

Reeds



One of the single most important things you can do to develop good tone on a reed instrument is to invest in a good reed. High quality reeds will last longer and give you better results.

Reeds are a natural product cut from bamboo. That said, it should be obvious that they would be fairly inconsistent. Try to buy them in ten-packs because most will require some adjustment. Out of a pack of ten you may be lucky enough to get 4 that don't require much if any adjustment. Use the chart on page 3 to determine what adjustments need to be performed.

Reed Grading

Reeds are graded by thickness, 1 being thinnest to 5 being thickest. You should start out by using a 1-1/2 to 2. Using a reed that is too hard for you will cause you to bite down and make your tone harsh and uncontrolled. Using a reed that is too soft for you will give you weak tone and no projection. Most people will use a medium reed and a medium mouthpiece.

To check a new reed soak them for about 10 minutes in tepid water, then remove it, shake it off and place it on a flat glass or plastic surface. Wet your thumb and rub it towards the tip about a dozen times this will seal the pores and may even play better. Let them dry out over night.

The next day repeat the process and test each one and grade them from best to worst. Reeds should last for about 20 hours of playing. Rotate your reeds to break them in slowly – they'll last longer. If you are having a hard time playing try switching reeds, that'll may solve your problem.

Reed Adjustment

As I mentioned earlier reeds nearly always need adjusting. You will need to take off small bits of material to balance or trim the reeds so that they work properly. If you start with a reed that doesn't work well at all you can experiment without fear of ruining it because it doesn't work anyway right?

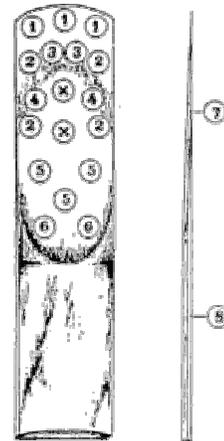
A few things you'll need to adjust your reeds are:

- A reed case (most reeds come with some form of these)
- A flat piece of glass or plastic
- A sharp knife or single edged razor
- 400 grit sandpaper
- A reed trimmer

Hold the reed up to a bright light and see if you can tell if one side looks thicker (darker) than the other. Start by thinning the tip a little. Try taking a tiny bit of material off the darker side.

Now play the reed, sometimes a very small adjustment can make a really big difference. Use the chart below to determine what adjustment needed to be performed.

You don't want to take off too much. You will find that if done properly all you will see is bits of fuzz after removing material.



Problem Detected	Reed Area	Possible Solution	Notes
Too soft	Tip	Trimmer	Clip small amount. Test
Buzzy	Tip	Trimmer	Same as above.
Lack of resonance	1 & 2	400 grit Sandpaper	Balance.
Dull sound on soft playing so	1 & 2	400 grit Sandpaper	Balance; take off both sides
Blows hard	2	400 grit Sandpaper	Thin both sides and balance.
Lower register lacks resonance	2	400 grit Sandpaper	Balance and thin if necessary.
Tip too thick after clipping	Under side of tip	400 grit Sandpaper on glass	Sand to about 3/8 of an inch back from tip.
Reed whistles	2	400 grit sandpaper	Balance.
High tones hard to play softly	2 & 1	400 grit sandpaper	Thin gradually with light stroke.
Thin high register	3	400 grit sandpaper	Test after each few strokes.
Poor projection in upper tones	3	400 grit sandpaper	Move three back from the tip.
Poor resonance in mid tones	4	400 grit sandpaper	Lightly on 3 also.
Heavy low register	6	Scraping knife	Finish sandpaper.
General lack of resonance	7 & 8	Sandpaper on glass	Reed may be too wide for mouthpiece.
Reed plays well but blows hard	6 - 5 - 4 - 3	Scraper	Thin evenly all indicated areas.
Table not flat	Table	Razor blade	Stroke lightly towards tip.
Table not smooth	Table	Sandpaper on glass	Rub lightly in the direction of the grain.