

How To Play

The saxophone

A Complete Beginner's Guide



Includes
Step-by-Step
Online Video
Lessons

Written & Performed By Award-Winning Saxophonist
Johnny Ferreira

How To Play The Saxophone - A Complete Beginner's Guide

Comprehensive and easy to follow step-by-step instructions and up-to-date techniques with video lessons of personal instruction

by Johnny Ferreira



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About the Author

Johnny Ferreira is a professional saxophonist, band leader, composer, recording artist and saxophone educator who runs several websites including: www.JohnnyFerreira.com and www.HowToPlaySaxophone.org, a membership site that has several thousand members and growing everyday, which you can join for free and learn more about playing the saxophone through videos and communicate with Johnny and other sax players on related topics within the members forum.

Want to learn how to play the sax? Great!

This course was written to take a complete beginner from getting a saxophone and putting it together to playing a repertoire of popular music.

You will:

learn all the notes and their fingerings

learn all the major scales

achieve and develop your tone
gain technique through simple scale-based exercises
learn to read basic music notation

And finally - learn some songs!

I'm Here For You...

Your saxophone education doesn't end here because you can become a member (for free) at HowToPlaySaxophone.org and take advantage of the extra tips and lessons being posted there whenever they are made available. There you can connect other saxophonists and myself in the member's forum with any comments or questions: <http://HowToPlaySaxophone.org/>

I really appreciate your feedback **so please Rate, Review, and "Like" this book on Amazon so others can discover it as well.** Much appreciated... thank you and enjoy the journey!

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Summary

The first few sections will teach you about the saxophone's main components including the sax itself, mouthpieces and reeds. Wrong choices here can lead to a journey of frustration instead of happiness and feelings of accomplishment!

The next few sections are about getting sounds and what is directly related in this process, namely how to breathe air into the saxophone the right way, and how your mouth, facial muscles and tongue are used... this is called your embouchure. Improper breathing and a poor embouchure are the main causes of slow tone development. Mistakes and bad habits here can take many months to fix so it pays to get it right from the start.

The following sections are about learning the notes, getting finger coordination and developing technique. We start nice and easy with a single note and slowly build up to full scales. Learning these scales and accompanying scale-based exercises will prepare you for what is one of the best parts of playing the saxophone and why you probably want to learn it in the first place... PLAYING SONGS!

Finally we will learn some songs which will give you a real repertoire of standard and popular tunes we all know and love. I say "we" because I have recorded lesson videos to guide you through this process so you will have something to watch and emulate besides just trying to figure it out for yourself. Also included are play-along backing tracks which make working on and learning songs way more fun than playing them by yourself and just reading the notes.

PLEASE KEEP IN MIND that embouchure and proper breathing can't be developed to perfection overnight! It will be slow and possibly frustrating at first but every day you'll get a bit better and fall in love with the instrument a little more each time.

Please Rate, Review, and "Like" this book on Amazon so others can discover it as well. I really appreciate your feedback. You can leave me comments and any questions regarding these lessons or playing the saxophone on my membership site HowToPlaySaxophone.org (see link above).

Introduction To This Beautiful Instrument known As The Saxophone

Why do we love the sound of the saxophone so much?

Maybe because it's the musical instrument that most resembles the human voice. Like our voices, the sax, or should I say the saxophonist is capable of producing an extreme range of sounds from sad, haunting dark tones to uplifting screams of laughter.

Unlike most instruments, which evolved over centuries to become what they are today, the saxophone was invented. In Belgium, around the early 1840's Adolphe Sax envisioned something which was a cross between a woodwind and a brass instrument, this was his inspiration to come up with the saxophone. Sax eventually constructed 14 different types of saxophones. Today there are four that are the most popular and commonly played:

Soprano in Bb

Alto in Eb

Tenor in Bb

Baritone in Eb

These 5 are not so common but they do exist:

Sopranino in F and also in Eb

Soprano in C
Mezzo-soprano in F

Melody in C

Bass in Bb
Contra-Bass in Eb

The soprano in F may be impossible to find these days but did exist at one time.
The C melody has not been made since earlier in the 20th century but they pop up from time to time, it falls between the alto and tenor.

The First Things You Need to Know About the Saxophone

Regardless of which saxophone you've decided to play, you should know that the fingering charts are the same for all the different saxophones. You don't need to buy an expensive professional model to start out with, an inexpensive one that is in good working order will do just fine.

