few students. A final phase of testing, kappa testing, used to determine the effectiveness of the website, occurred in March and April 2012, after changes based on the beta testing were made to the [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) website. Overall, from beginning to end, the testing processes proved tremendously useful in conceptualizing and improving the final website in terms of functionality and curriculum.

### *The Alpha Testing*

To assist in setting up the best website possible, the alpha testers provided reactions to and advice on the website [www.windsongstudios.info](http://www.windsongstudios.info), prior to the beta testing phase. The alpha testers consisted of professional website builders, computer technicians, film specialists, graphic designers, musicians, colleagues, students, and everyday users of the Internet.

Once the website framework on the [www.windsongstudios.info](http://www.windsongstudios.info) site was completed, one of the items the alpha testers looked at was whether the tabs and subtabs, used to navigate the website, clearly illustrated their content and also progressed in a logical order. The arrangement and content of the tabs and subtabs could be likened to

the index and chapter layout of a book and are considered key elements in allowing users to access information on a website. The results of alpha testing revealed that the original tabs – containing the curriculum to be taught to students – presented three main challenges to navigation.

First, there were too many tabs. Many websites have 7 to 10 tabs, whereas the [www.windsongstudios.info](http://www.windsongstudios.info) website went beyond the high-end range starting with 14 and ending with 12. Furthermore, from speaking to testers and looking at the layouts of other websites, it became apparent that some important and frequently used tabs<sup>1</sup> such as “Contact Us” and “About Us” were missing. In addition, important parts of the curriculum were absent, such as the “Oboe Basics” tab as well as “Getting Started,” “Reed Education,” and “Illustrations,” which later became subtabs on the [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) site. This meant that there were too many tabs presented to the user, and the tabs did not cover all the materials that I considered vital to organizing the site and to teaching the method effectively. Consequently, in some ways the organization of the website needed to be condensed and in other ways expanded and generally reorganized.

Second, the tab labels were too long, which meant that they were difficult to follow. It also became apparent that the placement of the tabs needed to permit easier access to the content of the website. As originally placed, the tabs were viewed on the left-hand side from top to bottom, instead of allowing the eyes to move quickly and easily from left to right across the top of the home page. Based on reviewing other websites and

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the document, the titles of website tabs and subtabs are set off with quotation marks for the sake of clarity.

considering alpha tester feedback, I opted to have the tabs presented across the top of the website, which looked more organized and clear. Tabs across the top also made the display of subtabs much easier to scan and read.

Third, based on the alpha tester feedback, I decided that the tabs needed to be arranged progressively according to subject matter so that it would be obvious to the students in what order to access the tabs related to the curriculum they were to progress through. The original layout of the tabs did not fully take into account the thinking process students would likely apply when using the website. The alpha testing created a window into the likely thoughts of students encountering the website. A majority of students who looked at this site scrolled from the first tab to the last tab showing on the screen. They successfully scrolled down the page progressively, but did not automatically scroll all of the way through the remaining tabs on the page. Consequently, the location of the website tabs was switched to the top of the page so visitors would be able to see the entire contents of the site and be able to read the tabs progressively. I also hoped that they would be drawn into the content of the site and continue scrolling throughout the site because of this new set-up.

Input from the alpha testing phase also proved useful in the presentation of the website's videos. From the beginning, I had believed that the videos would be the most important and difficult part of building the website. As I continued to work to solve operational problems with the [www.windsongstudios.info](http://www.windsongstudios.info) website and filmed the first set of videos in December, I reached the pivotal decision that it was necessary to upgrade to a completely new website to best present the teaching videos to my audience. Under the category of "live and learn," the advice of one of the early alpha testers came back to me

as I became more and more educated about website programming. In August, when I was using Dotnetnuke as the website builder tool, she had recommended a program known as “WordPress,” with which I was not familiar. However, once it became evident that Dotnetnuke was not sufficiently compatible with the videos. I knew I had to seriously weigh moving to WordPress.

Alpha testers were asked to view both sites, [www.windsongstudios.info](http://www.windsongstudios.info) and the newly framed [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com), to decide which one would be the best. The decision to create a new website and use a program much more capable of supporting the videos was confirmed in a poll of the alpha testers, who complained that the original website was cumbersome and loaded too slowly. The response was unanimous that the [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) site loaded faster, looked sleeker, and was more compatible with different devices and browsers. When it became clear how quickly and smoothly the videos loaded with the new WordPress site ([www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com)), it was time to leave [www.windsongstudios.info](http://www.windsongstudios.info) behind and work exclusively on the new website.

A third round of alpha testing focused on finalizing the tabs to be included and the renaming of the tabs in a more logical order. Keeping in mind the results of the alpha testing, nine tabs were selected: “Home,” “About Us,” “Embouchure,” “Oboe,” “Play Along,” “Switching?,” “Resources,” “Credits,” and “Contact Us.” The original “Home” and “Website Use” tabs were combined into the “Home” tab, based on input that students were not likely to visit a “Website Use” tab. Although I wanted the students to view the Website Use video (a tutorial) to know how to use the website, I learned that students were most likely to use this video if the video was available on the home page, not on a

separate tab. Access to the student tutorial for using the website was enhanced by displaying it prominently on the “Home” tab.

To simplify the website for students, the “Reed Placement,” “Reed Exercises,” and “Oboe Exercises” tabs were combined into two tabs, “Embouchure” and “Oboe,” and the survey was no longer given its own tab, but was placed on the “Contact Us” tab. The survey was retained as part of the “exit tab” with hopes that students and instructors would fill out the survey before they left the site. Initially, the “Play Along” tab materials were put under the “Oboe” tab. However, based on alpha tester feedback, which demonstrated the importance of this content, “Play Along” became its own tab, increasing the curriculum tabs to 3 (in addition to the 4 basic website tabs and the remaining 2 informational/administrative tabs).

Although one alpha tester recommended placing all tutorials under a “Tutorial” tab, this was not done, as such a tab would have created a large and dense curriculum that may have caused students to miss information, get confused by having such a large amount of information on one tab, or simply become overwhelmed.

Once the first round of videos was completed in December, alpha testers in the final segment of testing were asked to review the videos posted on the website and to offer suggestions. The amount of positive feedback received signaled that it was time to have the [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) site beta and usability tested.

Overall, the alpha testing was extremely beneficial in providing information on how to organize the tabs for optimum progression through the curriculum and confirming that the website tutorial video and links at the bottom of each page made the website easy to navigate. Moreover, the alpha testing opened my eyes to the software and web

management decisions I needed to make to allow the central focus of the site to remain on the videos, where the core oboe method curriculum was embedded.

### *The Beta Testing*

Beta testing was administered from January 20 through March 23, 2012. This testing consisted of a survey of the testers and a usability study on a few students.

#### *A. The Survey and Comments*

Those completing the beta test survey included a wide range of music students, teachers, and professionals, from age 7 to 77 years old. Furthermore, in order to obtain diverse and well-rounded views, testers included graphic designers and computer as well as media specialists to evaluate functionality and appearance. The goal of the beta testing was to gain as much information as possible on how to make sure that the website worked properly and that its content would be appealing, useful, clear, and helpful to the students. As a result, I created a two-tiered survey to evaluate these main criteria, with about a third of the questions asking about functionality and the rest seeking feedback on the curriculum.

The main focus group for content was the teenage students (12-18 years old, in middle school or high school), since they are the intended audience. Younger children (ages 7-11), college students, teachers, and music directors were also asked to participate to determine how helpful the website was for them. Although the comments and input from oboe students and teachers were my first priority, information was needed from students and teachers that play other instruments, especially flute, saxophone, and clarinet, to determine how the “Switching?” tab curriculum might be perceived by

students switching to the oboe from other woodwind instruments. Teachers of other instruments could also evaluate the organization and delivery of the method.

Fifty-three survey testers were contacted by email to ask for their cooperation in completing the website's online survey. An example of the email sent in February to testers appears in Appendix 3. Responses began to come in right after the email was sent out, but not all answered within the first two weeks. Because some later indicated that they thought it might be too late to give their feedback, I sent out another request for feedback in March to encourage testers to complete the survey if they had not done so already.

Thirty-nine out of fifty-three surveys were completed, a response rate of 74% (See Table #1.) Additionally, a number of the thirty-nine testers who completed the survey provided feedback outside of the survey by email, a phone call, or in person (See Appendix 4.) Although fourteen testers did not complete the survey, many of these fourteen testers offered comments and observations (See Appendix 4.)

The survey requested the name and instrument of the respondent and asked the following twelve questions:

