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Abstract: The article offers suggestions for U.S. music teachers on instructing saxophone students in basic types of articulation provided by band director Richard Bresowar. Tongue use and movement are considered important aspects of correctly learning articulation. Ear training, sound imitation, and rhythm practice are discussed as effective teaching methods.

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BRASS AND WOODWINDS

As soon as a saxophone student has grasped the fundamentals of how to play his or her instrument, a teacher should begin to introduce more advanced techniques, such as how to achieve basic types of articulation. We spoke to Richard Bresowar, band director at Dutchtown Middle School in Geismar, Louisiana, to get some tips on how to start students off on the right foot.

According to Bresowar, working on articulation has to start near the very beginning of a student's instruction on the saxophone. "For me," he says, "the order of teaching is to first work on legato tonguing, followed by separated tonguing, slurring, and combinations of the above. I start by teaching repeated legato quarter notes, stressing a continuous air flow and the importance of

using the tongue to interrupt that flow."

Getting the student to use the tongue in the correct way, with a "tu" or "du" attack on the reed, is imperative to developing good articulation skills. Students who use their diaphragms to start and stop notes will have difficulty starting notes cleanly and accurately. Teachers can use a variety of different tricks for getting the tongue to move correctly, such as attempting to imitate the action of a water valve by stopping and starting the flow of air in short bursts.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of teaching any type of articulation is helping students to tongue efficiently. Bresowar says there is no perfect method for this, but that "the thing to remember is -- since you can't look inside their mouths to see what's going on easily, and everyone is a little different in what will work for them -- you have to listen to what they're sounding like. I assume that if the sound and articulation are correct, then we are okay."

Since the ear plays such a vital role in learning proper articulation, a student's ability to listen and imitate the sounds demonstrated by the teacher is essential. "If a student is not getting it right," Bresowar says, "then I have the student listen and try to imitate the sound of the correct articulation. Kids are pretty good at getting the sound to match a model, if they have a good model to match."

Once students have managed to form a general understanding of what each articulation sounds like, they need to practice it in order to perfect it. One of Bresowar's favorite methods uses the Ed Sueta Rhythm Vocabulary Charts (available at edsueta.com), together with verbal instructions of what articulations to employ for each line: "The Sueta books are good rhythm practice and also contribute to good articulation and tone production if you watch for that."

Given a little time and practice, any student can learn the basics of playing with good articulation, as long as what the teacher is looking for is clearly understood. Be clear, be patient, and use good listening examples, and you will have no problems bringing out the best in your students' sound.

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By Chad Chswell

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