



Demystifying Bassoon Reeds: Adjustments and Maintenance Strategies

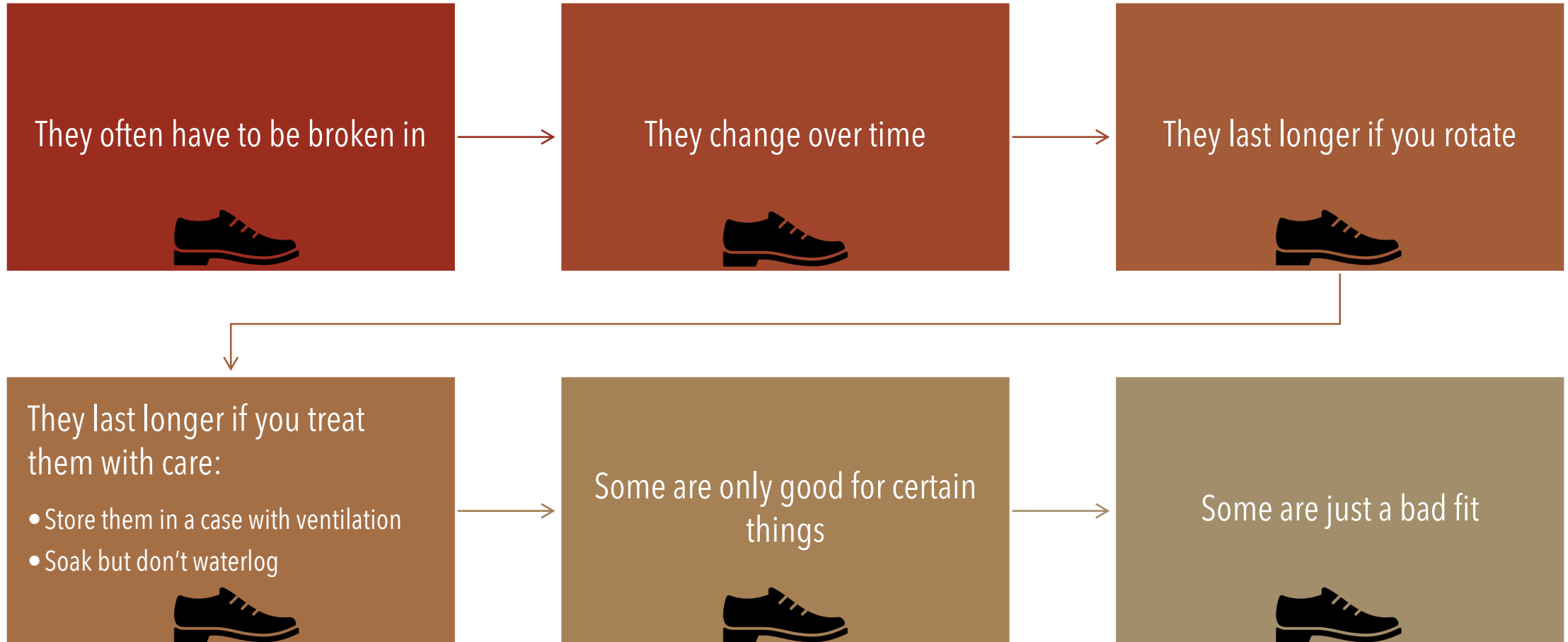
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Reeds are like shoes



What is a crow?



A crow is a multiphonic that reveals the presence of low, mid, and high tones

To test a crow: place your embouchure on/near the top wire and blow

A good crow:

- Vibrates freely
- Multiple tones present
- Mids/lowers dominate
- Tells me:
 - This student's embouchure is in good shape
 - This reed is (for the most part) well-balanced

A concerning crow:

- High sounds dominate
- 1-2 tones present
- Could mean:
 - Embouchure is too tight
 - Reed tip is too closed or stiff



Reeds are like haircuts:

You can always take more off,
but you can't put it back on!