1. Was this website easy to navigate?
2. Did the videos load quickly and clearly from this website?

**Table #1: Listing of Survey Recipients**

Tester No.	Category	Sub-Category	Level	Survey Returned	Browser	Device	Q-1	Q-2	Q-3	Q-4	Q-5	Q-6	Q-7	Q-8	Q-9	Q-10
1	Student	Clarinet	Elementary	1	Chrome	PC	1	2	0	0	2	1	1	-1	0	2
2	Instructor	Clarinet	College	1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	-2	-2	2
3	Parent			1	IE	PC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2
4	Instructor	Art		1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	2
5	Music Director	Trumpet	Elementary	1	Opera	Mac	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	-1	0	2
6	Student	Oboe	Middle	1	IE	PC	2	2	2	1	0	1	2	-1	0	2
7	Technician	IT- Computer		1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2	-2	2
8	Instructor	Oboe		1	Chrome	Droid	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	-2	-2	2
9	Student	Voice	College	1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	-1	2
10	Student	Clarinet	High School	1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2	-2	2
11	Instructor	Sax	Sax Teacher	1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	2
12	Student	Oboe	College	1	IE	PC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2	-2	2
13	Technician	IT- Computer		1	IE	PC	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2
14	Parent															
15	Student	Flute	High School													
16	Student	Clarinet	High School	1	Safari	iPhone	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	-2	-2	1
17	Student	Voice	College	1	Firefox	PC	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2
18	Student	Voice														
19	Tester			1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
20	Student	Clarinet/Sax	High School	1	Chrome	PC	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2
21	Student	Trumpet, Piano, Voice	High School	1	Firefox	PC	2	2	2	2	0	2	1	-1	-1	2
22	Student	Oboe	High School	1	Firefox	PC	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	2
23	Tester	Guitar		1	Firefox	Mac	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2
24	Instructor	Oboe		1	Safari	Mac	2	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	2
25	Student	Oboe		1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	0	0	2
26	Instructor	Film														
27	Student	Voice	College													
28	Music Director	Piano, Guitar, voice	High School	1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2	1	2
29	Instructor	Piano	College	1	IE	PC	2	2	0	0	0	2	2	-2	-1	1
30	Professor	Music														
31	Instructor	Clarinet		1	Chrome	Ipad	1	0	1	2	1	2	2	0	-1	2
32	Student	French Horn	College	1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	-2	-1	2
33	Tester			1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2
34	Tester	Guitar		1	Firefox	Mac	2	2	1	2	0	2	2	0	0	2
35	Music Director															
36	Instructor	Art		1	IE	PC	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	0	0	2
37	Graphic Designer			1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2	0	2
38	Instructor	Flute		1	IE	PC	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	2
39	Instructor	Clarinet/Sax		1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	-2	2
40	Instructor	Flute		1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	-2	1
41	IT Specialist			1	Chrome	PC	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2
42	Instructor	Guitar														
43	Student	Voice/Design	College													
44	Graphic Designer			1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	0	0	2
45	Music Director	Orchestra	College													
46	Musician			1	IE	PC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	-1	2
47	Student	Clarinet														
48	Student	French Horn	Elementary	1	Firefox	Mac	2	2	0	0	1	2	2	0	1	0
49	Instructor	Web Design/Artist	College	1	Firefox	Mac	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
50	Parent															
51	Instructor	Oboe	College													
52	Student	Voice														
53	Tester		College	1	Firefox	Mac	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2
			Total Survey Responses	39	74%	Score	75	66	68	68	54	72	71	-11	-9	73
						Possible High Score	78	78	78	78	78	78	78	0	0	78
						% of high score	96%	85%	87%	87%	69%	92%	91%			94%
						No. of 2	36	29	32	32	22	34	33	5	4	35
						No. of 1	3	8	4	4	10	4	5	3	3	3
						No. of 0	0	2	3	3	7	1	1	17	19	1
						No. of -1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	6	0
						No. of -2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	7	0
						Mac	16	41%								
						PC	20	51%								
						Device	Droid	1	3%							
							Ipad	1	3%							
							iPhone	1	3%							
							Firefox	8	21%							
							IE	8	21%							
							Browser	Safari	11	28%						
								Chrome	11	28%						
								Opera	1	3%						

3. Were the Embouchure Basics Tutorials informative and helpful to you?
4. Were the Oboe Basics Tutorials informative and helpful to you?
5. If you're switching to oboe from another woodwind- was the Switching? (Switching Instruments Tab) informative and helpful to you?
6. Did this Website have content that increased your knowledge and understanding of the oboe embouchure basics?
7. Did this Website have content that increased your knowledge and understanding of the oboe basics?
8. Focusing on the curriculum- were there any specific sections of the tutorials or website layout that were unclear? Please forward suggestions.
9. Is there any specific information or videos that you think should be added to complete this Website? Please forward suggestions.
10. Did this Website have content that you would recommend to a colleague or student?
11. What web browser did you use to view the site?
12. What type of computer or device did you use to browse this site?

For questions 1 through 10, the testers were given multiple-choice answers, ranging through “strongly agree,” “moderately agree,” “neither,” “moderately disagree,” and “strongly disagree.”

For purposes of analysis, I have grouped the questions and answers into four categories based on their content:

1. Questions 1, 2, 11, and 12 address functionality including access, navigation, and ease of use, along with its range of compatibility with various technological programs and devices;
2. Questions 3 and 4 address how useful the tutorials were for the user;
3. Questions 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 assess the content and curriculum found on the various parts of the website for playing the oboe; and,

4. Question 5 asks how informative and helpful the website would be if you were switching to the oboe from another woodwind instrument.

### **1. Functionality Results<sup>2</sup>**

In analyzing the feedback from the surveys, I will begin with functionality.

Whereas content and curriculum are the most important aspects of the website, students, and teachers would not be able to access or have the greatest access possible to the content and curriculum of the website without first ensuring that the website functioned properly.

In general, this site was well received by all surveyors and commentators in terms of functionality. The site's navigation was reported to be very clear and easy to understand without complaints. (36 testers out of 39 chose "strongly agree" in answer to question 1 about whether the site was easy to navigate.) The majority of the users (29 out of 39 testers) stated that the videos loaded quickly and clearly. The navigation question did receive better scores than those related to the videos loading. In trying to identify who experienced the greatest loading problems, the responses to the survey showed that users of the Droid or iPad encountered more problems with loading and did not receive full screen images as easily as other devices. Browsers with slower Internet connections, which do not allow users to navigate websites as easily as high-speed connections, also may have impacted the results. All of the devices were compatible because of the use of WordPress and the Exposure Room plug-in, although individuals had different

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<sup>2</sup>The functionality results can be found in the survey results of the 39 individuals who completed the survey, which appear in Table #2.

**Table #2: Listing of Survey Respondents**

Tester No.	Category	Sub-Category	Level	Survey Returned	Browser	Device	Q-1	Q-2	Q-3	Q-4	Q-5	Q-6	Q-7	Q-8	Q-9	Q-10
1	Student	Clarinet	Elementary	1	Chrome	PC	1	2	0	0	2	1	1	-1	0	2
2	Instructor	Clarinet	College	1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	-2	2	2
3	Parent			1	IE	PC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2
4	Instructor	Art		1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	2
5	Music Director	Trumpet	Elementary	1	Opera	Mac	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	-1	0	2
6	Student	Oboe	Middle School	1	IE	PC	2	2	2	1	0	1	2	-1	0	2
7	Technician	IT- Computer		1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2	-2	2
8	Instructor	Oboe		1	Chrome	Droid	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	-2	-2	2
9	Student	Voice	College	1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	-1	2
10	Student	Clarinet	High School	1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2	-2	2
11	Instructor	Sax	Sax Teacher	1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	2
12	Student	Oboe	College	1	IE	PC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2	-2	2
13	Technician	IT- Computer		1	IE	PC	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2
16	Student	Clarinet	High School	1	Safari	iPhone	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	-2	-2	1
17	Student	Voice	College	1	Firefox	PC	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2
19	Tester			1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
20	Student	Clarinet/Sax	High School	1	Chrome	PC	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2
21	Student	Trumpet, Piano, Voice	High School	1	Firefox	PC	2	2	2	2	0	2	1	-1	-1	2
22	Student	Oboe	High School	1	Firefox	PC	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	2
23	Tester	Guitar		1	Firefox	Mac	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2
24	Instructor	Oboe		1	Safari	Mac	2	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	2
25	Student	Oboe		1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	0	0	2
28	Music Director	Piano, Guitar, voice	High School	1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2	1	2
29	Instructor	Piano	College	1	IE	PC	2	2	0	0	0	2	2	-2	-1	1
31	Instructor	Clarinet		1	Chrome	ipad	1	0	1	2	1	2	2	0	-1	2
32	Student	French Horn	College	1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	-2	-1	2
33	Tester			1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2
34	Tester	Guitar		1	Firefox	Mac	2	2	1	2	0	2	2	0	0	2
36	Instructor	Art		1	IE	PC	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	0	0	2
37	Graphic Designer			1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2	0	2
38	Instructor	Flute		1	IE	PC	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	2
39	Instructor	Clarinet/Sax		1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	-2	2
40	Instructor	Flute		1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	-2	1
41	IT Specialist			1	Chrome	PC	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2
44	Graphic Designer			1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	0	0	2
46	Musician			1	IE	PC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	-1	2
48	Student	French Horn	Elementary	1	Firefox	Mac	2	2	0	0	1	2	2	0	1	0
49	Instructor	Web Design/ Artist	College	1	Firefox	Mac	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
53	Tester		College	1	Firefox	Mac	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2
39		Total Survey Responses		39	100%	Score	75	66	68	68	54	72	71	-11	-9	73
						Possible High Score % of high score	78	78	78	78	78	78	78	0	0	78
						No. of 2	36	29	32	32	22	34	33	5	4	35
						No. of 1	3	8	4	4	10	4	5	3	3	3
						No. of 0	0	2	3	3	7	1	1	17	19	1
						No. of -1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	6	0
						No. of -2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	7	0
						Device	Mac	16	41%							
							PC	20	51%							
							Droid	1	3%							
							ipad	1	3%							
							iPhone	1	3%							
							Firefox	8	21%							
							IE	8	21%							
							Safari	11	28%							
							Chrome	11	28%							
							Opera	1	3%							

connections.

To address the issues of video-loading speed, a single video module at the top of each page and links for the other videos that would load automatically in the module was considered. Nonetheless, based on feedback from students, parents, and teachers, I concluded that the current set-up for the videos is more aesthetically pleasing, and I chose to sacrifice a few seconds of load time to keep the currently high visual quality of the website intact.

In terms of functionality, there remained one issue, which came through in several comments, that could not be fixed: once you start viewing a video and then move on to play the next video, the first video does not stop automatically. Unfortunately, within the WordPress builder tool there is no way to automatically stop one video, once you start the next. Although this is bothersome for a user who starts a video but does not finish it before moving to the next video, there is currently no way to fix this situation without major format changes to the website, which would be detrimental to the overall functionality of the site. Users can stop videos though, before moving on.