The very first sax I bought was a very average King student model which cost \$200 in the 1970's and I used it for the first 2 years of my playing career. If money is no object then buy the best one you can, but truthfully, the biggest part of your tone will come from you (your embouchure) and your specific setup, meaning the mouthpiece and reed combination. These factors will play a bigger part in how you sound than the saxophone itself.

Before starting to play your sax I highly recommend taking it to a saxophone repair shop and have it quickly inspected for any minor leaks in the pads and any alignment problems as these can make it very difficult for the beginner to work with. A bad leak in just one note pad can make it almost impossible to even get out the first note. Since this can sometimes be difficult enough to do for some on a good working sax, a poorly working one can frustrate, and even turn off a beginner very quickly, so...

make sure your horn is in good working order!

Let's get started...

Taking Your Saxophone Out of it's Case

Getting your sax (safely) out of it's case and putting it together will be a snap once you do it a couple times. There are a few things to watch for because this is a very delicate instrument with lots of parts on it that can easily break or bend. Grab it on solid smooth surfaces and avoid things like rods and note pads. Grab it on solid smooth surfaces and avoid things like rods and note pads.

1. The best way to grab it while it's still in the case is by putting your right hand inside the bell, this gives you a firm hold and is a safe, smooth surface.



2. With your left hand grab it from the very bottom where it curves.







3. Once you have it firmly like this with both hands you can tuck it between your arm and body, this frees up your other hand to put the saxophone neck in place.



Putting On The Neck

Now that you know how to firmly and safely hold your saxophone it's time to put on the neck. This is very easy and simple to do but there are a couple points you need to be aware of. When you slide it into the hole at the top of the sax it shouldn't be extremely tight or extremely loose. If it's too tight try loosening the screw, if it's still too tight this area needs a professional adjustment. If it's too loose even with the screw tightened it will require an adjustment as well.

The second point to know is not to hold the sax by the bell and tugging on it while trying to put the neck on, this can create enough pulling pressure to take the sax out of alignment, and this can be an expensive repair job.



After pushing the neck all the way into the sax tighten the screw located on the side, at the top of the sax to firmly hold the neck enough in place so it can't move from side to side



DO NOT pull the sax apart by the bell while trying to slide the neck in, this can cause it to go out of alignment!



***Note** – you can view this section as a video lesson here:

<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/saxophone-handling>

***Attention** – the following few paragraphs are repeated in a much later section called “Tone” but I doubt anyone is not going to try blowing some kind of sounds out of their saxophones before getting to that part, so at least you can have some guidance for your first attempts at getting some sounds. You’ll get everything more together as you take in each following section, so...

Before Producing Your First Sounds

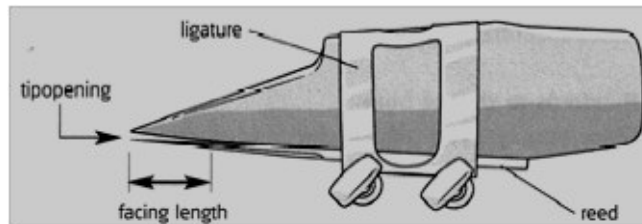
Before blowing your first sounds – could be squeaks and squawks but that's OK! You can blow into the mouthpiece before putting it on your sax after you position the reed in place of course (instructions for reed placement follow below in the "Reed" section). The following instructions apply whether the mouthpiece is on or off your sax. Do this as a warm up: 1. With the reed on the mouthpiece, put it in your mouth, resting your top teeth on the top side of the mouthpiece, not too much in, and not too close to the tip either... somewhere between a half inch to one inch of the mouthpiece should go in your mouth. Experiment with this by seeing if slipping it further in or out makes producing the sound any easier.

2. Your bottom teeth will be positioned directly underneath but don't let them touch the reed, instead curve your bottom lip over them to form a cushion between the teeth and the reed.

3. Again...your bottom teeth do not touch the reed, they rest on a curved bottom lip which is touching the reed.

Now blow nice and loud!

The Saxophone Mouthpiece



Next to having a good working saxophone, the mouthpiece is your most important piece of equipment. It's the part of the sax that goes in your mouth and is largely responsible for the kind of tone you will be producing, more than the sax itself.

There are seasoned saxophonists that spend more time searching for the perfect mouthpiece than the time they actually play their sax! There is no such thing as a perfect mouthpiece. That doesn't mean we shouldn't try to find one because we can get very close. As a beginner just start with the mouthpiece that came with your sax, unless there wasn't one included, in which case you can get one of the most highly recommended beginners mouthpiece such as the [Selmer S80 C*](#)

A typical beginners mouthpiece will have a medium facing and chamber which is ideal for someone just starting out.

