Saxophone Maintenance

Saxophone Care

Saxophone Assembly

1. Hold onto the bell and neck when assembling the saxophone. Be careful not to bend any of the keys.
2. When attaching or adjusting the mouthpiece, hold onto the neck. This will help you avoid bending the neck.

Saxophone Tips

- Never leave the neck strap attached to your sax when you put it in the case.
- The use of a tenon plug is essential for the safety of the octave mechanism.
- Accidental bending of the octave key is the most common damage to saxophones, and will cause your horn to not respond correctly.

General Woodwind Care Tips

- No gum or soft drinks before playing. Sugar mixed with saliva builds up on the pads and causes them to stick, making it difficult to play the instrument.

- Use cork grease as little as possible, but make sure you use it when needed. To apply it properly, you must rub the grease into the cork. Do not use ChapStick®.
- So moisture does not absorb into the pads, use an absorbent drop swab to clean out the moisture from each section before you place it in the case.
- Wipe down the exterior of the instrument with a non-treated cloth to remove fingerprints and residue.
- Do not store the reed on the mouthpiece; store in a reed holder. Reeds can cement themselves to your mouthpiece and collect many germs. As soon as the reed cracks, chips, or softens, it is time to replace it.
- Clean your clarinet or saxophone mouthpiece in warm, soapy water, making sure the reed and ligature have been removed.
- Do not leave a woodwind instrument in a hot car, or in your trunk. Extreme temperatures can damage your instrument.
- Do not set anything on top of your woodwind instrument, whether inside or outside of its case; this includes sheet music! Damage occurs easily when items are set on the instrument and the case is closed. The keys are often bent this way.
- Make sure the case is closed securely. Check all hinges, latches, and handles to ensure they are securely fastened.
- Never use pliers or hammers on your instrument. Improper use of household tools is a common cause of unnecessary damage to instruments.
- It is recommended that an instrument is taken to a professional repair technician at least once a year for general maintenance and cleaning. Doing so may prevent costly repairs that may eventually arise. A qualified technician can often discover a problem that you may have overlooked or may not be aware of.

More Information

Woodwind instruments should have moisture removed from the bore after every playing. Pulling a swab through the bore of a clarinet removes the moisture that can accumulate and possibly cause cracking. Moisture should also be removed from the exterior of the instrument as well. Wipe the outside of the body using a soft cloth. Also wipe the keys to remove any residue that could result in tarnishing.

There is much debate at this time as to whether a wood body of a clarinet should be oiled. Some experts in the field (including manufacturers) suggest oiling the bore with a fine bore oil to maintain resistance against moisture absorption. Others say the wood will only absorb a slight - amount of oil (on the surface) creating an imbalance between the surface and the wood below. This would create stress resulting in the body

cracking. If you do decide to oil, use a minimum on a soft cloth. The cloth should not be dripping wet, just damp. Avoid oil on the pads and corks.

Sticky pads can sometimes be adjusted by dragging a soft cloth between the pad and tonehole surface. Place the cloth between the pad and tonehole, then lightly close the pad against the cloth. Pull the cloth out being careful not to apply too much pressure which could cause the skin of the pad to tear. We generally do not recommend the use of powders which are supposed to dry the moisture on the pad. The powder doesn't work any better than the cloth and usually ends up in the key mechanisms causing the keys to be sluggish. If the cloth doesn't work after several tries, the pad should be replaced.

Key mechanisms need to be checked periodically for loose screws. Grasp the key and gently try to move side to side. If there is play, tighten the pivot screw until the key has a minimal amount of movement. If you tighten too much, the key will lock up. Loosen the screw slightly until the key moves again. Rods need to be tightened for proper seating of the pads. Check for rods that are extending beyond the post and tighten if necessary.

Oiling of the key mechanisms is essential for proper key operation. Any of the fine key oils available from the major manufacturers will work (or sewing machine oil is acceptable). A drop on the end of a needle pin is plenty for each key that contacts a post, either where a rod goes through a key, or where a key is held with a pivot screw. Oil the keys once every year. Too much oil and it will run over the keys, eventually removing the key corks. Not enough and the keys will dry out causing the keys to be sluggish.