

Breathing for the *Oboe*

How the smallest reed opening changes the way you use your air.

THE BIG IDEA

A tiny opening = big back pressure.

The oboe reed has the smallest opening of any reed instrument. Air can only leave in a thin stream, so it builds up behind the reed. That push is called **back air pressure** — and every oboist has to learn to manage it.

F Flute Player's Problem

The flutist shapes their own opening with their lips. It takes years to control, and too much air escapes at first.

Common feeling: dizzy or lightheaded from losing air.

O Oboe Player's Problem

The oboe reed already has an opening built in — so the opposite problem shows up. Air can't escape fast enough.

Common feeling: "I can't get rid of my air quickly enough!"

Three Ways Oboists Handle Back Pressure

PRACTICE FOCUS

01

Reed Making

Shaping the reed changes how easily air moves through it. A good reed is easier to blow.

02

Smart Phrasing

Plan where you breathe. Phrasing decides when to release air and when to refill.

03

Right-Sized Breath

Don't overfill! Only take in the air the next phrase actually needs.

High Notes: **Blow Harder, Don't Bite**

Once you've got the basics of your embouchure (your lip grip) and tone, start practicing **octave exercises**. Here's the rule for high notes:

The reed is small and super-sensitive. Squeezing your lips harder just makes the note go sharp. To hit high notes cleanly, use more **air pressure** from your body and keep your lips steady.



Do this

Push more air. Keep your lips steady.



Not this

Biting or clamping — the note goes sharp.



Less fingers means more air.

A woodwind rule of thumb. It matters most for bassoon, but oboists feel it too — especially on high notes, when fewer keys are held down.