Positive feedback on the site's functionality included comments such as:

- *Your site is beautifully done. My audio was fine.*  
(International Baccalaureate Music Instructor, Pianist,  
Vocal Director, Orchestra Director)(emphasis in the  
original)
- I absolutely love the website. It was nicely put together, yet not overcrowded. (College Voice student)
- I went through and watched all of the videos and navigated through the website. Things worked well and the videos were small and concise. (Tester)
- The website is really awesome. You did a wonderful job

and it was great to see all the things you are involved in. It is so professional-looking. I love how you 'pop-up' in the beginning and the white background is striking... I really don't have any criticisms per se. Excellent work! I know who I can call on to do my voice recordings from now on for orientation videos! (Student Registrar)

The comments of one tester with website building experience allowed me to make navigation of the curriculum more accessible for students. She wrote,

I thought that the overall categories were a little bit unclear. So if I were a beginner I wouldn't know the relationship of the embouchure to the oboe section to the play alongs. But I don't play the oboe so that may be really obvious to someone who plays the oboe! It is really an organizational issue. You could reorganize the videos by level: Like beginning oboe, intermediate oboe, advanced oboe and switching between instruments. Then in each of those sections you could have sections like:

- How to play
- Embouchure
- Reed education
- Exercises
- Play Along

This tester continued, “That way your students could work their way through the exercises and play alongs according to skill. Or you could leave them as they are and add some verbs or language:

- How to play
- Mouth positions
- Practicing
- Playing along
- Tips for switching instruments”

In reaction to this sound advice, I changed the curriculum menu tabs to “Oboe,” “Embouchure,” “Exercises,” and “Play Along” – much simpler and easy to follow. Although “Embouchure” seems the most important to me as a teacher, I put “Oboe” tab first because that is where students, parents, and instructors would likely start before

moving on to “Embouchure.” I added videos to the oboe tab for beginners under “Getting Started” to help beginners with more basic concepts and added two new videos about practicing. I then added an “Intermediate” sub-tab under the “Oboe” tab that contained more advanced concepts and recorded additional videos for that level. At this point I decided to forego adding an advanced-level tab, as I wanted to maintain the focus on the beginner method. In total, from the second filming session in March, I added 40 more videos and re-did 10 videos to make them more clear to the beginner. In the future, I plan to add more text to each page to clarify the material covered and may consider further organizational changes.

## **2. Tutorial Results**

On the survey questions related to the helpfulness and information quality of the website’s tutorials, it is interesting that questions 3 and 4 were both answered exactly the same for strongly agree (32 of 39), moderately agree (4 of 39) and neither (3 of 39), and the scores for both questions were mostly strongly agree. For these two questions there were no moderately disagree or strongly disagree answers.

I suspect, based on the background of the testers, that the testers who answered “moderately agree” or “neither” did so because they were non-oboists (3 of the 4 testers who selected “moderately agree” or “neither” on both questions 3 and 4 were not oboe players), since as non-oboists they did not find this information helpful to them specifically. The testers who were oboists (2 different ones) were not beginners and for this reason may not have found the oboe basics tutorials as helpful to them at their playing level.

The comments attached to questions 3 and 4 were positive as well. A college horn student wrote that “the introduction video is very informative/helpful in regards to navigation and understanding of the website,” while another tester thought “the videos were fun and very helpful. You did a wonderful job. Your voice is very clear and I can tell everything was well rehearsed.” Another “enjoyed watching [the] instructional video on oboe basics. I love your tone and demeanor throughout the video: relaxed, funny and assured. The squirrel with the puffy cheeks is really funny!” One tester thought it was the best introductory video he had come across on the Internet. No negative results or comments were received.

### **3. Content and Curriculum Results**

The answers to questions 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, meant to focus on the content and the curriculum offered on the website, were more mixed, and the answers to some of the questions were difficult to evaluate, in particular on question 8, because as some testers indicated, this question and question 9 were confusing. Given what I know now, I would have posed a number of these questions differently.

That having been said, the responses for questions 6, 7, and 10 were very positive with most testers (33, 34, and 35 out of 39, respectively for each question) choosing “strongly agree” and providing positive commentary (See Appendix 5.) The International Baccalaureate Music Instructor, mentioned above, wrote, “This is such a great resource, how will you be getting it out there for directors? I will share the link with the Supervisor of Music [in my county] and she will send it out to the county.” Another tester thought the project could be introduced to the International Double Reed Society as a resource to publicize the website and encourage members to visit. This

tester believed that the website could be enlarged in the future to become a collaborative effort with other serious students and teachers.

An experienced clarinet instructor also shared his thoughts, “I think your videos and play-along tracks would be very helpful to beginner oboists. As a music educator, I would definitely recommend this to young oboe students - I remember having to rent my own oboe during my student teaching to play long tones along with a student who had a lot of trouble maintaining a steady pitch without a reference.”

An oboe student’s parent observed that her daughter “liked listening to the duets play.” She requested that the site include oboe music for listening so her daughter can learn what she would sound like if she sticks with it, and she loved the fact that as the "songs" play, there is a red line moving along the measures showing which note is being played. Another tester noted that he liked “how the video changes to black and white when you demonstrate a bad habit. It makes some kind of subliminal connection to this bad habit.”

A professional musician visiting the site stated she would like to hear excerpts of the oboe being played in different styles and ensembles and a bit of history about how the instrument came to be the way it is now in comparison with some of its predecessors. She also said she hoped to see a list of major repertoire that young people could work toward, which might cause “some 14-year kid to completely fall in love with the instrument.”

A college oboe player gave invaluable specific tips on how to strengthen parts of the website’s curriculum from a beginner’s perspective, ranging from safely putting the reed on the lower lip to releasing air during tonguing, further explaining what is meant by

endurance, and the correct positioning of the oboe by use of angles. His observations were readily incorporated into newly filmed videos which were then posted to the website following the beta testing phase.

A saxophone and clarinet specialist observed that the site could serve as a model for all of the woodwinds, while another tester remarked that this type of site could blossom into a sharing or open source site for woodwind resources. This support strongly suggests that musicians, academics, and instructors looking to share their love of music and the oboe should not shy away from using the Internet as a means of communicating about technique, methods, and other instructional matters. While to some, the Internet may seem too commercial, technologically challenging, modern, or superficial, the Internet may provide a worthy space for quality instruction, artistic expression, and growth in the music community.

It was evident from the comments that questions 8 and 9 were confusing to the testers because they were compound and awkwardly phrased. For example, one college voice student tester wrote, “Oh! I didn't find anything to be unclear in the tutorial. However, the two questions that I neither agreed or disagreed [with] were a little confusing. You are asking ‘yes or no’ questions but have ‘agree or disagree’ answers.” (See additional comments regarding confusion in Appendix 5.) Based on follow-up, some testers picked “strongly agree” to give the best score to the website, while others picked “strongly disagree” because the question was formed in the negative. The majority of the testers answering question 8 chose neither (19 of 39). When asked for clarification of this response through a follow-up e-mail, many clarified their response to mean that they thought that neither the tutorials nor the website layout was unclear.

In answer to question 9, written a bit more lucidly, a number of the testers encouraged me to make more videos, but did not think that more videos were absolutely required. Some testers requested more switching videos, but because the website was largely intended to pertain to oboe basics, and other websites are available on the Internet for other instruments, videos added after the beta testing were created for the oboe and not other instruments.

#### **4. Switching From Another Woodwind.**

Related to switching instruments, Question 5 provided the most feedback via numerous comments and observations. The list of beta testers surveyed included several clarinet, sax, and flute teachers to assist in evaluating the switching tab and to inquire as to what additional resources could be shared on the site. (The survey results from players and instructors of the clarinet, saxophone, and flute can be found in Table #3.)

The scores for this question from those who played or instructed students to play the clarinet, sax and flute were encouraging. Of these twelve testers, eleven testers “strongly agreed” or “moderately agreed” that if they were switching to the oboe, they

**Table #3: A List of Other Woodwind Respondents**

Tester No.	Category	Sub-Category	Level	Survey Returned	Browser	Device	Q-1	Q-2	Q-3	Q-4	Q-5	Q-6	Q-7	Q-8	Q-9	Q-10
1	Student	Clarinet	Elementary	1	Chrome	PC	1	2	0	0	2	1	1	-1	0	2
2	Instructor	Clarinet	College	1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	0	2	2	-2	2	2
10	Student	Clarinet	High School	1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2	-2	2
11	Instructor	Sax	Sax Teacher	1	Chrome	PC	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	2
16	Student	Clarinet	High School	1	Safari	iPhone	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	-2	-2	1
20	Student	Clarinet/Sax	High School	1	Chrome	PC	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2
24	Instructor	Oboe		1	Safari	Mac	2	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	2
25	Student	Oboe		1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	0	0	2
31	Instructor	Clarinet		1	Chrome	ipad	1	0	1	2	1	2	2	0	-1	2
38	Instructor	Flute		1	IE	PC	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	2
39	Instructor	Clarinet/Sax		1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	-2	2
40	Instructor	Flute		1	Safari	Mac	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	-2	1
12			Total Survey Responses	12	100%	Score	22	19	19	21	17	21	20	-3	-6	22
						Possible High Score % of high score	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	0	0	24
						No. of 2	10	9	8	10	6	10	9	1	1	10
						No. of 1	2	1	3	1	5	1	2	2	1	2
						No. of 0	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	5	5	0
						No. of -1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
						No. of -2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	0
						Device	Mac	6	50%							
							PC	4	33%							
							Droid	0	0%							
							ipad	1	8%							
							iPhone	1	8%							
							Firefox	0	0%							
							IE	1	8%							
						Browser	Safari	7	58%							
							Chrome	4	33%							
							Opera	0	0%							

thought that the website would be helpful, while one user chose “neither” in response to this question. As hoped, a number of the twelve testers also gave detailed input on the site. For example, one clarinet instructor gave a recommendation for the “Resource” tab as follows: “I think there could definitely be more recommended recordings. If this is geared toward educators, dissertations, articles, and books would be very helpful. If a young musician were navigating this site, it would be more helpful for them to have guided listening before reading. Even as a non-oboist, I always appreciate recommendations for my own listening and to help future students on other woodwind instruments.” Another clarinet teacher offered,

Also on the switching page, I was wondering about the chin info on clarinet and sax being relaxed. I have always been taught that the chin was firm and flat, making the embouchures fairly similar to oboe except for the angle and the upper lip.

I plan to edit and fill out all of the switching pages based on this feedback and feedback from many woodwind specialists. Eventually, on the “Switching?” tab, I will include recording lists for each instrument, as well as links to instructional videos on each, as there are currently several excellent videos that have already been created for flute, sax, and clarinet. I received the suggestion from one tester to create videos for each of the switching instruments to include embouchure and hand position specifics. Although I entertained the thought, I decided that it would be more of a contribution to spend my time filling out the oboe videos and focusing on the oboe resources.

