

CHRISTOPHER GAUDI

BACK TO BASICS



**How To Improve All Aspects Of Your
Oboe Playing (Automatically) Without
Spending Hours In A Practice Room**

Dear Friend,

Thank you for taking the time to explore this series of lessons. Whether you're just beginning your journey with the oboe or have been playing for years, the exercises I've prepared are designed to help you elevate your playing to the next level.

Some might call it a simple "warm-up routine," and while that's partially true, I believe it is much more than that. This is a carefully crafted series of six progressive exercises that encompass every fundamental aspect of oboe playing. I call it "*Back to Basics*." By focusing on these core principles and mastering each exercise, you'll find that your playing improves naturally, steadily, and with lasting impact.

Unlike practicing etudes, excerpts, or solo repertoire on a surface level, these exercises delve deeply into the foundational elements of healthy oboe playing. At the heart of this method is air control—what I like to call "*holding the air*." That's why the first exercise begins there, laying the groundwork for everything that follows.

At first glance, the exercises may seem overly simple, but don't let that fool you. With time and focus, each concept will reveal layers of nuance and potential. I encourage you to commit to just 30 minutes a day for one week. Start in the key of C on day one, then progress through each key (C#, D, etc.) each day. The more carefully you listen to yourself, the more you'll hear, and you may be surprised at how much you look forward to these sessions after just a few days.

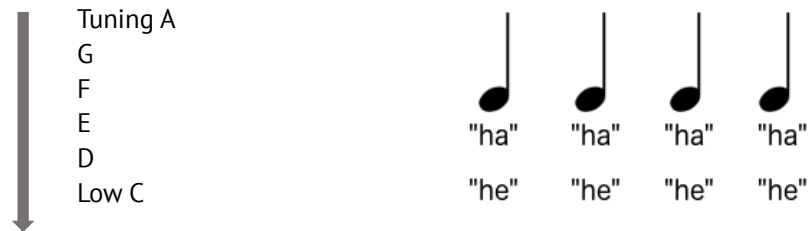
Here's to your success!



Christopher Gaudi

Exercise #1: Aspirated Attacks

Aspirated attacks are one of the most effective tools for mastering air control and developing the skill of “holding the air.” I believe that the aspirated attack position should serve as the default playing position, which is why it’s the ideal starting point for this lesson. As you work through the exercise, focus on recognizing and internalizing the distinct sensations of “holding the air” versus “blowing the air.” This awareness will provide a strong and lasting foundation for every aspect of your oboe playing.



How to practice this exercise: Starting on tuning A, play each note 8 times in a row at a medium tempo, using aspirated attacks. You may start and stop the air.

How to make an aspirated attack:

- 1) Do not use the front of the tongue to start and stop notes.
- 2) Instead, start each note with a puff of air. (See how quickly you can build pressure and have the note speak.)
- 3) Start with the syllable “he, he, he...” and gradually shift to more of a “ha, ha, ha...” as you go into the lower notes.

What to think about while practicing this exercise: Work to get clear, solid, and whole beginnings of notes. See how immediately you can play each note from the time you start building pressure to the time the note speaks. You may start and stop the air in between each note during this exercise, if needed.

What to watch out for: If notes are cracking, it’s likely because too much air is trying to go through too small an opening on the reed. Two things can cause this:

- 1) You’re overblowing... too much air is trying to go through the reed.
- 2) You’re biting... you’re making the reed have too small an opening.

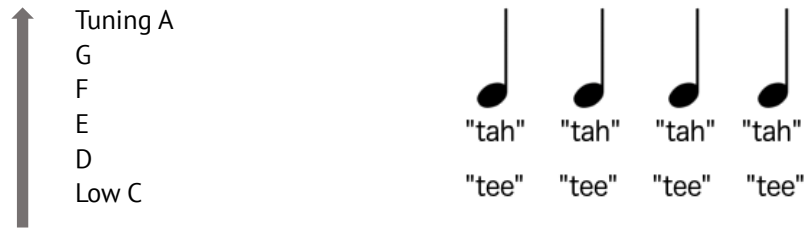
How to fix cracking: Don’t blow, instead simply “hold the air”. Playing the oboe is all pressure, no air. Think about this concept until it makes sense for you. A good way to practice this concept is to take a deep breath, exhale all the air you can, exhale again, then practice aspirated attacks using the more than enough air that’s left at your disposal.