Putting the mouthpiece on your saxophone

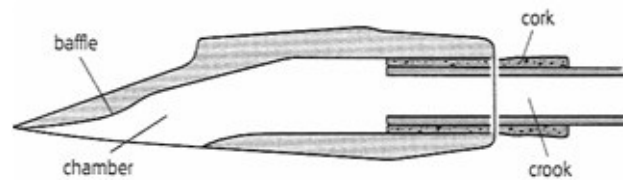


The mouthpiece slides directly onto the corked tip of the sax neck. If it does not slide on easily you can apply some cork grease which either came with your sax or you can get at a music store. Slide the mouthpiece about half way onto the cork. So if your cork is about an inch and a half in length as most are, the mouthpiece should cover 3/4 inches of the cork.

Tuning your sax

You can tune your saxophone by pushing the mouthpiece further in on the cork, or pulling it out closer to the tip of the neck. Pushing it in makes the sax sound sharper and pulling it out will make it sound flatter. You don't need to worry about the tuning very much until you're playing with others. At this point just keep the mouthpiece about half way on the cork because having it extremely too far in or too far out will make the sax be out of tune with itself.

Below is the mouthpiece placed about half way on the cork at the end of the neck:



Saxophone Mouthpiece Guide

The following section is more information than you may need at this point but I've included it here for when you're ready to move on to another mouthpiece. Reading this information will teach you how mouthpieces work and what you'll be looking for later on.

Most mouthpiece makers use a numbering system to identify the range of it's tip opening; a wide opening will give you a brighter sound, a narrow opening a darker sound. For the beginner though, any extreme in this opening range will make it difficult to produce any good sound though so a medium opening is the way to go.

The typical numbering chart ranges from 1 to 10, with 10 having the widest tip opening. I'll point out Selmer here because they make some very good mouthpieces but their system works different in that they use letters instead of numbers going from something like A to H, with H being the widest.

The Selmer C series are a very good choice for beginners as they are a nice medium opening. More specifically, the [Selmer S80 C*](#) is generally regarded as one of the best choices for starting out on and even taking you to the next level.

When you're just starting to play, use whatever mouthpiece is available to you, such as the one that came with your sax, at least for the first little while as you're learning how to get the basics down. You can check the one you have to make sure it's not an extremely open or closed model by the information above.

The most important parts of the mouthpiece are:

The Facing

The Baffle

The Chamber

The Facing – Look for a medium size facing.

This is what dictates the distance between the reed and the tip of the mouthpiece and is the most important thing when talking about the tip opening as mentioned earlier.

The Baffle – Look for a medium size baffle.

Right behind the tip is the baffle. As your sound leaves the reed it hits this baffle area first. A high baffle will leave less space between the reed and mouthpiece, sometimes causing squeaks quite easily. A low baffle leaves more space but if too extreme can make it harder for you to blow.

The Chamber

This is where the sound resonates in the mouthpiece. A small chamber going right into the mouthpiece will produce a larger and brighter sound than a large chamber. When considering the walls of the chamber as well, it's only fair to say that manufacturers have many variations available when designing the chamber, many of which shouldn't concern the beginner.

*While much of this might not be or seem relevant to you at this stage, it's good to know for when you feel ready to move on to a different style of mouthpiece.

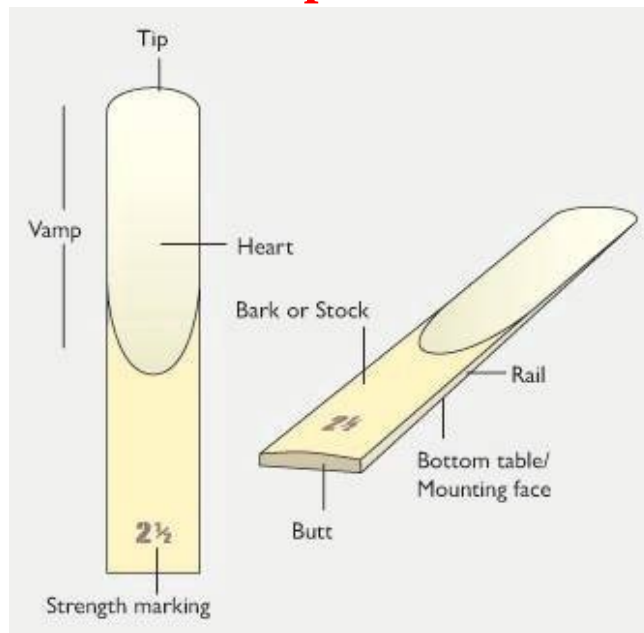
Three excellent mouthpiece brands:

