

# **DOUBLE TONGUING**

## An Instructional Guide

By Christopher Gaudi

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

Double tonguing is a technique in which articulation is achieved by alternating between a "T" syllable and a "K" syllable.

### **Why Learn Double Tonguing?**

Many instrumentalists develop this skill to articulate faster than is possible with a single tongue. At today's high musical standards, the ability to double tongue can be essential in meeting technical demands and avoiding potential disadvantages in certain musical situations.

### **How Long Does It Take To Learn Double Tonguing?**

Learning to double tongue requires only 10 to 15 minutes of focused practice per session. Practicing this skill daily is recommended to build a solid foundation and achieve consistent results.

### **Goals for Learning Double Tonguing**

As you work on mastering this skill, aim to:

- Achieve equal clarity and strength in both the "T" and "K" syllables.
- Transition seamlessly between single and double tonguing.
- Incorporate double tonguing naturally into passages whenever needed.
- Apply double tonguing to various rhythms and mixed articulations.
- Create articulations of different lengths while double tonguing.
- Develop control over double tonguing at a wide range of speeds.
- Emphasize rhythms and meters accurately while using double tonguing.
- Refine the physical motion of the tongue for maximum efficiency.

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

To create a clean and clear double tongue, a strong and controlled “K” syllable must be practiced and developed. The quality of your double tonguing is directly linked to the quality of the “K” syllable.

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

Let's explore the differences between these syllables:

### **“Ka”**

The “Ka” syllable tends to be the least focused and does not lend itself well to developing a clear and solid double tongue. Try saying “Ka, ka, ka.” Notice the significant motion in the throat when producing this syllable. The air stream feels bulky and unfocused, making it less efficient for refined articulation.

### **“Ku”**

The “Ku” syllable is slightly more focused than “Ka,” but it is still produced too far back in the throat to be the most effective choice for cultivating a refined double tongue.

### **“Ki”**

The “Ki” syllable is the most focused and effective for producing a clear and solid double tongue. Similar to the way the tongue must stay close to the tip of the reed for elegant single tonguing, the “Ki” syllable is formed at the front of the mouth. The tongue presses against the roof of the mouth, creating a focal point. This minimizes physical motion in the throat and tongue, resulting in a refined and efficient articulation.

**Note:** Another equally effective syllable is “Kur.” Both “Ki” and “Kur” place the tongue against the roof of the mouth, reducing the space inside the mouth. This naturally refines and focuses the air stream. Additionally, minimal physical motion is required to articulate with these syllables, making them highly efficient choices for double tonguing.

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

There’s a saying that goes, “Anything worth doing takes time.” This is especially true when learning to double tongue. The key to success is breaking the process into manageable steps and progressing gradually. Think of it like running a marathon—no one leaps 26.2 miles from the starting line to the finish line. Instead, marathon runners take thousands of small steps to reach their goal. Take the first step, and with consistent effort, you’ll cross the finish line before you know it!

## **Order of Progression**

To master double tonguing, follow these three steps:

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

### **Step 1: Without the Reed**

1. Begin by practicing the “Ki” syllable at a comfortable speed without the reed. Repeat “Ki, ki, ki, ki...” and focus on clarity and the physical sensation of producing a strong, focused articulation.
2. Once you’re comfortable, alternate between “Ki” and “Ti.” For example: “Ti, ki, ti, ki, ti, ki, ti, ki...”
3. Use a metronome set to MM=40. Say “Ti, ki, ti, ki...” as 16th notes, then gradually increase the tempo two clicks at a time until you reach MM=132.

### **Step 2: On the Reed Alone**

1. Hold the reed and practice articulating “Ki, ki, ki, ki...” Focus on producing a powerful, somewhat explosive “Ki” at first. Don’t worry about refinement yet; the goal is to develop a strong articulation that will retain its clarity when later refined.
2. Once comfortable with “Ki,” alternate between “Ki” and “Ti.” Example: “Ti, ki, ti, ki, ti, ki, ti, ki...”
3. Again, use a metronome starting at MM=40. Articulate “Ti, ki, ti, ki...” as 16th notes, gradually increasing the tempo two clicks at a time until you reach MM=132.

### Step 3: With the Reed on the Instrument

1. With the reed on the instrument, isolate the “K” syllable and practice articulating it on a repeated pitch: “Ki, ki, ki, ki...” Focus on clarity and control. To help refine this step, try emptying your lungs of air before practicing—using less air (just the air in your mouth) often results in better articulation.
2. Slowly alternate between “Ti” and “Ki” on a repeated pitch: “Ti, ki, ti, ki...” Pay close attention to the control and focus of the “Ki” syllable. Aim to articulate the “Ki” as late as possible for greater refinement.
3. Find a comfortable tempo on the metronome where double tonguing feels natural. This could be at a faster or slower speed, depending on your current ability.
4. Adjust your practice based on your comfort level:
  - If faster speeds feel more natural, start at a quicker tempo and gradually slow the metronome down one click at a time.
  - If slower speeds are easier, begin at a slower tempo and increase the metronome one click at a time.
5. Practice double tonguing on a repeated pitch at the chosen tempo, refining clarity and efficiency as you progress.

### Advanced Practice Routines

Once you have mastered double tonguing on a single pitch at speeds ranging from MM=40 to 132, strengthen your technique by incorporating the following advanced routines:

1. Double tongue on scale passages: Practice at various speeds to build consistency and adaptability.
2. Explore different rhythms: Apply varied rhythmic patterns to repeated pitches and scale passages to refine control and flexibility.
3. Apply double tonguing to excerpts: Choose excerpts with fast tonguing, such as *La Scala di Seta*, and practice them at progressively slower tempos to enhance precision and control. For example, begin at quarter note = 120, then reduce to 116, 112, 108, 104, 100, and so on.

### Conclusion

As with any skill, the ultimate goal is to become your own teacher. Experiment to discover what works best for you and what doesn't. Pay attention to how it feels physically when trying out different “K” syllables and when practicing with less air, relying only on the air in your mouth. With consistent practice and persistence, you will develop a lifelong ability for clean and effortless fast tonguing!