

Beginning Bassoon Basics

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Frequently damaged areas of the bassoon and how to protect them.

Bb key linkage can be damaged. Hold down Bb pad when attaching bell.

Bocal can break easily. Always grasp bocal at the bend where it is thicker and stronger, not near the reed.

Keep reed in mouth or water when not playing or walking with bassoon.

Whisper key pad will be torn off by bocal vent if whisper key is depressed while inserting bocal. Use finger on wing joint to hold whisper key open.

General set up

A bassoonist should always soak their reed in a cup of water, not in their mouth.

Have the student sit up straight with the bassoon in the right hand perpendicular to the floor. Focus on a point straight ahead and slow bring the bassoon across the body. Without a reed, the bocal should land in just below the lower lip. Adjust the seat strap as needed. "Bring the bassoon to you, don't move to it."

Keys in this area on the bass and wing joint can hit each other on the back (pictured here) and the keys of the wing joint on the front can scrape the wood of the bass joint. Check front and back multiple times while attaching bass joint to ensure no keys are hitting each other or scraping any wood.



A duck in distress: troubleshooting common problems

Low notes sound an octave up or some higher harmonic: Usually caused by "biting" the reed or not enough space in mouth.

Middle F# or G "cracking" or warbling between octaves: Half hole needs to be more open.

Middle G# "cracking": Half hole needs to be more closed.

Impressive multiphonics or dying duck sounds: A finger is not fully covering a tone hole. LH middle finger is a common culprit. A cup style seat strap can also be at fault if it is holding open a pad on the boot joint as they often do.

A few thoughts on fingerings

A good fingering chart is indispensable. All those thumb keys exist for a reason yet most method book charts ignore them. Those charts should be burned. I would recommend this chart created by my friend and colleague: <https://davidawells.com/resources/fingering-charts/>