

Voicing the Saxophone Mouthpiece

(beginning mouthpiece buzzing)

Why blow into just the mouthpiece? For every saxophonist, the work of sculpting a sonically vibrant sound is never done. Learning to create a stable, focused pitch on a mouthpiece is essential for playing the saxophone in tune throughout all ranges of the instrument, from the low register bell keys to the upper register palm keys and beyond. Gaining flexibility with mouthpiece voicing, also called “buzzing,” is a gateway to melodic inflections such as vibrato, scoops and bends.

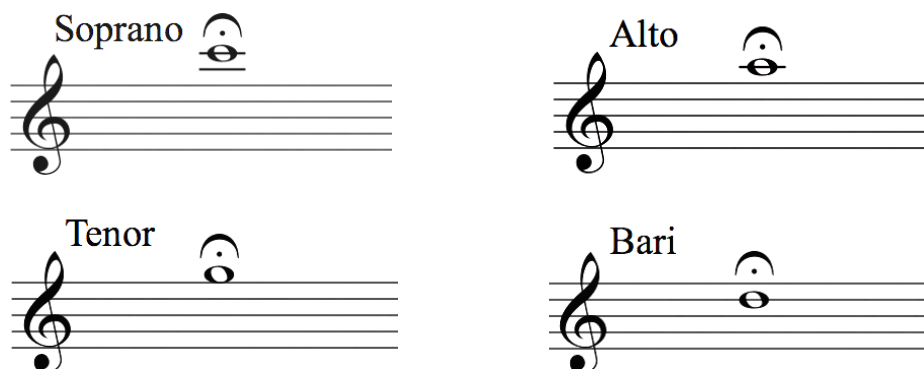
Playing the Mouthpiece

-Set up the mouthpiece in the standard fashion. Your reed should be well soaked in water and your saliva, aligned to the tip of the mouthpiece, with the ligature firmly set.

-Blow into the mouthpiece. Mouthpiece buzzing should be done at a *mf* to *f* dynamic. Although your “instrument” is now much smaller and higher pitched, work to create the same embouchure shape you would normally use when playing the fully assembled saxophone. There will be much more back pressure when blowing into the mouthpiece only, since it has now become a very small instrument with a narrow opening! Work to produce a full, vibrant note by blowing with a steady air stream.

Voicing the Mouthpiece

Each member of the saxophone family has a standard mouthpiece pitch that should be voiced while blowing into the fully assembled horn. This pitch engages a “core” embouchure shape that will enable ease of playing and ensure sonic flexibility. While blowing into the mouthpiece only, work to obtain the following in *Concert Pitch*:



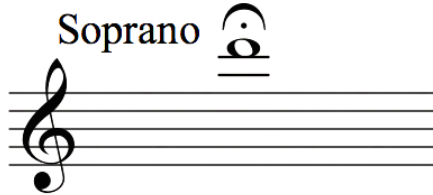
Tips to help you find your mouthpiece pitch:

- Using an audible concert pitch tuning drone, try to match the sound you hear.
- Using a tuner, try to visually bring your pitch to the center of the screen and match the correct concert pitch letter for your instrument.

Move to the Horn

Once you are able to play the correct mouthpiece pitch, put your mouthpiece on the horn and play the corresponding pitch on the fully assembled instrument. This pitch should be transposed for your saxophone type. To try this for yourself, play the following note below on your saxophone:

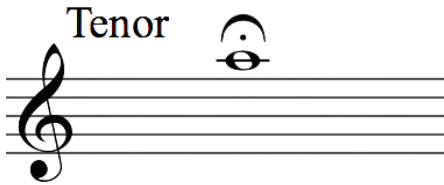
Soprano: Palm Key D



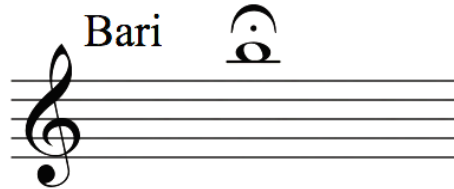
Alto: Middle Octave F#



Tenor: A Above the Staff



Bari: B Above the Staff



The note you play above should sound the same as your mouthpiece pitch, although in a lower octave.

Tip for musical growth:

Alternate back and forth between playing the mouthpiece only and the corresponding note on the fully assembled horn (transposed) for your instrument. Try to keep the pitch steady and consistent whether playing on just the mouthpiece or your full horn.

How Often Should I Practice Mouthpiece Voicing?

Reinforcing a "core" embouchure shape by voicing the correct pitch into the mouthpiece should be a part of every saxophonist's daily work. A minute or so of mouthpiece buzzing daily will contribute towards giving you a rich and vibrant sound.