

Instrument Doubling for Saxophone Players

Created for Clearwater Jazz Holiday Jazz Master “Virtual” Sessions
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Why doubling is important

- If you play in a jazz ensemble or big band, doubles are sometimes required.
- As a working musician, you will be able to take on more work the more versatile you are.
- Most woodwind books for musicals/shows require at least 2-3 doubles.
- As a teacher, you can learn enough to teach lessons to beginning, intermediate, or advanced students.
- They are fun to play!

Common Doubles

- Alto Sax: Clarinet, Flute/Piccolo, Soprano. (Oboe for musicals/shows)
- Tenor Sax: Clarinet, Flute, Soprano. (Bassoon for musicals/shows)
- Baritone Sax: Clarinet, Flute, Bass Clarinet, Alto Sax (Bassoon for musicals/shows)
- ***Learning another saxophone technically isn't considered doubling, but learning to play more than one type of saxophone usually comes with the territory of being a saxophone player in general. I play all 4 saxes :)***

Clarinet

- Some saxophone players begin on clarinet before moving to saxophone. This is usually encouraged.
- If saxophone was your first instrument, clarinet should be the first double you learn.
- Find a used clarinet to learn on. Affordable brands: Yamaha, Buffet, Selmer, P. Mauriat, Leblanc, Jean Paul

Approaching the clarinet

- Embouchure - The embouchure should be more firm than playing saxophone.
- Reeds - You should be able to start on a more stiff reed than a beginner reed. Try a 2.5 or 3 to start
- Fingerings - Usually the trickiest part of learning the clarinet. (The break...)
- Buy a beginner book for clarinet; a band method book is helpful. I like to use the Rubank Method books. You may improve at a faster rate since you already know some saxophone.

Solo/Improvisation on Clarinet

- Soloing on clarinet can be a challenge at first. Here are some tips on how to approach it.
 - 1) The **lower range** of the clarinet fingerings match the **alto saxophone** sound and fingerings. (Written notes “E4” and lower) For example: Left Hand 3 fingers down is concert Bb on both instruments (C for clarinet, and G for alto sax). I tend to “think” in alto sax key when I play in the bottom range.

Solo/Improvisation on Clarinet

- Soloing on clarinet can be a challenge at first. Here are some tips on how to approach it.
- 2) The **upper range** of the clarinet fingerings match the **tenor saxophone** sound and fingerings. (Written notes “C5” and higher) For example: Left Hand 3 fingers down with the register key is concert F on both instruments (G for clarinet and tenor sax). I tend to “think” in tenor sax key when I play in the upper range.

Solo/Improvisation on Clarinet

- Soloing on clarinet can be a challenge at first. Here are some tips on how to approach it.
 - 3) “The Break” - On clarinet, a certain group of notes are called “throat tones.” When playing through these notes, it’s referred to as “going over the break.” The break refers to the breaking up of the fingering pattern of the clarinet. These notes on clarinet include: G, G#/Ab, A, and A#/Bb in the middle of the staff.
 - This can make things a bit tricky when soloing. Practice playing through these notes slowly at first. Learning major scales in 12 keys will also facilitate ease of playing these notes.

Flute

- Flute can be a very fun double to play.
- Learning flute isn't always necessary, but it's very useful to have a double.
- Find a used flute to learn on. Affordable brands: Yamaha, Gemeinhardt, Pearl, Jupiter, Jean Paul, Etude, Allora.

Approaching the Flute pt. 1

- Embouchure - This is the trickiest part to learning the flute. Getting a good sound that's clean, pure, and has the least amount of extra air noise is the priority.
- Practice on the head joint first. Treat it like blowing over the top of a pop bottle.
- Center the tone hole over your lip line while your lips are closed and relaxed. Roll the lip plate away from you so that the tone hole is exposed so that you can blow across it.
- While remaining relaxed and without pursing your lips, think of the syllable "poo" and blow with steady air across the tone hole.

Approaching the Flute pt. 1

- Practicing this in a mirror is best. Look for the vapor trail on the lip plate to be in the center. Adjust the aperture (hole formed by your lips) to help get a tone.
- Be mindful of your air! Blowing too hard too often can make you dizzy and winded. If this happens, take a break.
- Once you get a good tone on the head joint, start practicing with the instrument assembled.