What I am not going to teach you:

- How to make or form a reed
- How to scrape a reed
- How to use a knife
- Most adjustments that involve removing cane

Goals

How to improve your students' reeds

How to teach your students to improve their reeds

How to make your students' reeds last as long as possible

How to adjust your students' reeds without removing cane

Plaque

- Must obtain from double reed supply company
- \$4.00 each



Mandrel

- Amazon.com
- \$15.99



Pliers

- Amazon.com or most craft stores
- \$12.49



High-Grit Sandpaper

- Amazon or any hardware store
- \$4.99 for a multipack
- 800, 1,000, and 2,000 grit



End Cutting Pliers

- Optional
- Amazon.com
- \$8.79



Manufactured Reeds

- Are mass-produced via machines in which each piece of cane (which is highly variable) is subjected to the same processes.
- Are unfinished "blanks" assumed to be tailored to individual taste
 - If not:
 - Loud and blatty
 - Too thick
 - Harsh response
 - Often flat



What does it mean to "finish" a reed?

1

Take down the tip:

- Using high grit sandpaper, gently scrape tip five times, while using your index finger to apply pressure:
 - Back and forth
 - Up and down
 - Circles
- When it's finished, blades should be as thin as a piece of paper
 - Too thick and the reed will have poor response

2

Buff away the pithy fibers

- With a plaque in, use very high grit sandpaper all over the blade
- When it's finished, it will be smooth to the touch

3

Soak well and use your fingers to manipulate the tip opening

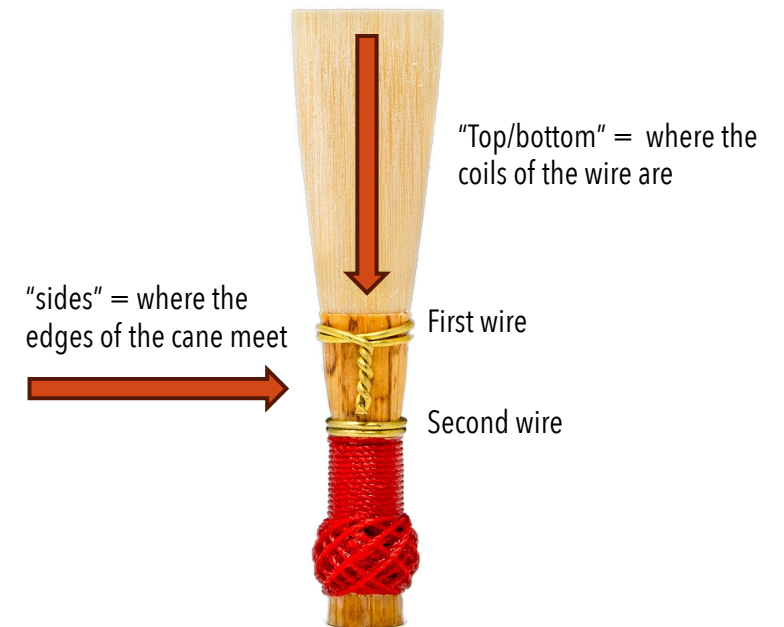
- Football shaped: too open
- Sliver shaped: too closed
- Just right: almond shape

Adjusting a Finished Reed: Tone

- If the tone of the reed is too blatty or unrefined:
 - Pinch the corners of a well-soaked reed with your fingers and "flex" the tip 2-3 times
 - Then, pinch all the way down the sides of the reeds
 - This will also help combat a sinking E
- If the tone of the reed is too dull or stuffy:
 - With a plaque inserted in a well-soaked reed, rub your thumb across the entirety of each blade length-wise to compress the fibres.
- If either of these don't yield the results you're looking for, you can reverse them by applying the other
 - Example, if pinch and flex made it too dull, give it a thumb rub