Meyer - Selmer - Yamaha



Regardless of the brand, choose a mouthpiece that falls in the medium range or a step or two below. This means it will have a medium to slightly less facing and chamber which is ideal for beginners. As you gain more experience you can move up to a wider one which will enable tone improvement but don't think about taking a short cut yet because a very wide and opened one played at this stage will make it too hard to blow.

The Saxophone Reed



The above illustration shows all parts of a reed. The only option you have when buying a reed is the “strength marking” number which refers to it’s strength or thickness – the higher the number, the thicker the cut and the harder to play.

The reed you choose can be the difference between easily getting a sound or barely being able to produce one at all, even if your sax is working properly and you have a decent mouthpiece. At the very beginning this can be a troublesome and frustrating time because you may not know if your failed attempts are because of a reed or you. This is why having several reeds on hand is important.

The function of the reed is to vibrate very, very fast to produce a sound from your mouth into the saxophone. Much the same way when we were kids, taking a blade of grass between our thumbs and blowing into it to make a sound.

So, the thinner the reed, the easier this will be, that’s why a beginner starts out using one the two thinnest size reeds.

Reed Sizes

Reeds are categorized into sizes with numbers: 1, 1 1/2, 2, 2 1/2, 3, 3 1/2 *etc.* One being the thinnest and between 4 and 5 being the thickest cuts. When starting out get some 1's and also some 1 1/2's so you can go back and forth to determine which size works best for you. You can't rely on an instructor to tell you this because you're the only one that can feel the difference. For many beginners a size 1 is perfect for the first few weeks or months of playing and for others even a 1 may be too thin, in which case using a 1 1/2 is perfect.

Different Types and Brands Of Reeds

A few popular brands that have been around for a long time are La Voz, Rico, and Vandoren. Originally reeds were made out of one material; cane. Today most are still made out of cane but there are several more choices on the market: **Plastic coated reeds** – these are cane reeds coated with a very thin plastic coating. The idea is that they will last longer and be harder to break because of the protective coating.

Synthetic reeds – these are not made from natural cane but man-made synthetic materials. These will be more consistent, longer lasting, and much harder to break or damage.

As a beginner you shouldn't bother with any other reeds than a regular cane reed. The truth is that there are synthetic reeds that have come close to sound and feel like a natural cane reed but they are not perfect and companies are still working to make them sound and feel as good as a natural reed. Natural cane reeds can be inconsistent, unstable, and prone to warping but when you get a good one there is nothing better and easier to play.

Working on reeds

Some experienced players work on their cane reeds in order to make them play better. If a reed feels too soft you can get a reed clipper and simply clip off a very thin amount from it's tip, but too much and it will now be a very stiff reed. If a reed feels pretty good but just a little too stiff you can sand it down a bit. Sand paper may work but there is a popular tool used by clarinetists and saxophonists called Dutch Rush, which is a type of cane that is abrasive and ribbed and therefore perfect for shaving down a reed. It grows naturally in

America and Europe in watery banks and in under-brush areas of large evergreen trees and other heavy growth forests. You don't need to go hunting for Dutch Rush though because some music stores sell it!

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How to put the reed on the mouthpiece

After moistening it (refer to video lesson) put the reed on the flat face of the mouthpiece so it's top edge is even with the top of the mouthpiece... now slip the reed down just a hair so you can see just a hairline of the mouthpiece tip



when the reed is pressed up against it:

As you can see, the reed above is even with the tip of the mouthpiece.



By dropping the reed slightly below the mouthpiece tip a very small space is created between it's tip and the very top of the mouthpiece. You should be able to see this by pressing the reed tip to the mouthpiece with your thumb.

Putting on the ligature

The ligature is what holds the reed onto the mouthpiece. Tighten it's screws(s) very slightly, just enough to hold the reed on firmly but not too tight that it chokes it. The ligature should naturally sit around the mid section of the



mouthpiece, just below the line in the middle of the reed:

***Note** – you can view the section on reeds as a video lesson here:

<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/reed-care>

Your Embouchure

This whole process of having everything right between the mouthpiece and your mouth is called your embouchure.

