

every band class, or one who is still using the reed which came with the instrument two months ago, warrants a closer look in case there is a problem. Read on for tips on handling as well as getting longer life out of your reeds.

Don't you just replace reeds when they break?

The soaking of a reed prior to playing softens the fibers, as does the vibration of playing itself. Eventually after this process has been repeated several times, the fibers break down and the reed loses its resiliency, making it more and more difficult to produce an acceptable sound. Oh, it may still work, but the net effect is like driving on bald tires: if it's performance you want, you're in trouble. An overused 2½ can play as soft as a 1 or less! Possibly the most damaging habit a young woodwind player can get into is to play one reed until it's dead before starting a new one. The danger is that the student begins to change embouchure to compensate for the soft reed, and then has to change dramatically again when a fresh reed is finally used. The player is never able to form a consistent embouchure, resulting in poor performance and enough frustration to disillusion many players, even though the problem isn't the person and is easily solved.

DO AND DON'T :

As a natural wood product, reeds are victim to the same problems of warpage as any wood. They're also fragile, and they do wear out. To get the longest life out of your reeds:

DON'T leave the reed on the mouthpiece. It will easily warp, and is much more prone to breakage. Take the extra few seconds to remove it and store it.

DON'T store reeds in plastic boxes without a way for air to get in and dry them. It's much too easy for the reed to warp or mildew. Many reed cases have dessicant vials to help, but even these need to be changed every now and then.

DO get and use a reedguard for reed storage. They hold the reed flat, avoiding warpage while allowing enough airflow to dry the reed thoroughly. We provide a reedguard with our rental instruments, most band directors insist on them, and they're very inexpensive. The reed holder that comes with Rico reeds is adequate, although a multi-reed holder helps keep things organized.

DO rotate your reeds faithfully! Use at least three or four, and never play the same one two days in a row. Number your reedguard and play each reed in its turn. The longer rest lets the fibers return fully to normal, so you'll get more use out of each reed. You'll also avoid that dramatic embouchure shift mentioned above, so your playing will be more consistent. Finally, you'll spend less money on reeds!



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getting the most out of your reeds

As students progress, it becomes increasingly important that they learn to select, prepare, and adjust reeds for their individual playing needs. There are many articles dealing with these topics; we also strongly recommend seeking out a private teacher who can give you a more thorough explanation of these techniques than any article can.

This pamphlet, however, is intended as an introduction to reed care and usage for the early to intermediate woodwind student. It will provide students and parents alike with basic information aimed at reducing the frustration, confusion and expense of purchasing reeds.

Unfortunately, there is almost no time to cover this information during a band class; even when the students are given this information, it may never reach the ultimate purchaser of the reeds (usually Mom or Dad).

We have chosen to answer questions that have been asked of us hundreds of times over the past few years. It is necessary to note here that you may encounter many confusing or conflicting opinions about reeds when talking to directors, teachers, and players. Since every player is different, there may be gray areas where no one answer is completely right or wrong. When in doubt, players should use their own common sense and personal playing experience as a guide. We have chosen our information after talking extensively with reed and instrument makers as well as professional musicians and private teachers, and we gratefully acknowledge the help given us by Vandoren Inc., G. Leblanc Corp. and Rico International.



SELECTION :

What are reeds?

It is air vibrating the reed that produces the sound in a woodwind instrument. The reeds used on modern woodwind instruments started out as a bamboo-like grass called *Arundo Donax L.* Reed cane, as it is most commonly known, grows in many areas of the world. However, almost all the world's music cane comes from the southern part of France and adjacent coast of Spain, with a percentage also coming from Argentina and Australia. Much like wine growing regions, there must be the proper combination of climate and soil to grow playing-quality reed cane. Efforts to grow quantities of suitable cane commercially in America have been economically unsuccessful.

What do the numbers on the reed mean?

During the manufacturing process, the reeds are graded for relative hardness, or *strength*, of the vibrating area. They are usually graded from "1" to "5" including half strengths. (Quarter- or sub-strengths are marketed at the professional level, but aren't a concern for beginning students.) The lower the number, the softer the reed is. One major brand, LaVoz, still goes by the older system of "soft through hard" for single reed instruments, although this nomenclature is also used for oboe and bassoon double reeds. A medium-soft (MS) reed is normally equivalent to the 2 to 2½ range.

What effect does reed hardness or softness have on a student's playing?

In general, softer reeds (e.g., #2) will be easier to play and initially offer a more acceptable tone for a beginner. However, as a student needs to produce more volume and higher notes, a soft reed may make it difficult or impossible to do so.

Are harder reeds better, and should players use harder reeds the longer they play?

Not necessarily. We usually suggest that a student stick with no harder than a #2½ or #3, unless a private teacher or director is able to help with the selection. This is because reed hardness must be balanced with mouthpiece type, individual embouchure, tone quality, and playing situation, and most early players will need outside advice to make the appropriate choice.

What reed should a beginner use, then?

About 99% of beginning students start on either a 2 or 2½. In our experience, many band directors suggest #2 and move up to 2½ around mid-year, while private teachers seem to start students immediately with #2½. This may be due to the private teacher's ability to more closely monitor progress with the harder reed, while band directors may be trying for quicker gratification from an easier to blow, softer reed.

Are All #2 reeds the same strength?

No, not exactly. It is important to realize that there is no grading standard that all manufacturers follow. Some brands are closer than others, but you'll have to try them to see how they compare for *you*. Look at it this way: not all pizza parlors mean the same thing by a "large" pizza, either.

My reed says "V-2". Is it different from a regular 2?

Not in any critical way for the beginner. Originally, Rico reeds were cut or finished several ways. There was an "A" cut, and several others. Over time, the "V" cut was so popular that the others were discontinued. The V continues to be printed (on regular Rico reeds), but a brand without the letter, though it *could* be cut differently, will still work on your instrument. You may even like it better.

What's the best brand to buy?

There's no right answer to this one! In general, each brand has its own character, quality control system, and design philosophy. Some companies market several grades as well as cuts of reed, so the choices can be bewildering. Rico, for example, offers the regular *Rico*, *Rico Royal*, *LaVoz*, *Grand Concert*, *Plasticover*, and *Mitchell Lurie* reeds for clarinet alone. However, most beginning students tend to start with Rico's regular ("V") reeds, primarily because they're available almost everywhere, and they're relatively inexpensive. Better grade reeds (both Rico's and others) will reward you with better results, so try them if you can afford to.

CARE :

Is it OK to play on a cracked reed?

It's about the same as wearing glasses with one lens cracked. While you may get the reed to play, it won't be fun, and you'll end up working harder for a poor sound at best. Any crack or chip impairs the vibration of the reed. Don't waste time playing on it.

How long do reeds last?

It depends on the care you give them, the amount you play, and the type of playing you do. Some parents, especially, seem to think that reeds function like batteries in a radio: pop them in and they're good for weeks or months at a time. In reality, they demand as much care and attention as the instrument itself if you want to get the most out of them. At the very beginning, students will often damage as many reeds through improper handling as they will wear them out playing. In general, though, first or second year students playing in band tend to get one to three weeks use out of each reed, assuming it hasn't been damaged in handling. Therefore, a student who needs a new reed for

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