### *B. Usability Beta Testing*

I decided to conduct usability beta testing after learning of the benefits of such testing from one of the alpha testers who builds and tests websites professionally. She

told me, “You would be surprised what you find out from usability testing. Things that you would have never thought of can happen. Sometimes we are just too inside of our projects that the most obvious things to us do not make sense to someone else.” As explained below, this turned out to be very true.

I learned more about usability testing from Steve Krug’s *Rocket Surgery Made Easy*.<sup>3</sup> Using comments from Steve Krug’s book, I created two questionnaires. One questionnaire was designed to gather information about the testers’ background in music and use of the Internet, while the other consisted of ten tasks to see how easily the usability testers could find the information that I thought was important for them on my website.

For this phase of testing, I picked four people based on age range and category. These four were students, ages 8, 12, 16, and 21, from the elementary, middle-school, high-school, and college-student categories to correlate with the beta tester categories. According to the original alpha tester and Steve Krug’s book, it does not matter how many of each category are used because within a category most people will test the same:

Three is enough. The debate over how many test participants you need raged for a long time in the usability community, like one of those coal mine fires that burn underground for decades. Almost everyone agrees that there are diminishing returns from having more users do the same tasks: the more users you watch, the fewer new problems you see. Most of the research that’s been done-and arguing-is about how many users will uncover most of the usability problems in what you’re testing... The first three users are very likely to encounter many of the most significant problems related to the tasks you’re testing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Steve Krug, *Rocket Surgery Made Easy* (Berkeley: New Riders, 2010).

<sup>4</sup>Krug, *Rocket Surgery Made Easy*, p. 43.

So it was more important to have at least one person from each age range, rather than multiple people from one category to the exclusion of another.

The most significant (and disappointing) information that I learned from the usability testing was that some of these students did not know what the word “embouchure” meant. As a task in usability testing, I asked them to “find out how to form your mouth.” Two out of four usability testers looked everywhere on the website except under the “Embouchure” tab. The other two that I had personally taught about embouchure knew what the word meant, but they still looked under the “Oboe” tab before searching the “Embouchure” tab. This was a revelation for me and inspired the final changes to the website’s menu. Originally, I had placed “Embouchure” tab first in the menu because I think of it as the most important fundamental involved in studying the oboe. But from the usability testers, I discovered that I needed to think more like a beginner student or a parent of a beginner student. Based on their input, the “Oboe” tab was placed before the “Embouchure” tab in the menu for the final website version. Care was also taken to arrange the videos according to how a beginner student or parent might need to acquire information. “Oboe-Care and Cleaning “ (what you need), “Oboe Assembly,” and “Buying Reeds” needed to be first.

It was suggested that the embouchure videos be placed under the “Oboe” tab, but this suggestion was rejected out of a concern that these crucial videos would be buried under the other information contained on the “Oboe” tab. Moreover, there were too many embouchure videos for them not to have their own tab. Though many beginner students may not immediately understand what “embouchure” means, they should learn the meaning from the site as they go through the initial aspects of playing the oboe, and

then move through the site to the “Embouchure” tab. Under that tab there are two videos that introduce the embouchure – “Embouchure Introduction” and “Embouchure Effects” - to stress how key the embouchure is to oboe playing. In the introduction video, I explain that embouchure refers to how the lip and face muscles are formed around the reed and that the term “embouchure” comes from the French word *bouche* meaning mouth and from the French verb *emboucher* meaning to put into the mouth. Also, to lead a student to the topic of the embouchure once they have been introduced to the oboe, there is link at the bottom of the Oboe Basics subtab titled “Learn About Embouchure!” This link directs them to embouchure instruction web pages. I positioned videos at the beginning of the “Embouchure” tab and also provided as many ways to learn the embouchure as possible through videos, illustrations, and text acronyms to make the good and bad habits easy to remember and to motivate students so that they would not become frustrated. I tried to lighten the mood with jokes here and there so that they would not give up and would want to go on to the next video. Learning about all of the aspects of embouchure at once can be overwhelming, so I tried to break the videos into smaller manageable parts and make them each a little different. I reinforced the principles of a good embouchure in the reed and oboe exercises to further the use of the correct embouchure in playing skills.

The majority of the usability testers said that the website was very easy to navigate and that the videos worked very well and no concerns were raised about the tutorial. They were enthusiastic about the live videos and illustrations, and the variety of formats available to reinforce the method.

Several testers were grateful to see information on switching woodwind instruments included. Although this area may require the most revision in the future, I was anxious to hear specifically from the woodwind specialists and learn about possible links to YouTube (if there is not a copyright issue), recommended CDs and DVDs, commercial websites of interest, and method books that might be added.

At the suggestion of one beta tester, I added more specific information about posture by recording two new videos on that subject. On the other hand, I decided not to go forward with the suggestions of several beta testers to add more information on switching instruments at this time. Basically, I decided it was more important to preserve the website's central focus on oboe basics (rather than switching instruments), and that if I were to add more videos on switching in the future, I would do so in collaboration with colleagues who play other woodwind instruments.

Other videos added were oboe long tones which were more basic than the long tones already on the website. After filming the original long tones in December, I decided to create long tones 1A-6A in March so that a student could build up to the more challenging long tones. I included these so that the students could focus on the fundamentals in a more progressive manner and then move on to the original long tones with more understanding of endurance, tone, and pitch. (See Appendix 2 on my long tone method.) The first long tone that I added focused on endurance. This enables the student to simply play the note at a medium volume without worrying about dynamics or tonguing. The second long tone focuses on learned endurance from the first long tone and added the new focus of tone. The third long tone focuses on the learned habits of good endurance and tone then added a new focus on pitch. I filmed three more long

tones, 4A-6A, that were tongued to progress to the next level, focusing on the same aspects as 1A-3A: endurance, tone, and pitch but with the added challenge of tonguing. These new long tones are progressive and similar to the progression seen in previous exercises, long tones, and play alongs.

I created the long tones 1A and 4A to focus on endurance to allow a student to improve in this area first. Once they master 1A and 4A, they can move on to tones 2A and 5A so that they are building on the foundation of endurance, but also working on the main goal of tone. Once they are successful in these exercises, they could move on to the new videos added for long tones 3A and 6A to study and practice pitch. Because pitch can be a more technical issue to understand than tone. I chose to address last in the progression of these exercises. In these videos, I emphasize that it was important to stay consistent with tone and pitch when tonguing the note, just as it is in the first three long tone videos without tonguing.

I considered adding videos about vibrato and reed placement but opted not to do these and instead to focus on pitch and the determinants of pitch. Although I will most likely make more videos in the future, I felt it was important that the website be cohesive and instructionally sound for the beginner student. Therefore, I decided that a video about pitch was more important to the oboe basics than a video about vibrato. Furthermore, a vibrato video might confuse beginners on the issues of breathing, air control, and pitch. These are both advanced concepts and issues that might not be addressed in private lessons until a student has studied the oboe for several years.

*The Kappa Testing*

To measure effectiveness, two oboe teachers were recruited to survey and evaluate their students' use of [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com). The teachers were to select middle-school students and high-school students to match the target audience for the site and conduct their analysis over a period of 4-5 weeks. The teachers were also encouraged to include other students as desired in addition to at least two students in each age group in order to provide variety to the study. In the final analysis, the sample included students of different ages and skill levels.

The teachers were given five pages to complete. (See Appendix 6.) Page one introduced the study and explained the steps involved, with directions for weekly assignments and how to return the results. The other pages included an introductory survey for students and teachers, weekly follow-up surveys, and an exit survey for teachers to complete at the end of the process. For anonymity and tracking purposes, teachers were requested to use only the student's initials on each survey. The introduction to the evaluation also recommended assignments for each week, ordered by importance, but also accompanied by a statement that assignments could be given based on what the teacher thought was appropriate for the student's age or skill level.

For the first week, it was recommended that the students be assigned to explore the website freely before their next lesson so that the students' initial and undirected response to the website could be assessed. The second, third, and fourth weeks were more structured in that the students were asked to review specific sections of the website. For the second week, the students were asked to review the "Embouchure" tab, specifically the videos under the "Good Habits," "Bad Habits," and "Illustrations"

subtabs. It was important to determine if the teachers agreed with the embouchure method being taught and whether or not it mimicked what they were teaching or wanted to teach in their lessons about good and bad habits of the embouchure.

For the third week, the students were asked to survey the “Exercises” tab (specifically the reed and oboe exercises because these contained videos that have more to do with the embouchure method than the other fundamentals videos under the “Oboe” tab.) For the fourth week, they were asked to continue to review the “Exercises” tab, in particular the long tones videos. Long tones are used among woodwind and brass players universally. And, although students do not always enjoy working on long tones, in my opinion they can be instrumental in becoming a proficient and excellent player. Also, based on my research, while a student might encounter or have access to information related to the basics of playing the oboe, practice resources on long tones are much more limited. Thus, attention was drawn in the survey to the long tones, rather than oboe basics, and I was curious to find out if the exercises provided on the website would coincide or complement the lesson instruction that was taking place.

Other information that seemed relevant to evaluating the effectiveness of the website was collected by asking students for background information on the preview surveys. These questions asked the students how they learn about the oboe, with the primary choices being reading, lessons, independent work, and the Internet. It would be helpful in gauging the usefulness of the website to verify that many students are using the Internet to find information and to find out whether it is likely that teachers or students would use [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com), or a similar website, to educate themselves or others about the oboe. In addition, students were asked to share information about what they

were learning from their teacher to find out whether students had already learned the material that the website presented and whether or not the website correctly emphasized the aspects of the oboe embouchure that students and teachers were currently working on.

The teacher's portion of the document asked the teachers to rate their students' embouchure, posture, and hand position so that the teacher could evaluate if the students had improved in these areas by the end of the study, after using the website. These areas were selected because the embouchure is the core of the method, and the effectiveness of the posture and hand-position segments could be assessed easily by the teachers if the students watched the five videos under the "Oboe" tab that addressed these two issues. With regard to this part of the study, I felt it was particularly important to hear from other teachers. The next document that I asked the teachers and students to use was the follow-up effectiveness survey (See Appendix 6.) This asked the students what sections of the website they had used and how the website helped their understanding of the embouchure. I then asked the students to comment on whether the website improved their embouchure and asked the teachers to answer the same questions after evaluating and re-evaluating their students at sequential lessons.

