

# Reed Tests

*Based on information from Elaine Douvas & Linda Strommen*

## **Aspirated Attacks** (response - tip)

Using your normal embouchure, blow lightly into the reed. The response should come with ease, but there must still be something to blow against.

If the reed requires too much support or if you have to engage the embouchure too much, then:

- be sure tip is symmetrical
- thin corners of the tip
- scrape the rest of the reed to balance with the amount just taken off the tip
- make sure the reed is not over-soaked

NOTE: Scraping across the entire end of the tip can make high notes flat and cause a scattered tone

## **Peep in Playing Position** (resistance, tone quality, pitch in upper register - transition between tip and heart/plateau)

Using your normal embouchure, playing at the reed's pitch floor, articulate the reed on one wind at forte and piano dynamic levels. Listen for the qualities of both pitch and tone.

- If tone is thin, the left hand notes (in both octaves) will also be thin
- The pitch should consistently be a "C" when playing to the pitch floor. Challenge the reed by trying to play down to the "B" to be sure you are evaluating objectively. Playing the "B" should feel awkward to the embouchure. The "peep in playing position" should be no lower than a 1/2 step lower than the "thread crow."
- If the "peep in playing position" is flat, check that the transition between the tip and heart/plateau has enough definition. If the transition is too smooth, the tip may lose its independence from the rest of the reed. It could actually become flatter after clipping.

**Glissando Test** (stability vs. flexibility [pitch of high notes] - length of the tip at the center and the sides as well as the concavity at the base of the tip)

Begin with the reed & embouchure in the normal playing position. Move the reed out of the mouth to produce a glissando down. The pitch should move down a minor third. More than a minor third is too flexible, and less than a minor third is not flexible enough.

- If the glissando is too large (greater than minor 3rd), the reed may be unstable due to:
  - Loose sides (get rid of reed)
  - Residual ears remaining on the tip, or the overlap has not been clicked in place.
    - remove the ears and click overlap in place
  - Tip may be too long.
    - Clip tip and rebalance the reed
  - Tip may be too thin.
    - Clip tip and rebalance the reed

NOTE: The amount of flesh on the reed can affect the pitch. Too much flesh on the reed can cause false readings and make the reed seem flat.

**Thread Crow** (pitch and depth - back [concavity at the base of the tip or transition between tip and heart/plateau])

Crow the reed without engaging the embouchure, and place the reed in the mouth up to the string. Begin crowing softly and bring the low register in as the air becomes more concentrated and the air speed is increased. The reed should have a two octave "C" or "C#" crow. (This pitch is determined by the oboe, so don't be afraid of a "C#". If your reed crows a "C" on certain oboes, you may find yourself biting to achieve correct playing pitch. Know your oboe!

- The high octave should speak easily, the lower octave will enter later when using more air. The speed at which the lower octave enters is a measure of the reed's resistance.
- If the crow is too noisy or rattling, or if there are three octaves in the crow, check for loose sides, heart/plateau being too thin, residual ears, or an overlap that has not been clicked in place.