

# DOUBLE TONGUING

## An Instructional Guide

By Christopher Gaudi

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### **What Is Double Tonguing?**

Double tonguing is a skill in which articulation is accomplished by alternating between a “T” syllable and a “K” syllable.

### **Why Would I Want To Double Tongue?**

Many instrumentalists develop this skill in order to articulate beyond the speed of their single tongue. At today’s high musical standards, not being able to double tongue may leave you at a disadvantage in certain situations.

### **How Long Will It Take To Learn To Double Tongue?**

Learning to double tongue takes only 10 to 15 minutes per practice session. It is recommended to practice this skill at least once every day to build a solid foundation.

### **What Are Some Goals While Learning To Double Tongue?**

- ❖ Having the “T” and “K” syllables be equally clear and strong
- ❖ Being able to move from single to double tongue seamlessly
- ❖ Mixing in double tonguing whenever and wherever needed
- ❖ Using double tonguing in different rhythms and mixed articulation
- ❖ Making different lengths of articulation when double tonguing
- ❖ Using double tonguing at many different speeds
- ❖ Being able to put the emphasis of rhythms and meters in the correct places when double tonguing
- ❖ Refining the physical motion of the tongue so its movement is as efficient as possible

### **It's All About The Syllable**

In order to create a clean and clear double tongue, a strong and controlled “K” syllable must be practiced and developed. The quality of the double tongue is directly related to the quality of the “K” syllable.

#### **Which “K” Syllable: “Ka,” “Ku,” or “Ki”?**

Let's examine the differences between “Ka,” “Ku,” and “Ki”:

“Ka” I have found this syllable to be the least focused and therefore does not lend itself well in developing a clear and solid double tongue. Just say “Ka, ka, ka.” Notice how it feels to say this syllable. There is a lot of motion in the throat when saying this syllable and the air stream is bulky and not as focused as it could be.

“Ku” “Ku” is slightly more focused than “Ka” but this syllable is still produced too far down in the throat area to be the most efficient syllable used in cultivating a refined double tongue.

“Ki” The “Ki” syllable is the most focused syllable I have found to create a clear and solid double tongue. Just as the tongue needs to be kept close to the tip of the reed to produce an elegant single tongue, the “Ki” syllable is produced in the front of the mouth. The tongue is pressed against the roof of the mouth, creating a focal point, and there is little physical motion in the throat or with the tongue when producing the “Ki” sound. I feel this is the most efficient syllable to use.

Note: An equally effective syllable is “Kur.” Both the “Ki” and “Kur” syllables place the tongue against the roof of the mouth, which creates a small space in the mouth, automatically refining and focusing the air stream. Little physical motion is needed to articulate with the “Ki” and “Kur” syllables.

### **“Anything Worth Doing Takes Time”**

There is a great quote that goes something like this: “Anything worth doing takes time.” This holds true when learning to double tongue. Break the process down into small steps and take one step at a time. A marathon runner doesn’t take one giant 26.2 mile leap from the starting line to the finish line. A marathon runner takes thousands of small steps in order finish the race. Take the first step and you’ll be crossing the finish line before you know it!

### **Order Of Progression**

1. Practice without the reed
2. Practice on the reed alone
3. Practice with the reed on the instrument

### **Without The Reed**

1. Without the reed, practice saying the “Ki” syllable at a comfortable speed. Say “Ki, ki, ki, ki, etc.” Listen and be aware of the physical sensation of clarity and focus.
2. Once you are comfortable producing a strong and consistent “Ki,” begin alternating “Ki” with “Ti.” Example: “Ti, ki, ti, ki, ti, ki, ti, ki, etc.”
3. With a metronome begin at a slow pace, MM=40, and, as 16<sup>th</sup> notes, say “Ti, ki, ti, ki, etc” Move the metronome tempo up two clicks at a time until you reach MM=132.

### **On The Reed Alone**

1. Practice articulating on the reed (while holding it), saying “Ki, ki, ki, ki, etc.” It is not necessary try to produce a refined “Ki” at first. Listen and be aware of the physical sensation of clarity and focus. Being able to produce a powerful, somewhat explosive “Ki” is necessary during this first step so that it will have enough strength left when it is later refined.
2. Once you are comfortable producing a strong and consistent “Ki,” begin alternating “Ki” with “Ti.” Example: “Ti, ki, ti, ki, ti, ki, ti, ki, etc.”
3. With a metronome begin at a slow pace, MM=40, and, as 16<sup>th</sup> notes, articulate “Ti, ki, ti, ki, etc” Move the metronome tempo up two clicks at a time until you reach MM=132.

## **With The Reed On The Instrument**

1. With the reed on the instrument, isolate the “K” syllable and practice focusing and articulating that syllable on a repeated pitch, saying “Ki, ki, ki , ki, etc.” It may help to empty the lungs of air before practicing this step. As with all great articulation, the less air that is used, the better. Use just the air in your mouth.
2. Slowly alternate “Ti, ki, ti, ki, etc” on a repeated pitch and be aware of the control and focus of the “Ki”. Try to articulate with the “Ki” syllable as late as possible.
3. Find a comfortable tempo on the metronome. If it is easy at this point to double tongue at a faster speed or slower speed, find that tempo.
4. If you are comfortable at a faster speed, start quickly and work your way down one click at a time on the metronome. If you are comfortable at a slower speed, start slowly and increase the tempo one click at a time. Practice double tonguing on a repeated pitch.

## **Advanced Practice Routines**

After you have mastered double tonguing on a single pitch, from speeds ranging from MM=40 to 132, solidify your technique using these routines:

1. Double tongue on scale passages and at various speeds.
2. Practice using different rhythms on repeated pitches and scale passages
3. Apply double tonguing to an excerpt with fast tonguing and see how slowly it can be played for control. (For example, practice La Scala starting at quarter note= 120 then practice at quarter note=116, 112, 108, 104, 100, etc).

## **Conclusion**

As with anything we learn, the goal is become our own teacher. Experiment and find out what works and what doesn't work. Be aware of how it feels physically when trying out the various “K” syllables and how it feels when we try using less air and just the air in the mouth. If one practices and is persistent in developing this skill, the reward is a lifelong ability of clean and effortless fast tonguing.