The exit survey, the last portion the teachers were to complete, was intended to capture information about the teachers' opinions of the website, including what they found useful and how they would like to see the website change and grow. In addition, this part of the survey was to draw out how teachers might incorporate the website into lessons and their students' weekly practicing, what instructions they might have for other teachers to help them use the site, and whether or not they would recommend the site to their students and colleagues.

To measure effectiveness objectively, two oboe teachers were recruited to survey and evaluate their students' use of the website, [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com). One of these teachers, Andria Brennan Hoy, Adjunct Professor of Oboe at Ashland University in Ohio was able to complete the survey. She selected a range of students to include a variety of ages and skill levels. These included; 1 middle-school student, 4 high-school students, and 3 college students to create an overview of the target audience for this site, and to conduct an analysis over a period of 3-4 weeks. Ms. Hoy was encouraged to include any students that wanted to participate, and in the end this survey included students from all age and skill levels.

Although I had hoped to survey more beginners, the teacher only has two beginners who were not part of the 8 students that completed the survey. In the amount of time allowed to do this her beginner students were not consistent with lesson attendance and participation. Potentially, this means that it might be more difficult than originally thought to draw beginners into the use of the website. It might be that a motivated beginner who finds the website would still benefit. Perhaps teachers will have to act as a conduit of the curriculum for beginner students. In this survey, the remaining eight students had a minimum of four years of study on the oboe. This level of experience places them in the intermediate to advanced category instead of the beginner category.

Overall, the students were receptive to the website and some even recommended that the Shaker Heights High School band director use the site for future oboe students. The college students were especially interested in the website from an educator's standpoint and all of the students said that they would definitely use the site as ensemble

directors and recommend it to their private students. In an effort to gather background information about the students they were asked to note the different ways that they learn about the oboe. Out of eight students surveyed, four said that they learn from reading about the oboe, seven said that they learn from listening to what their teacher tells them, seven said that they learn from listening to how their teacher plays the oboe, seven said they learn from trying something out, six said they learn from trying something out with their teacher, and five said that they learned from researching the oboe on the Internet. Apparently, learning to play the oboe is a composite process.

When asked what were the top five things that their teacher emphasizes to improve oboe playing, several said, “Do not to bite the reeds.” This seemed to be the most consistent response from all of the students. The second most common thing that their teacher emphasized was to practice hard parts slowly, play things slowly and then up to tempo, and practice with the metronome. Articulation and dynamics were also mentioned, but my favorites were, “Think before you play” and “Pay attention to everything.” When asked if there were specific things that the students had taught themselves by using the Internet (musical or non-musical), one college student responded that he or she had used the Internet to find oboe fingerings when they first starting while the other two college students both said they had learned cooking. The younger students said that they used YouTube to listen to and learn how to play their solos. Others learned the Harry Potter theme and found out more about historical oboe players, and how to play the piano and guitar. For the age ranges of these students, their use of the Internet in learning was lower than expected.

Amongst these students, there was improvement in every category with the exceptions of “Embouchure: Leaks” where there was no depreciation. There was significant improvement (at least 2 points) for many of the students in Embouchure: Whistle Shape, Pockets, Tight Corners, Flat Chin over the three week period of the study. Biting and Bunching showed a lesser improvement. One student, however, did experience significant improvement in biting, going from 1 to 2.5. In my opinion, in such a short period of time, some advancement in the area of biting is a good sign, as bad habits related to biting and bunching can take a long time to correct, often a year or several years. In their comments, students remarked positively about the embouchure materials that were covered in the second week of the testing. One said of the embouchure assignment, it “informed me on how a good embouchure affects many aspects of playing oboe.” Another commented about embouchure, “It helped by really expressing the correct whistle shape.”

In the third week students shared comments that also reflected an appreciation for the long tone exercises. One student said about the long-tones assignment, “I understand the purpose for long tones and proper technique,” while another mentioned, “The website showed me different ways to play my long tones.” One other “learned different techniques for long tones and ... warm-ups.” Finally, on the issue of switching, a college education major offered this advice: “The section on switching instruments can be very helpful for a new student. Maybe have a section about not moving the reed in and out of the oboe for pitch.” I agree that is a very good point sometimes misunderstood by non-oboist.

Even in this group of intermediate and advanced students about half of the students said that the website helped their understanding “A lot.” With the exception of one student who did not find the website helpful, the rest found the website at least “A little helpful.”

In her exit survey, Ms. Hoy she said that she thought the website would be useful in teaching about the embouchure and how to start (attack) notes. When asked if there were particular parts of the website that she would change she said, “None – just needed more time to do this. Spring break really messed up the weeks. Sorry!” When asked if she had any suggestions for how teachers might incorporate this website into their lessons, she said, “This website would be good for instructing in the first six months for embouchure and attacks and maybe year 2 or 3 for the long tones.” When asked if she had any suggestions for how teachers could incorporate this site into a student’s weekly practicing, she said, “Long tones would be good on a weekly basis.” When asked, “Are there any instructions you would give to teachers to help them use the website,” she said, “Go through entire website first before assigning things. I missed the attacks section the first time; I probably would have assigned those as well.” When asked if she would recommend this website to her students and colleagues, she said, “Yes, it has been fun to have the students use it and realize that I’m not the only one who says “Don’t bite, and flatten your chin.” This exit survey illustrates that Ms. Hoy found the method and website useful with her students inside and outside of their lessons.

It was great to see that the website was functional and effective, and that it was reflective of what other teachers teach with regard to good and bad embouchure habits and the use of long tones. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to test so many

people, students and colleagues alike, within so many different testing styles. The fact that the survey respondents agreed with my method and will continue to use the method with students encourages me to believe that the method is effective.

## Conclusion

As noted in the introduction to this document, the oboe is considered one of the seven endangered instruments and is thought by many to be the most difficult woodwind instrument to progress with to an advanced level of performance. This is at least, in part, because of difficulties unique to, or accentuated by, the playing of the oboe. Oboe embouchure is one of these unique difficulties. It is also the aspect of oboe playing that I have concentrated on in my own playing of the oboe and in my teaching because, for me, it is the key to improvement and excellence in oboe playing.

Upon a review of the information available to students about the oboe embouchure, looking especially at numerous books, method books, DVDs, and the resources available on the Internet, I found a lack of the detailed multi-media information specifically aimed at making students successful in attaining the proper embouchure. Furthermore, much of the information available is incorrect, confusing, or contradictory. With regard specifically to the Internet, although there are videos available about embouchure on a limited number of sites, there is not a website that goes into the detail needed to fully describe and demonstrate the proper embouchure, accompanied by physical analysis, long tones and other exercises.

I created [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com), with its graphics and strong progressive curriculum, to help fill this void, to reduce the frustration in oboe learning, and to share my experience in teaching the oboe. I have designed the website to reach my target audience, middle- and high-school students, who do not have access to private teachers for financial, geographic, or other reasons. I also hoped to assist teachers who could use

the website's videos to reinforce or supplement their curriculum, as well as to improve their students' retention of the information between lessons.

Chapter two and several of the appendices highlight the complexity and awkwardness of trying to explain very detailed physical behaviors in writing that are more easily communicated through video, graphics, and clear verbal explanations. These facets of the website make instruction more effective. The videos are consistent with and complement the use of a mirror, in bringing visual aspects to life for the student, through live demonstrations from several different angles of the embouchure. The website is a significant contribution to the oboe resources that currently exist, since anyone can have free access to [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) from anywhere in the world where the Internet is available, and it is a more graphic and more-in-depth display than any other oboe embouchure method available in print or on the Internet. The website's many videos provide a compelling means of learning the method outlined in chapter two, confirmed by the testing showing that people were easily engaged with the method materials on the website.

The three phases of testing described in chapter four were tremendously helpful throughout the process, taking into account the opinions of a diverse pool of testers. While the results among the kappa testers who were beginner oboe players were limited, several intermediate and advanced students relayed positive feedback and noticed improvement, which was heartening. In a number of cases, even in a short time, students were able to internalize the method using the website and to produce positive results.

In addition, as I received feedback in the alpha, beta, and kappa testing process and subsequently added more content to the website, I came to realize that

[www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) would help many people outside of my target group. Although my initial goal was to create a progression for beginner students, the step-by-step nature of the curriculum on the website has also made it a place where more advanced students, who might have only a single problem, can delve into an analysis of their playing in a trial-and-error fashion to locate and remedy those problems. For intermediate and advanced students, having even one physical problem with oboe fundamentals can slow down progress and also lead to physical pain and discomfort, so these details are extremely important. Therefore, thoughtful, analytic use of this site by such students may encourage them to continue with the oboe.

Furthermore, the reaction of non-oboe woodwind teachers involved in the testing processes indicated that another potential audience for the website exists. These teachers responded enthusiastically, agreed that they and their student would be able to take advantage of the site, and envisioned that the site might serve as a template for other kinds of musical instruction. This bodes well for the website, and others like it that may follow to in the future.

Several new connections with teachers, students, and technology experts were established throughout the entire process. I hope to further collaborate with the professionals involved to update the website, and to incorporate this experience I my teaching.

A website in its true essence is never completely finished, and there is always room to tinker with certain features and provide more resources. In this regard, my first goal would be to continue and enhance my collaboration with other woodwind teachers in order to provide the most accurate and helpful information on the “Switching?” pages.

My second goal would be to have the most up-to-date resources on the “Resources” page, so that oboe students and teachers alike could access additional information as needed. I am also considering incorporating a webcam feature to let students see themselves and compare their embouchure with the proper embouchure. At some point, (although this would require very advanced skills in website construction), it would be helpful to arrange the website with different tracks for different interest groups, such as parents, students, oboe teachers, woodwind teachers, and ensemble directors, to make their learning process more efficient.

If I have the opportunity to create more videos, I would like to incorporate more humor into my videos, either through re-dos or new additions. I have found that this draws the students into the content and that they understand and retain more information with appropriate humor. Including humor allows the student to connect to their teacher. With that said, I might also include parts of my individual lessons online (with the consent of students and parents) to show the importance of having a private teacher and one-on-one interaction. To this end, I also look forward to reaching out to current and potential oboe players and teachers to expand the oboe curriculum itself. To respond to requests of parents and students, I plan to include on the website a repertory list for oboe (with links to preferred recordings) and personal performances to inspire young students.

