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**Abstract:** The article presents the workshop in brass and woodwinds which focuses on the intricacies of Oboe Reed making. It notes that oboe students must learn to adjust their reeds to achieve the best sound. It cites band director Amy Franklin Richter in New York who believes that the reed is the personal voice of oboe players.

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## **BRASS AND WOODWINDS**

### **The Intricacies of Oboe Reed Making**

The oboe is one of the more misunderstood instruments in our bands, and that's due principally to the unusual elements that combine to produce the instrument's characteristic sound. The condition of an oboe reed is far more important to the overall tone of the instrument than is the make or manufacture of the instrument itself. Therefore, oboe students need to know how to adjust their reeds to achieve the best possible sound.

Amy Franklin Richter, band director at Blue Mountain Middle School in Cortlandt Manor, New York, believes that "for an oboe player, the reed is your own personal voice. That's why professionals tend to make their own reeds. Making your own reed does not have to mean starting from scratch. Some professionals buy partially made reeds and then customize them to their liking, although most make their own reeds from start to finish by themselves."

While not all band directors have the time or knowledge to customize and tweak an oboe reed, learning to do so is not the dark art that many assume it to be. It all starts with using a good-quality reed that you or your student has "pop" tested to make sure that there are no leaks. Put the reed into your mouth up to the string, cover the end with your finger, and suck in to remove all air from inside the reed. As you pull the reed out of your mouth, you should hear a noticeable "pop," signaling that the reed is airtight. After this, crow on the reed, again with your lips touching the wrapping string. The reed should crow C in octaves. If it does, the reed will be more likely to play in tune. If it doesn't, you can try adjusting it by using tools and reed making kits obtained from many different online and brick-and-mortar reed equipment vendors.

The basic tools of the reed making trade include a reed knife, a plaque (piece of metal that slips between the two blades of the reed), a cutting block, and a sharpening stone. The knife is used together with the plaque and cutting block to scrape away portions of the reed, allowing it to respond better in different registers or improve the quality of the tone that it produces. For those who aren't do-it-yourself types, another alternative is to find a local oboist who is willing to help teach you and your students or who is willing to fix the reeds for you.

Adjusting oboe reeds is not beyond the abilities of most teachers or high school students. With the proper tools and a little guidance from a friend or from a book (Richter recommends *The Oboe Reed Book* by Jay Light), anyone can learn this craft and take their knowledge of the instrument to a new level.

PHOTO (COLOR): Figure 1. Atypical beginning guitar method will contain certain symbols — circled numbers representing the strings and plain numbers representing the fret hand's fingers — that help students learn where the notes fall on the guitar and how to finger them.

PHOTO (COLOR)

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By Chad Criswell

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