Embouchure comes from the French word bouche, which means mouth. Your embouchure is all about how you use your facial muscles and the shaping of the lips on your mouthpiece. Proper form takes time to develop.

Playing with a proper embouchure is the only way you'll ever be able to play your sax in its full range with a full, clear tone that's in tune. The things that affect your embouchure are:

- facial muscles
- lips
- teeth
- jaw alignment
- mouthpiece placement
- cheeks
- tongue

Initially, the most important points to keep in mind are: your top teeth are resting on the top of your mouthpiece. Your bottom lip forms a cushion over your bottom teeth, in other words... your bottom teeth are not touching the reed! So you have your bottom lip between your teeth and the reed acting as a cushion. When you're new at this or play many hours in a row, you might develop a cut or sore on the inside of your bottom lip. This is normal. You'll get used to it and eventually any sores will disappear.

Simple exercise to develop these muscles

All these supporting facial muscles that are involved will develop over time. You can do a daily exercise to help strengthen some of these muscles: whistle. When you whistle the corners of your mouth will move to the center. After a short whistling period, smile the widest smile you possibly can. This brings the corners of your mouth back as far as possible. Rotate the whistles with the big smiles a few dozen times during the day. If these muscles get a little tired while you're doing this exercise it's because they need to develop and you can continue to do just that.

Your tongue is back from the reed and shouldn't touch the reed because it'll constrict the movement of the reed, which needs to vibrate very fast to produce a sound.

Summary

There are two words that define and summarize a good embouchure – **control** and **relaxation**. Your embouchure should be relaxed but well controlled and supported without being collapsed. Be patient, pay attention to all these elements every time you play and eventually you will develop a good, proper and strong embouchure!

***Note** – view the embouchure section as a video lesson here:

<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/embouchure>

Tongue Placement

Proper starting and ending of notes

The “attack” or start of a note should be concise, with equal intensity and proper pitch, all from the very start of the note. Your first note is the listener’s first impression of you and once you play that note, there is no turning back to correct it so work at getting it right from the start each time!

Let’s stop, think and prepare our list of things that are necessary and come into play to make this happen:

1. Embouchure position
2. Breath support
3. Tongue placement

We have talked about embouchure and proper breathing but not the position of the tongue, who’s job is to start and stop the notes. When doing this, the position of your tongue on the reed is crucial, but to the beginner can be confusing.

Starting a note is done by releasing it with your tongue, and ending that note is done by stopping the reed from vibrating with your tongue. At this point don’t try to start and stop a note with more or less air support. Full and constant air support should be going into your sax at all times, using your tongue to either allow the reed to vibrate or stopping it from vibrating is the technique used to start and end the note.

When I say to use the tip of your tongue to do this, you may wonder just where that actual “tip” is. Have a look at the two illustrations and notice how the first one shows almost the very tip of the tongue touching the reed, and the second shows the part of the tongue much further back. Which is right? This is a personal choice and depends on several different factors ranging from individual facial proportions to embouchure and mouthpiece position.

You should experiment and see where it feels most comfortable for you to properly start and stop a note with the tip of your tongue, which could be anywhere from near the actual tip to about half an inch or so further down.



When preparing to start a note, inhale, get your embouchure in place, place tip of tongue on reed and hold it there until air support comes towards the reed and release your tongue. You should be making a “ta” sound with each note release.

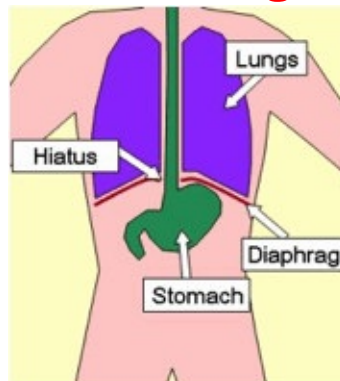
Stopping the note

Ending a note is just as important as starting it. The best way to end it is to stop the reed from vibrating with your tongue. Another way is to slow down or stop the flow of air, this works in certain musical situations such as when you need to taper off or fade out near the end of the note. The Long tone exercise with the crescendo markings later in this book are an example of this.

***Note** – you can view the tonguing section as a video lesson here:

<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/tonguing>

Breathing



One of the toughest things to do when starting out is creating proper air support. Air must come from the diaphragm, not your throat.

The diaphragm is directly underneath the rib cage.

Make sure you have an open throat and your air support is coming from down deep in your diaphragm, not your throat. So, open your throat and push air from your diaphragm, in other words, blow from the bottom up.