There is also the possibility of a blog or a “woodwind forum” at some point to collaborate with other teachers to create a list of preferred woodwind recordings and to discuss issues surrounding the switching of instruments or playing several woodwind instruments simultaneously.

Although technology is constantly changing (and this document recounts some of the difficulties that such change can cause), it is my hope that the classic look and filming techniques used to create the [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) website videos and graphics will help insure that the curriculum material will not quickly go out of date and will continue to be used for years to come.

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## Appendix 1: Reed Information

The basics of embouchure should also include some explanations concerning the proper use of a reed. Dealing with the subject of reeds is complicated, and many aspects are only appropriate for advanced students. However, let me first address reeds, treating beginners differently from advanced students. Reeds and embouchure are interrelated. My method is designed mainly for beginners so I do not focus on reed making or the relationship between embouchure and the reed as much as I would with an advanced student.

With all of my students, I talk about what is important for them to understand at a basic and intermediate level. This includes buying reeds, the reed's parts (staple, string, and cane) so that they know which end of the reed goes into their oboe, the reeds blades, so that the student will know which side of the reed should be facing them (the shorter blade), and overlap so that they know what this is when picking out reeds from the store. I also go over the reed sections, including the cane parts of the back, plateau, and tip so they will know where to put their lips when playing.

For beginners, I also teach reed placement by describing the different parts of the reed. For intermediate students, I explain the parts of the cane and how they vibrate for different registers and where the lips need to be placed on the reed to allow and assist these vibrations.<sup>1</sup> This seems like an advanced concept, but I have found that explaining it is rewarding because then the students understand why you are telling them to do something instead of just telling them to do it. I think that it important for the student to

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<sup>1</sup>I do talk about the reed a lot on the site but mainly the parts that are important to a beginner and intermediate. I stay away from talking too much about reed making because that is what can be found in several books, DVDs and other sites. Please see chapter three for more information about reeds.

understand that the front blade is shorter than the back blade to make it easier to tongue. It is also important that students know which blade should be facing them when they are playing. In private teaching, I make reeds for my beginner and intermediate students and start them on reed-making in high school once they have a good tone and understand pitch. If I get a beginner who is in high school I might not get to teach them reed-making or might wait until later because the qualities of the reed can affect everything. I do not introduce reed-making to them until I know that they are ready to handle this aspect of oboe playing. . Starting a student on reed-making too early can completely frustrate them and stifle their growth.

This is how I outline the reed parts for my students:

#### **Parts of the Reed-**

1. Staple- cork and metal part that goes into the oboe
2. String- the cane part of the reed on the staple
3. Cane- this is the most important part because it is what creates the vibrations of the oboe.

Here is how I outline the 3 main sections of the cane part of the reed for my students:

#### **Sections of the Reed-**

**Tip-** Top of reed- the thinnest part which is also the farthest away from the string. Since this part vibrates for the high notes of the oboe, this means that the lips cannot be on the tip for the tip of the reed or these notes might not sound. More of the reed will need to be placed in the mouth to keep the lips off of the tip of the reed.

**Plateau-** Middle of the reed- the thickest part- holds the reed open- the part that vibrates for the middle notes of the oboe- where the lips should be placed most of the time-

“plateau position.” Even though the lips are on the section that creates the vibrations for this register of notes, the back and tip are free to vibrate and assist in creating the vibrations.

**Back-** Bottom of the reed- second thickest part- (the closest part to the string,) which means the lips cannot be on the back or the reed will not vibrate well for the low notes.

Less reed will need to be placed in the mouth to keep the lips off the back of the reed.

This means that the reed needs to be pulled out of the mouth from the “plateau position”

## Appendix 2: Long Tone Exercise.

First long tones exercises:

- 1A - 5 beats at medium volume, then 6-8 beats at medium volume- focusing on endurance- simply holding the note without getting tired.
- 2A - 5 beats at medium volume, then 6-8 beats at medium volume- focusing on good pitch with a tuner.
- 3A - 5 beats at medium volume, then 6-8 beats at medium volume- focusing on good tone. Then I introduce tonguing- students should not move onto tongued long tones until they can play long tones 1, 2, 3 or play a note at medium volume with good pitch and tone.
- 4A - 5 beats at medium volume, then 6-8 beats at medium volume- focusing on endurance- simply holding the note without getting tired.
- 5A - 5 beats at medium volume, then 6-8 beats at medium volume- focusing on good pitch with a tuner.
- 6A - 5 beats at medium volume, then 6-8 beats at medium volume- focusing on good tone.

Second Set:

This next set of long tones involves dynamics. A student should not pass on to these long tones until they have mastered 1A-6A, because playing long tones with dynamic changes is more difficult than holding one steady dynamic.

- 1B - The first long tone goes from 1 (soft) to 5 (loud) and then back down again from 5 to 1. This long tone is slurred which means that it is played without tonguing the note. 1-5 and 5-1 should be p mp mf f ff ff f mf mp p.
- 2B - The second long tone goes from 1 (soft) to 5 (loud) and then back down again from 5 to 1. This is the same as the first long tone, but this time each note is tongued every time the number or dynamic level changes. 1-5 and 5-1 should be p mp mf f ff ff f mf mp p.
- 3B - The third long tone combines long tones 1 and 2. First go from 1-5 and 5-1 slurred. Then go from 1-5 and 5-1 tongued.
- 4B - The fourth long tone combines long tones 1 and 2. First go from 1-5 and 5-1 tongued. Then go from 1-5 and 5-1 slurred.

- 5B - The fifth long tone is the same as long tone 3, but add a 3 beat slurred note at the end to increase control.
- 6B - The sixth long tone is the same as long tone 4, but add 3 tongued notes at the end to increase control.

### **Appendix 3: Survey Invitation**

Hello Christie,

I would like to include Sarah as a beta tester for my new website: <http://oboebasics.com>

I would really appreciate input from both of you. Please review the site and when you're finished take a quick survey which can be found on the Contact Us page.

Please don't hesitate to give me any and all comments in the survey, an email or a phone call. These can include comments on the website's functionality, layout, individual videos, its overall aesthetics, on specific text, on what might be missing, on what you would like to see added, etc.

Thank you!

Jennifer Muehrcke

[oboebasics@gmail.com](mailto:oboebasics@gmail.com)

<http://www.oboebasics.com>

(910) 508-7920

## Appendix 4: Survey Comments and Feedback

### 1. (Website Designer)

I thought that the overall categories were a little bit unclear. So if I were a beginner I wouldn't know the relationship of the embouchure to the oboe section to the Play Alongs. But I don't play the oboe so that may be really obvious to someone who plays the oboe! It is really an organizational issue. You could reorganize the videos by level: Like beginning oboe, intermediate oboe, advanced oboe and switching between instruments. Then in each of those sections you could have sections like:

- How to play
- Embouchure
- Reed education
- Exercises
- Play Along

That way your students could work their way through the exercises and play alongs according to skill.

Or you could leave them as they are and add some verbs or language:

- How to play
- Mouth positions
- Practicing
- Playing along
- Tips for switching instruments

You could also do a combination with:

- Oboe Basics (Getting started + oboe basics)
- Intermediate Skills
- Reed Education
- Mouth positions
- Exercises
- Playing along
- Tips for switching instruments

I would run these ideas past your user group and see what they think.

### 2. (Clarinet teacher)

I was just able to look through your web site and I think the layout and content are great. I think your videos and play along tracks would be very helpful to beginning oboists. As a music educator I would definitely recommend this to young oboe student - I remember having to rent my own oboe during my student teaching to play long tones along with a

student who had a lot of trouble maintaining a steady pitch without a reference.

One recommendation I have would be for your resources page. I think there could definitely be more recommended recordings. If this is geared toward educators the dissertations, articles and books would be very helpful. If a young musician were navigating this site it would be more helpful for them to have guided listening before reading. Even as a non-oboist I always appreciate recommendations for my own listening and to help future students on other woodwind instruments.

### 3. (Student Registrar)

This site is awesome! You did a fantastic job. Did you do it all in CAMTASIA? It is so professional looking. I love how you 'pop-up' in the beginning and the white background is striking. You have put an enormous amount of work into this...I can tell.

and

The web site is really awesome. You did a wonderful job and it was great to see all the things you are involved in. I really don't have any criticisms per se. Excellent work!

### 4. (Oboe Student's Parent)

The two things that she mentioned most when going through the site (other than the videos not loading quickly enough) were:

1. Make one video stop before the next one starts (if you click on #2 video before #1 video is finished)
2. Have more oboe music to listen to.

I think she really would have liked to listen to more oboe music while on the site. She liked listening to the duets play.

Under switching from "sax to oboe", about the 6th line down, the text said, "biting can effect playing." I'm not positive, but I believe it should be "biting can affect playing." ...just a thought.

Think of adding a paragraph on why musicians like the oboe--why do they choose an oboe over another instrument? Like double reed, sound quality, fingering, I don't know...why would/should someone choose the oboe? What's great about it??

- It would be great if you could either add a section of songs being played on the oboe or if you could have an oboe-song playing when you click on the "home" key. As a beginner, it would be great to let her listen to what an oboe sounds like --or what she will sound like if she sticks with the instrument.

- It would be nice to change the notes on the "Hot Cross Buns" duet so that the notes on the solo version (once mastered) could be played along with the duet--does that make sense?

In addition to the video of you playing a certain note under "fingering", it would be great to have a picture (not video) of which keys to hold down to play a certain note. Let me know if this doesn't make sense.

- I love that as the "songs" play there is a red line moving along the measures showing which note is being played. ...just a comment.

