From Beginner to Intermediate Clarinetist

Crossing the Break

Going from the Chalumeau to the Clarion Register

Chalumeau Register

Clarion Register

Beginner

Intermediate

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Introduction

The most difficult time for beginning clarinet players comes when crossing the break occurs. Crossing the break refers to playing notes that move from the chalumeau to the clarion register or vice-versa (figure #1). The difficulty in doing this lies in the need to have all 9 fingers move in a coordinated effort to cover or uncover holes and depress keys at exactly the same time.

Registers of the Clarinet

![Registers of the Clarinet](image)

Basic Preparation

1. Students must have developed excellent hand positions.
2. Students must have developed a firm embouchure.
3. Students must be able to play the complete chalumeau register from throat Bb to low E in F major.
4. Students must be able to begin any single tone in the chalumeau register from throat Bb to low E.

Ideal Hand Position

The Left Hand “Guide Position”

1. The left thumb is held close to the index finger in order to place the side of the index finger on the G# key and at the same time over the end of the A key (figure #2).
2. The third finger is stretched as necessary to reach and close the C hole.
3. The little finger rests on the edge of the low E key.
4. Fingers 1 and 2 curve onto the E and D holes respectively.

A Practical Left Hand Position for Young Hands

The unfortunate problem with hand position for young students is the size of the hands and the difficulty they have getting their hands in an ideal position. The goal is to have their hands in the “best” possible position so, as they grow, they will develop an ideal position with as little adaptation as possible.
The Right-Hand “Guide Position”

1. *The entire weight of the clarinet must be supported by the right thumb.* This is a major problem for young students and is the cause of much of the problems with hand position. Frequent rests are necessary to build up strength in the right-hand thumb. A neck strap to assist in holding the clarinet can be useful at this time.

2. The thumb must be straight and form a “backward C” with the index finger. The thumb should not be permitted to touch the index finger at any point. The index finger may not assist in holding the clarinet by touching the side Eb key.

3. In general, the thumb should place a “fingerprint” on the back of the clarinet so that the weight of the clarinet is placed on the “side” of the thumb. While there are permissible variations in the thumb position, the clarinet should not be supported by the thumb nail. A thumb pad is recommended for beginning students until they build up a callous on the side of the thumb.

4. Fingers 1,2,3 are placed on the Bb, A, and G tone holes respectively. This may require a “reach” of the arm for small students.

5. The little finger rests on the low F key.

**Important Note:**

The hands and arms should not be moved from these positions when playing. If the hands and/or arms must be moved in order to play low F and E, the student may not be physically big enough to find success in crossing the break.

![Image of a clarinet](image-url)
Contents

In order to make crossing the break as successful as possible, this text contains exercises to prepare the student’s hand position and technique to accomplish the coordination necessary for success.

Page 5  Left-Hand Exercises

Of primary importance for the left hand is to be able to play the throat tones without pulling the left hand out of guide position. Care should be taken to keep the left-hand index finger as close to the A key as possible and the thumb ready to touch the tip of the register key for Bb. The little finger should touch the low E key at all times.

Page 6  Right-Hand Exercises

The right-hand thumb supports the clarinet therefore take a break between each repetition of the exercises to rest the thumb. Be sure to keep the little finger on the low F key at all times.

Page 7  Going Above the Break

Playing from the chalumeau register to the clarion register before attempting to play notes in the clarion register is the easiest and most successful approach to preparing to cross the break. When slurring from the low note to the higher note, keep the embouchure still and firm.

Page 8  Crossing the Break Coming DOWN

These are the first exercises in which we actually “cross the break”. It is much easier to cross the break if we slur up to the clarion register and then step down across the break than to attempt to go up across the break immediately. When crossing the break, move the hands quickly and with as little motion as possible staying in guide position at all times. The embouchure does not change.

Page 9  Crossing the Break Going UP

We are now ready to cross the break going up. If the hands are in guide position and the previous exercises have been mastered, these exercises will help to easily cross the break.

Page 10  Melodies to Practice Crossing the Break

To make practice fun and continue to develop skill in crossing the break, there are twelve melodies to complete the transition from beginner to intermediate clarinetist.
Practice each exercise TEN times keeping your hands in "Guide Position" at all times

Left-Hand Preparatory Exercises
Right-Hand Preparatory Exercises

Practice each exercise TEN times keeping the hands in "Guide Position" at all times.
Only the "tip" of the thumb moves to open the register key when changing registers.
Crossing the "Break" Coming Down

Keep hands in "Guide Position" at all times
Move quickly and smoothly from one fingering to the next

* Keep Right Hand Down
Crossing the "Break" Going Up

Keep hands in "Guide Position" at all times
Move quickly and smoothly from one fingering to the next

* Keep Right Hand Down
Melodies that Cross the "Break"

Go Tell It On The Mountain
African-American Folksong

Green Grow The Lilacs
Irish Folk Tune

All Through the Night
Welsh Folksong

Lonesome Dove
American Folksong

* Keep Right Hand Down
Londonderry Air

Old Irish Tune

Rock-a My Soul [ Keep Right Hand Down At All Times ]

African-American Spiritual

Polly Wolly Doodle [ Keep Right Hand Down At All Times ]

American Folksong