Goal: Practice this exercise and memorize how you need to hold the air so you can make solid, clean, and whole aspirated attacks all the way down to low C without cracking.

Next steps: Repeat the above exercise, except instead of starting and stopping the air, do not stop the air in between notes. Reduce the amount of air just enough so that the ends of the notes taper (while still having a clear and full front). It’s OK to hear air moving through the instrument between notes.

Exercise #2: Repeated Low Notes

Now, let's reinforce the concept of using less air (blowing less) and more pressure (holding the air).



How to practice this exercise: Starting on low C, play each note 8 times in a row at a medium speed, using very loud, short, and explosive tongued attacks. Play very short notes, as short as you can play them. You may find you need to start with a “tah” syllable on the lower notes and “tee” as you move up the scale. Start and stop each note abruptly with the tongue. Keep the tongue on the reed and maintain pressure in between notes and make sure each note is full from the beginning to end.

What to think about while practicing this exercise: THIS EXERCISE IS MEANT TO BE PLAYED LOUDLY AND UNREFINED. DO NOT TRY USING A REFINED, CUSHIONED, OR SOFT-PEDALED ARTICULATION. The purpose of this exercise is to notice and memorize the feeling of the all-pressure, no air concept. Use only the air in your mouth, as that's all you need.

What to watch out for: If notes are cracking, it's likely because too much air is trying to go through too small an opening on the reed. Two things can cause this:

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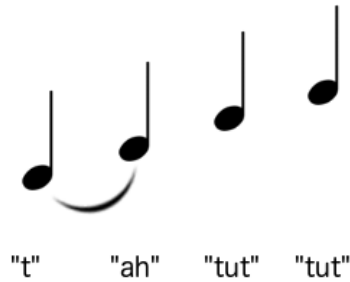
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Goal: Practice this exercise and memorize how you need to hold the air so you can make solid, clean, whole, and very short notes (as short as you can play them) using explosive tongued attacks starting on low C and going up to tuning A.

Next steps and variations: Repeat the above exercise, except gradually refine and cushion the articulation to be less explosive. Air pressure should always be maintained between notes. You can also repeat this exercise using different note lengths and reduce the number of times you play each note, until you're playing single notes up and then back down the scale. Continue to keep the tongue on the reed in between notes while practicing variations of this exercise.

Exercise #3: Slur Two, Tongue Two

We're now ready to move on to a two-note slur two-note articulated figure and the introduction of pressing into and shaping notes!



How to practice this exercise: Starting on low C, play low C to D under a full-length slur (don't clip the second note, D). Play the D as long as you can before articulating the next two notes, E and F, very shortly (stopping each one with the tongue) at a medium tempo. Play one octave up and down. Careful, especially on the way down, that the slur is full length and is not stopped short before articulating.

How to make the slurred and articulated notes:

- 1) Use a strong, clear, and full "t" syllable for the first note of the slur.
- 2) Really feel the "ah" syllable and sustain during the second note of the slur.
- 3) Use the syllable "tut" for the two short, articulated notes.

What to think about while practicing this exercise: All your effort should go into creating the first note of the slur and the remaining 3 notes are the result of that effort. Imagine a ball of dough on a table and you are kneading it. As you press the heel of your hand into the dough, that is the "ah" of the slur.

What to watch out for: Hold the second note of the slur full length at first. Play the entire slur in tempo, avoiding rushing to finish the slur and getting to the two articulated notes too soon. However, if it is easier, start with a clipped slur version, then work your way to a full-length slur version.

Goal: Your slur-two, tongue-two figure should sound effortless, elevated, poised and sturdy all while being played on one wind without letting up the air pressure. (Hint: use less air!) If you are playing with a metronome, aim to play on the "back" of the beat.

Next steps and variations: Repeat this exercise the following ways: tongue-two, slur-two; tongue-one, slur-three; slur-three, tongue-one. Shape, press, and "knead" the full-length slurs in each of these variations.

Exercise #4: Slow, Slurred Legato Scale

It's time to dive into slow, legato scales! While scales are excellent for developing technique, their true power lies in helping us master air control.



How to practice this exercise: Starting on low C, play a C major scale up and down one octave completely slurred, metronome marked at 40.