#### 5. (Art Faculty)

I have had several opportunities to observe the development of Jennifer Muehrcke's <http://oboebasics.com/> since the summer of 2011. Over time the design, organization, format and navigability have steadily improved resulting in the attractive and user-friendly version available online today. One of the greatest strengths of this resource has always been the combination of text-based and image-based information, the most effective of which are the demonstration and "play along" videos. When testing the site, I used it as a serious first-time student might, watching videos in the clearly planned sequence intended. (As a visual artist the clarity of the organization and the clutter-free design layout appealed to me; as a non-musician I learned a great deal very quickly, and I imagine that beginning students would be encouraged rather than intimidated by the site.) Considering the quality and quantity of the videos on the site, I wanted to test the site's performance on different devices and using different browsers. Using both Google Chrome and Internet Explorer, I had no trouble accessing information on my laptop or on an iPad. My final test was to see if the site would lock up or crash if users attempted to watch a second video before the first video was completed. In fact, I was able to start every video on any given page and run them simultaneously with neither a delay in the loading nor playback speed of any video. In short, the site is well organized, cleanly designed, easy to navigate, and has glitch-free performance – I am highly impressed with the site, it is definitely an effective online teaching tool.

#### 6. (College Horn Student)

Side note- the introduction video is very informative/helpful in regards to navigation and understanding of the website.

Overall, it looks amazing and whoever chooses to use the website will definitely reap the benefits from time spent on the site! I've never done anything with website stuff or webpages but it sounds/looks difficult and you did a fabulous job! Impressive.

I still think background music would be pretty awesome...I don't know how that works or

if it's even a possibility.

#### 7. (Computer Specialist / Tester)

I went through and watched all of the videos and navigated through the web site. Things worked well and the videos were small and concise (for those with smaller attention spans) and seemed broken down into logical and easily digestible chunks. The graphics are plain, but attractive with nice contrast. To me everything is clear and presented in a non distracting format. I like how the video changes to black and white when you demonstrate a bad habit. It makes some kind of subliminal connection to this bad habit.

A few final thoughts. Have you introduced yourself and your project to the International Double Reed Society? If they would post your site as a resource or might even be willing to announce your project and encourage members to visit? This could be gold! After all anyone who is a member is serious about the instrument and most likely involved in teaching. Given time and further input from others, I think that the web site could be enlarged in the future and even become a collaborative effort with other like-minded folks.

#### 8. (Piano, Voice and Guitar Teacher)

*Your site is beautifully done. I could see taking basics into intermediate as well. You have probably already thought of that! This is such a great resource, how will you be getting it out there for directors? I will share the link with the Supervisor of Music in [my]County and she will send it out to the county. That's what needs to happen now*

*My audio was fine. Possibly make the music larger for little people who are playing along, maybe highlight the notes somehow that they are hearing as they are being played. You wouldn't believe how much students don't know who have been playing instruments for a while!*

#### 9. (College Voice Student)

I absolutely love the website. It was nicely put together, yet not over crowded. If I could offer one suggestion, that suggestion would be not to refer to yourself in 3rd person during your introduction. After you identify yourself as Jennifer Muercke, you proceed to refer to yourself as she/her. Other than that. I would say job well done.

#### 10. (Graphic Designer)

Very nice!!

I touched on each video.. all very nicely done! you have good presence as well!

Only problem I saw was "biting" spelled Bitting....

but I loved it.. you've worked hard on this and it shows! It's a very clean and informative site.

## 11. (Web Designer)

Very nice job on that site, it looks great! Very impressive.

The site looks great! Bravo!!

It was very easy to use and understand - and it looks GREAT!!

Nice work.

## 12. (Oboe and Piano player)

Your site and it looks really great!! Your speaking on the intro. video is great!! You are speaking slowly and clearly and it sounds great.

On the switching to oboe page... 4th line... it says a change... (should be 2 words.. a change to oboe)

on the flute to oboe page... it says "in comparison, the oboe embouchure is neither a frown or a smile embouchure." I think grammatically it should say NOR a smile.

on the sax to oboe page.. "The saxophone reed and mouthpiece are much larger then the oboe reed." should be larger than.

## 13. (Woodwind Teacher)

Nice site! Two things so far I would mention. First, Tallis is misspelled down at the last paragraph of your About Us page. Second, your sentence about what you teach at the college is worded almost identically to the second sentence about your studio and what you teach there. It reads awkwardly. Maybe a single sentence that you teach all these at Cape Fear and at your studio called ...

I look forward to seeing the rest of it.

On the switching page I was wondering about the chin info on clarinet and sax being relaxed. I have always been taught that the chin was firm and flat making the embouchure fairly similar to Oboe except for the angle and the upper lip. Just curious.

## 14. (Flute Teacher)

In Paragraph 1 you have " air is blown over a tone hole...I would say that more specifically, it is directed at the outer edge of the tone hole. The air is split on that edge causing turbulence or vibration in the flute. This is called an *edge tone*.

The frown is preferable. It is less tight than the smile.

I wouldn't say we encourage lips to be "loose". More like *flexible*. The upper lip steers

the air across the tone hole edge and need to be flexible to meet the needs of various octaves etc. We keep our corners fairly firm.

I think another interesting difference is that the flute must create air pressure. It is like holding your breath and breathing out at the same time. We use our holding breath muscles and breathing out muscles all together. A stable, homogeneous air stream must be created out of , well, thin air!!..Oboes are opposite having to deal with excess pressure.

15. (Tester)

I thought that the videos were fun and very helpful. You did a wonderful job. Your voice is very clear and I can tell everything was well rehearsed.

A couple comments. Please take what you want and ignore what you do not want.

Credits:

Family - Thanks for your... looks like a hyper link? Should it be? It goes to a weird art link.

Not sure that you need periods after the names listed.

I would try to specialize each group that you are honoring.

Family - Thank you for your love and support

Friends- Thank you for your inspiration and encouragement

Colleagues- Thank you for your guidance

Students- Thank you for your motivation and dedication

To my CFCC, Wind Song Studios, and MM Music Studios Students- Thank you for working hard! Love you all and wishing you the best always! Go get it!!! - I would say "Thank you for all of your hard work. I wish you the very best. Go get it!" Not sure I would use the word love with students.

The spacing looks off a little on the terms of use tab specifically around the USE OF COMMUNICATION SERVICES

Contact Us:

I would remove the word love. Maybe say "We would enjoy learning about your experience"

16. (Tester)

I really enjoyed watching your instructional video on oboe basics. I love your tone and demeanor throughout the video: relaxed, funny and assured. The squirrel with the puffy cheeks is really funny! I have a few comments:

- RE: Website title on the opening page. "OBOEBASICS" all in CAPS in difficult to

- read. "OboeBasics" is easier to read.
- RE: Video titles. The repeated backgrounds you use clutter the visual field; eliminate the backgrounds or simplify them to help the student focus on the video title.
  - RE: Bad Habits/bunching. Should say "stable" not "stable sounding".
  - RE: Posture. Should add something about feet position and sitting v. standing posture.
  - RE: Fingering and Bad Habits. Might help to add something about proper finger lift during play and bad habit of "flying fingers" problem, i.e., too much finger lift.

Keep up the great work!

#### 17. (College Oboe Student)

When at first telling the student how to put the reed safely on the lower lip to avoid chipping the tip, you should maybe include the phrase "rolling", maybe as "roll the reed into your mouth after placing it on your bottom lip as your lips and jaw is apart". This will help the clumsy beginner not to carelessly bang the tip of the reed into either lip.

On embouchure, maybe consider adding about how the reed should be tightened by the corners so that it's equally pressured against both top and lower lip, because pressing into only the bottom lip can cause awkward/unneeded resistance to the vibration of the reed. This may be only a concept I have been taught by [my new teacher] though.

You should include on the part about releasing the tongue to play a note, that the air pressure should ALREADY be in place before the note is sounded/tongue released.

Explain what exactly the "endurance" is of the embouchure. The young student may not know that endurance is implying how long the lip muscles can be in place/tightened. The student may overlook this term without specification.

When telling the student the correct angle while in playing position, you should maybe include something like "the oboe shouldn't point straight into your mouth, but should be pulled down just a little from that point". maybe try to avoid teaching it with the term "angle" because young beginners are probably too new to the concept of angles which is taught in 6th grade math usually. just thinking about how to explain ways in the most basic relatable ways so it can be clear to all ages.

#### 18. (Piano Instructor and Professional Musician)

This is great! We would just ALSO want to hear excerpts of your playing in different styles and ensembles. Maybe just as background to videos of your taking apart + caring for oboe or making reeds (like, background music but way better.)

And maybe a bit more history of how the instrument came to be the way it is now. I still don't understand the mechanics of baroque oboe v. modern v. english horn ...

Lastly a list of major repertoire that young people work toward. You never know, some 14 year old kid could completely fall in love with the instrument due to your awesome rep + recommended recordings.

19. (Tester)

I really loved your website. I love the way you explained things. I laughed a lot at the funny parts.

## Appendix 5: Comments Regarding Questions 8 and 9

### Email to Clarify #8- Curriculum?

Dear Tester, as I have been reviewing the results of the survey, it has become apparent that one of the question might well have been confusing - and of course it was the question about whether you found the content or curriculum contained in the tutorials or on the rest of the website unclear. In your response you indicated you found some or all of the sections unclear. Could you confirm that this was your intended response. If so could you please send me a comment back via email as to what parts you found to be unclear. All comments are good and helpful to me as I go through the results of the survey and include the information in my dissertation.

The question in the survey was: "Focusing on the curriculum - were there any specific sections of the tutorials or website layout that were unclear? Please forward suggestions."

Thanks again for your help!  
Jennifer Muehrcke

#### 1. (Tester)

All sections and the web layout were clear to me, although I wrote in my previous email that the background of the video boxes -- which are identical in design and vary only in color -- MIGHT be cluttering the visual field of the page to the point of distraction, just a tad, because of the intricate detail of the oboe and the sheet music in the background and the number of times the background repeats.

#### 2. (College Voice Student)

Oh! I didn't find anything to be unclear in the tutorial. However, the two questions that I neither agreed or disagreed, were a little confusing. You are asking "yes or no" questions but have "agree or disagree" answers.

#### 3. (Website Builder)

I thought that the overall categories were a little bit unclear. So if I were a beginner I wouldn't know the relationship of the embouchure to the oboe section to the play alongs. But I don't play the oboe so that may be really obvious to someone who plays the oboe!

It is really an organizational issue. You could reorganize the videos by level: Like beginning oboe, intermediate oboe, advanced oboe and switching between instruments. Then in each of those sections you could have sections like:

How to play

Embouchure  
 Reed education  
 Exercises  
 Play Along

That way your students could work their way through the exercises and play alongs according to skill.