Adjusting a Finished Reed: Tip Openings

- When you adjust the wires, always have your mandrel in!
- Bassoon wires have opposite functions.
- Therefore, you can make a reed tip more open by:
 - Applying pressure with your pliers to the sides of the first wire
 - Adds resistance
 - Apply pressure with your pliers to the top/bottom of the second wire
 - Does not add resistance
- And you can close a reed tip by:
 - Applying pressure with your pliers to the sides of the second wire
 - Apply pressure with your pliers to the top/bottom of the first wire



Adjusting a Finished Reed: Rounding/Flattening the Tube

- Because wires have opposite functions, you can apply equal pressure to both wires to change the shape of the tube without altering the blades/tip opening:
- Equal sideways pressure on both the first and second wire results in making the tube more round:
 - This will create a more mellow tone
 - This will add resistance
 - This will help combat a sinking E
- Equal top/bottom pressure on both the first and second wire results in making the tube more flat:
 - This will create a more vibrant tone
 - This will decrease resistance
- If either of these don't yield the results you're looking for, you can reverse them by applying the other

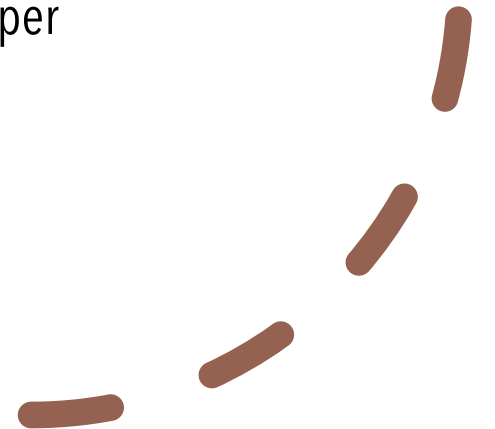
Other problems you might encounter

- If your student's blades are slipping:
 - They are twisting the reed onto the bocal when it's wet
 - Have them put it straight on



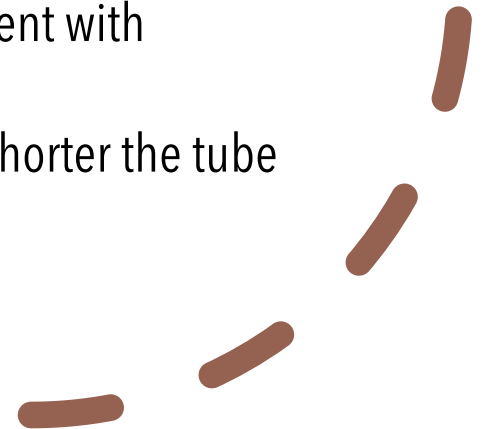
Other problems you might encounter

- A sinking E (the middle range E comes out as an E-flat):
 - If the reed is broken in and rounding the tube and/or pinch and flex has not resolved the issue, you can use your end cutting pliers to clip no more than one millimeter from the tip at a time.
 - This should be a last resort, but will be necessary sometimes
 - After clipping, finish tip again with sandpaper



Other problems you might encounter

- Poor intonation:
 - We don't pull out or push in anything on the bassoon to improve intonation.
 - There are no quick fixes
 - Primarily, intonation is dealt with through voicing by the player.
 - In other words, they have to learn how to play in tune.
 - Intonation comes from within.
 - This is because our instruments are extremely flexible.
 - Exceptions:
 - If EVERY NOTE on the instrument (not just select "bad notes") is chronically high or low, you can:
 - Add/remove length from the instrument with reeds/bocals that are shorter/longer
 - Bocals: the smaller the number, the shorter the tube
 - 0-4



Reed Recommendations



Cougar Reeds*: www.wilsonbassoon.com/cougarreeds



Jiffy Reeds: www.jiffyreeds.com



Legere: <https://shop.legere.com/collections/bassoon-reeds/products/bassoon-reed?variant=30367485377>

Questions?

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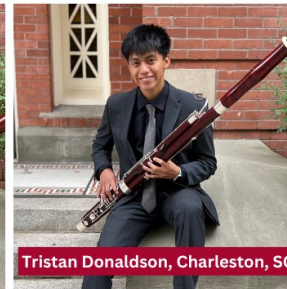
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