How to make the slurs really slurred:

- 1) Practice this exercise like we did in Exercise #2.
- 2) Repeat each note of the scale 4 times while making an obvious crescendo through the 4 repeated notes.
- 3) The 4th note should be the strongest, the 1st note the second strongest with a slight retreat on the 2nd note and then increase through the 3rd note.
- 4) Then play the slurred version of this exercise again.

What to think about while practicing this exercise: You should feel like you're making a crescendo within each note of the scale; however, a crescendo or "swell" should not be audible. Feel like you're pressing into and kneading (i.e. shaping) each note.

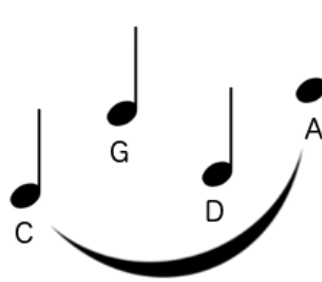
What to watch out for: Be sure NOT to let up the air before changing notes under the slur. If anything, increase within the current note. Take the current note to where you want the next note to be. DO NOT TRY TO PROTECT THE NOTE CHANGES. Keep the air steady.

Goal: All the notes in your slur should sound like one cohesive unit and should not "moo" or sound "notey."

Next steps and variations: Repeat the above exercise chromatically. Play a chromatic scale starting on low C, pressing and lifting the fingers on the keys so slowly that you can actually get and sustain glissandos between note changes. That is when you know you are holding the air well.

Exercise #5: Upward Fifths And Downward Fourths

Building on the skills developed in the previous exercises, we now shift our focus to the concept of “blowing through intervals.” This exercise highlights the importance of steady air support and seamless note connection, refining both tone quality and overall fluidity in your playing.



How to practice this exercise: Play a low C at a fairly full dynamic, hold for a few seconds while making a slight crescendo, then slur up a fifth to G without changing the air. Hold the G for a few seconds then slur down to low D in the same way. Really feel what it’s like to hold the air and blow through the interval without changing anything, including your embouchure. Use the bottom notes to prepare the interval and do the reverse on the way back down.

How to make the intervals really sustained:

- 1) Practice this exercise like we did in Exercise #2.
- 2) Repeat each note of the scale 4 times while making an obvious crescendo through the 4 repeated notes.
- 3) The 4th note should be the strongest, the 1st note the second strongest with a slight retreat on the 2nd note and then increase through the 3rd note.
- 4) Then play the slurred version of this exercise again.

What to think about while practicing this exercise: You should feel like you’re making a crescendo within each note of the scale; however, a crescendo or “swell” should not be audible. Feel like you’re pressing into and kneading (i.e. shaping) each interval.

What to watch out for: Be sure NOT to let up the air before changing notes under the slur. If anything, increase within the current note. DO NOT TRY TO PROTECT THE NOTE CHANGES.

Goal: All the notes in your slur should sound as one unit and should not “moo” or sound “notey”.

Next steps and variations: Repeat the above exercise using intervals of thirds instead of fifths. Start on low C and slur up a third to E, then slur down a step to D and repeat.

Exercise #6: Legato Tonguing

In our final exercise, we will focus on how the tongue can encourage seamless articulation rather than interrupt it.



How to practice this exercise: Play a low E at a fairly full dynamic, hold for a few seconds while making a slight crescendo then slur up a step to F. Slowly slur between these 2 notes a few times. Really feel what it's like to hold the air and blow through the interval without changing anything, including your embouchure. Then, using the same air shape, tongue E to F, back and forth.

How to make the tongued version legato:

- 1) Practice tonguing late. It's OK if you tongue so late that you slurred into the F from the E and then tongued the F.
- 2) Memorize how the air felt during the slurred version and use that same air shape during the tongued version.

What to think about while practicing this exercise: You should feel like you're making a crescendo within each note of the scale; however, a crescendo or "swell" should not be audible. Feel like you're pressing into and kneading (i.e. shaping) each note during both the slurred and tongued versions.

What to watch out for: Be sure NOT to let up the air before changing notes. If anything, increase within the current note. DO NOT TRY TO PROTECT THE NOTE CHANGES.

Goal: The same shape of the air should be used for the tongued and slurred versions. The tongue should feel like it's encouraging the next note, not stopping or interrupting.

Next steps and variations: Repeat the above exercise using the interval of a third. Start on low E with the slurred version up to G and then the legato tongued version.