Or you could leave them as they are and add some verbs or language:

How to play  
 Mouth positions  
 Practicing  
 Playing along  
 Tips for switching instruments

You could also do a combination with:

Oboe Basics (Getting started + oboe basics)  
 Intermediate Skills  
 Reed Education  
 Mouth positions  
 Exercises  
 Playing along  
 Tips for switching instruments

I would run these ideas past your user group and see what they think.

////////////////////////////////////

### **Email in response to #9- Adding?**

Dear Tester, as I have been reviewing the results of the survey, I noted that in the survey you indicated that additional information or videos should be added to complete the website. Would you kindly take a minute or two to respond to this email to let me know what additions you would like to see. Thanks again so much for your assistance.

Thank you,  
 Jennifer Muehrcke

1. (Tester)

Do you need to include the fingering video 4 times? .  
 Assembling the Oboe video is too loud  
 Redo Oboe stretching video due to perspiration stains  
 In the video "5 common Bad Habits" at the end the word biting is misspelled "bitting"

In the longnote section clarify if practice on one note G? C? or do on different notes?

Clarify "start your air" is that in or out?

Survey should read:

1. This website is easy to navigate.
  2. The videos load quickly and clearly from this website.
  3. The Embouchure tutorials are informative and helpful to me.
  4. The Oboe Basics tutorials are informative and helpful to me.
  5. If you are switching to oboe from another woodwind, the Switching Instruments tab is helpful and informative to me. (Add an answer N/A).
  6. This website has content that increased my knowledge and understanding of the oboe embouchure.
  7. This website has content that increased my knowledge and understanding of oboe basics.
  8. Focusing on the curriculum - there are no sections of the tutorials or website layouts that are unclear. Please forward suggestions.
  9. The information and videos are complete. Please forward any suggestions.
  10. This website has content that I would recommend to a colleague or student.
- The rest of the questions are fine and gather information.

Very minor corrections:

1. Under Terms of Use Did you mean to mention Wind Song Studios in the first paragraph of the liability disclaimer?
2. About Us paragraph three the various orchestras should all have "the" in front of them or none should have "the" in order to be consistent.
3. CV under Cape Fear and Wind song all subsections should be verbs to be consistent "Instruct", "Develop", "Implement" "Devise", "Provide opportunity for students accomplishments"

Not really many corrections considering the scope of the project

2. (Tester)

The website is great, and it's your relaxed and humorous presentation of the material that makes it so. If it were to me, I would add two additional (short) video segments: the first about feet position and sitting v. standing posture; the second about bad fingering habits such as "flying fingers," i.e., too much finger lift.

## **Appendix 6: Kappa Testing Form**

### **Overview of Effectiveness Testing for the Teacher**

#### **Survey Goal:**

The goal is to have at least 5-10 students evaluated over a period of 4-5 weeks. Please choose at least 2 middle school students and 3 high school students to participate in the survey. Any other students that you want to include are welcomed and would offer variety to the study. (This includes students that are; beginners, middle school, others from high school, and college students- to use in studio and methods classes). The process will begin the week of March 19 and finish by Saturday, April 21st.

The steps include:

1. Fill out the introductory survey at the first lesson before the student looks at the website.
2. Fill out the follow-up surveys during the next 3-4 lessons for each student.
3. Fill out the exit questionnaire at the end of the survey period. There is a single form for the teacher to complete with general questions about the website and it's use in teaching.

Each weekly survey is 1 page long and includes a section for the student and the teacher.

#### **Directions and Weekly Assignments:**

1. Please put the student's initials on each survey so the results can be tracked.
2. If a student misses a week, please complete sheets for all other weeks, as results from other weeks will be useful.
3. At the end of the first lesson each student should be given the handout introducing oboebasics.com, which has the website address and a map of the site's menus. The student should be asked to explore the site and use it any way they would like to before the next lesson.
4. For the subsequent lessons, it is requested that the teacher incorporate the website during the lesson and give a specific assignment for homework using the website – whatever you think is appropriate.

Recommended Assignments (but please assign what you think is appropriate)

Week 1: The student should explore the site freely before their next lesson.

Week 2: The Embouchure Tab- Good Habits, Bad Habits, and Illustrations.

Week 3: The Exercises Tab- Reed and Oboe Exercises.

Week 4: The Exercises Tab- First Long Tones, Long Tones, and More Long Tones.

\*Assigned by you as appropriate per student's age and skill level.

#### **The Results:**

Please send the surveys back to me at the end of each week, so that I can compile the results as the study progresses. I am happy to send self-addressed envelopes for mailing, or you could fax or scan and send the forms.

**An Introduction for Students to Oboebasics.com Website:**

My name is Jennifer Muehrcke and I want to thank you for using my new oboe teaching website and agreeing to give me feedback to help improve the site.

Your teacher will be asking you to view the site and its videos sometime between this lesson and your next lesson.

You can find the website simply by typing [www.oboebasics.com](http://www.oboebasics.com) into any internet browser (such as Firefox or Safari).

**Below is a List of the Tabs That Are Likely to be of the Most Interest to Students:**

<u>Oboe</u>	<u>Embouchure</u>	<u>Exercises</u>	<u>Play Along</u>
Getting Started	Good Habits	Reed Exercises	Notes
Oboe Basics	Bad Habits	Oboe Exercises	Songs
Reed Education	Illustrations	First Long Tones	Duets
		Long Tones	
More Long Tones			

**Preview: Effectiveness Survey for oboebasics.com**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Background Information:** Grade level: \_\_\_\_\_ Years of playing the oboe:  
\_\_\_\_\_

<p align="center"><b>Student Initials:</b></p> <p align="center">_____</p>
--

**Part 1: Questions for Students to Answer**

**1. How do you learn about playing the oboe (check all that apply):**

Reading about how to play the oboe? \_\_\_\_\_

Listening to what your teacher tells you? \_\_\_\_\_

Listening to how your teacher plays the oboe? \_\_\_\_\_

Trying something out? \_\_\_\_\_

Trying something out with your teacher? \_\_\_\_\_

Researching the oboe on the Internet? \_\_\_\_\_

**2. List the top 5 things that your teacher emphasizes that you should do to improve your oboe playing:**

**3. Are there specific things (musical or non-musical) that you have taught yourself by using the Internet?**

**Part 2: For Teachers to Answer**

**(1) Please rate your students at the end of this first lesson on the following aspects -- 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest**

**(2) Give your student the handout introducing the website and ask your student to watch the videos on the website before the next lesson.**

1. Embouchure: Whistle shape?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Embouchure: Biting?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Embouchure: Bunching?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Embouchure: Leaks?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Embouchure: Pockets?	1	2	3	4	5
6. Embouchure: Rolling the Lips in Too Much?	1	2	3	4	5
7. Embouchure: Tight Corners?	1	2	3	4	5
8. Embouchure: Flat Chin?	1	2	3	4	5
9. Posture: Straight Back, Chin Up?	1	2	3	4	5
10. Hand Position: Curved Fingers?	1	2	3	4	5

**Follow-up Effectiveness Survey for oboebasics.com**

**Student  
Initials:**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Teacher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Background Information:** Grade level: \_\_\_\_\_ Years playing the oboe: \_\_\_\_\_

**Students, please answer the following questions:**

1. What sections of the website did you use since your last lesson?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Did the website help your understanding of how the correct embouchure can affect your pitch and tone quality on the oboe? A lot \_\_\_\_\_ A little \_\_\_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_\_\_

3. How much did using the website help you to understand the proper embouchure?  
A lot \_\_\_\_\_ A little \_\_\_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_\_\_

4. If the website helped improve your playing, how did it help?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**For Teachers:**

**Part 1: Please select some parts of the website under the “Embouchure”, “Exercises”, and “Play Along” tabs and use those parts in your lesson with your student.**

1. What parts of the website did you select? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How useful was the practice material on the website in complementing your instruction?  
A lot \_\_\_\_\_ A little \_\_\_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_\_\_

3. Were you able to reinforce important concepts using the website with your student?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

4. What part(s) of the website are you assigning for your student to use this coming week?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2:**

**At this lesson, rate your students on the following aspects, to note any improvements -- 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest**

Lesson # \_\_\_\_\_

At First Lesson

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Embouchure: Whistle shape?                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Embouchure: Biting?                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Embouchure: Bunching?                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Embouchure: Leaks?                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Embouchure: Pockets?                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Embouchure: Rolling the Lips in Too Much? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Embouchure: Tight Corners?                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Embouchure: Flat Chin?                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Posture: Straight Back, Chin Up?          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Hand Position: Curved Fingers?           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**Additional Comments** (please use back as needed)

**Exit Survey for Teachers for Effectiveness Evaluation of oboebasics.com**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. Were there particular parts of the website that you found useful?
  
2. Were there particular parts of the website that you would change or add to?
  
3. Do you have any suggestions for how teachers might incorporate this website into their lessons?
  
4. Do you have any suggestions for how teachers could incorporate this site into a student's weekly practicing?
  
5. Are there any instructions you would give to teachers to help them use the website?
  
6. Would you recommend this website to your students and colleagues?

## VITA

Jennifer Muehrcke was born in Chicago, Illinois and spent her formative years in Shaker Heights, a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. She earned a Bachelors of Music from Kent State University (1999), a Masters of Music from Louisiana State University (2001), and a Doctorate of Musical Arts from the University of Washington (2012). Dr. Muehrcke's primary instruments include oboe, English horn, and voice as a mezzo soprano. She has performed as a member of the Eastern Symphony Orchestra, Tacoma Symphony Orchestra, and Ohio Light Opera. Dr. Muehrcke has also performed as a substitute with the New World Symphony, South Carolina Philharmonic, Long Bay Symphony, and North West Sinfonietta. Her musical travels have taken her to Canada, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Brussels, Belgium, and Japan. As a clinician, she has worked with bands, orchestras, and choruses in North Carolina, Washington, Ohio, and Louisiana. Dr. Muehrcke currently works at Cape Fear Community College in Wilmington, North Carolina, where she teaches woodwinds, voice, chorus, music theory, music fundamentals, and music appreciation. Dr. Muehrcke also has an active private studio, Wind Song Studios, where she teaches voice, oboe, flute, clarinet, saxophone, bassoon, and music theory.