Approaching the Flute pt. 2

- Flute fingerings are very similar to saxophone fingerings with some small adjustments.
- Practice doing lip slurs between notes throughout the instrument's range. This will help you develop control of your embouchure. There is no register key for flute so extending the range higher requires good control of your embouchure.
- Always strive for a pure of a tone as you can.

Approaching the Flute pt. 2

- Some flutes are “open hole.” These flutes tend to be more advanced but also may have a slightly better tone. Some flutes come with hole plugs so you can gradually learn to play without them.
- Learning the upper range of the flute can be tricky. Work slowly. Use a flute method book (Rubank or a band method)
- Since the flute embouchure is quite different from the saxophone, you may consider taking a few private lessons with a flute instructor to get you started.

Soprano Saxophone

- Although not really considered a “double” per se, learning soprano can help you out on those rare occasions when one is needed for a recording session or a show.
- Some saxophone players choose to specialize on soprano or make it their most-used secondary instrument (Kenny G, Coltrane, Wayne Shorter).
- This is a very common saxophone to learn for tenor saxophone artists.

Soprano Saxophone

- Soprano saxophone has the same fingerings and notes as the tenor saxophone, just one octave higher. This makes it a fairly easy double to start.
- The real trick with soprano is embouchure and pitch. The smaller mouthpiece requires a much more firm and controlled embouchure than tenor.
- Work on achieving a desirable tone with long tones and use a tuner to work on your pitch.

Bass Clarinet

- Bass clarinet is often a double for baritone sax players.
- Modern jazz ensemble arrangers will often include bass clarinet as a double in one of the saxophone parts.
- If you get hired to play a musical or show with a Woodwind 4 part or if you are on baritone sax, bass clarinet is almost certainly a double.

Approaching Bass Clarinet

- If you've never played bass clarinet before, think about renting one or purchasing a used one to learn on.
- The fingerings are the same as the regular clarinet, however, there are no tone holes to cover. This makes the fingerings a bit easier to handle.
- Getting the right embouchure to produce a good tone is the most difficult thing about learning to play this instrument. The mouthpiece is much larger than a baritone sax and it may take some time to adjust.
- Work on the lower range first, striving for a deep, dark, rich tone. The upper range can be very finicky and may take more time to master.

Piccolo

- I don't play piccolo very much at all, but it could be a useful instrument to have if you are planning on playing in a lot of pit orchestras for musicals and shows. It often shows up in the Woodwind 1 part.
- Much more difficult to play than flute and requires a mastery of flute embouchure. I highly recommend learning to play flute before trying to play piccolo so you can get the feel of what it's like to form the embouchure and make a sound.

Double Reed Instruments

- **Oboe** - Fingerings are similar to flute and saxophone but with some minor adjustments.
 - Learning to play the double reed and get a desirable tone is a challenge.
 - There is a LOT of back pressure when blowing into the double reed.
 - I highly recommend learning from a private lesson instructor on oboe if you can.

Double Reed Instruments

- **Bassoon** - One of the trickiest doubles to learn, but not impossible. This is one of the less common doubles and is usually played by a musician who is highly specialized in doubling.
 - Often found in the Woodwind 4 books of musicals and shows.
 - This instrument reads in bass clef so you will need to learn to read that clef.
 - The embouchure is similar to the oboe, but not as firm. Making a sound should come fairly easy at first.
 - Fingerings - A complete nightmare! Extra thumb keys on both thumbs and very strange fingering combinations that aren't found with the other woodwind instruments. Best of luck!

Some final thoughts

- When learning to play a secondary instrument, it's important to take your time, go slowly, and strive for a good sound.
- Being consistent in your practice with your secondary instrument will allow you to improve at a faster pace. I recommend daily practice of at least 30-45 minutes.
- Learn your 12 major scales as soon as possible. Practice similar exercises that you practice on your primary instrument.
- Learn to play simple tunes by ear on your secondary instrument. Examples: Happy Birthday, Hot Cross Buns, Twinkle Twinkle, etc. Practice them in all 12 major keys.
- Pick up a music book with easy songs to learn; pop songs, Disney, etc. Learning these can be fun and also help you develop a good tone and good technique

Happy Doubling!

If you have any questions, contact me!

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