Most people's natural tendency is to push air from the throat, which will produce sound but is not sufficient for producing a quality saxophone tone. Until you can supply your sax with strong air support from your diaphragm you will get a thin and weak tone. This is one of the most important things you will learn as you are developing, and one of the most important things to master that will turn your thin, weak tone into a rich, full, beautiful one... yay!

So...

How can you tell if you're breathing properly?

The best way to experience and see the proper breathing technique in action is to lay on the floor, flat on your back. When you inhale and hold your breath for a few seconds then exhale, you will notice the area around your stomach moves and not the chest area.

Now do this again with a heavy pot or book on your stomach and watch what happens. Practice filling up with air starting with the lower chest and then upper chest, which is your entire torso and not just the upper chest.

Practice this breathing technique while standing up straight and erect. First

breathe in short intakes of air gradually building up to full intakes. You can literally control where the air is coming from; put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach area. Take a deep breath using your chest at the same time keep your abdomen still. Next take a deep breath from your diaphragm, abdomen area while keeping your chest perfectly still. This type of control is what will eventually lead you to do the proper breathing technique needed for your saxophone.

After a few days or weeks of practicing these exercises the entire process will come naturally and eventually you won't even need to think about it anymore. It's at this beginning stage that it's crucial to get it right.

***Note** – you can watch the breathing video lesson here:
<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/breathing>

Tone

The saxophone can produce a wider variety of sounds than most other instruments and is also the instrument that can sound closest to the human voice. Even so, it's tone can be as individual as the person playing it, just like everyone has their own unique sounding voice. Your saxophone's tone will be effected by a number of things - your choice of reed, mouthpiece, saxophone, breathing technique, and embouchure.

Before Producing Your First Sounds

Before blowing your first sounds – could be squeaks and squawks but that's OK! You can blow into the mouthpiece before putting it on your sax after you position the reed in place of course. The following instructions apply whether the mouthpiece is on or off your sax. Do this as a warm up: 1. With the reed on the mouthpiece, put it in your mouth, resting your top teeth on the top side of the mouthpiece, not too much in, and not too close to the tip either... somewhere between a half inch to one inch of the mouthpiece should go in your mouth. Experiment with this by seeing if slipping it further in or out makes producing the sound any easier.

2. Your bottom teeth will be positioned directly underneath but don't let them touch the reed, instead curve your bottom lip over them to form a cushion between the teeth and the reed.

3. Your bottom teeth do not touch the reed.

Now blow nice and loud!

Yes, there's a lot going on and in the beginning it's not possible to make it all come together perfectly right away. Start blowing your sax and getting some sounds from it. You don't need to be concerned about notes and fingerings yet. Hold the horn in place using the neck strap and holding it up with your thumb under the thumb rest on the right hand and the left thumb resting on the upper thumb rest.

Adjusting your neck strap

The neck strap should be adjusted so your sax is high enough not to make your head bend too far down or up when blowing into your mouthpiece. You should be holding your sax so the mouthpiece is about even with your mouth while your head is straight. Your fingers can rest on the note keys but should not be pressing any of them down. Your left thumb is resting on the round thumb rest button and your right thumb on the lower thumb hook which helps to further support it in playing position. Where to place the thumbs was covered in the first lesson video that shows how to take the saxophone out of its case.

Blow without holding any notes down. This position of no fingers is actually the fingering position for the note C# (C sharp). So if you are totally beginning at this point and didn't know any fingering positions yet, now you do!

As you experiment with the sounds you're getting out of your sax, take notice of when it's a good one as opposed to a bad squeak and try to realize your embouchure position when you made that sound, you want to focus on that so most of the sounds are good and therefore can get better once you know what you did to make it happen that way. The slightest change and adjustment can often make a big difference so you need to experiment carefully and take note of everything you are doing, both good and bad.

How much of the mouthpiece do you put in your mouth?

Too much will make it too difficult to get any sound and too little is hard as well. Start with about half an inch. At first you can do this with only the mouthpiece in your hand omitting the sax until you get some sounds. They will probably be high, squeaky and ugly but the point here is to just be able to get some sort of sound out of it. Being alone in the house or on a boat out at sea, or even several miles into the wilderness are all good ideas for this! It's trial and error, hit and miss at the beginning but what you should be doing is to know how your embouchure was positioned when a good note came out and try to duplicate it again until you have it just right. Your mouth should be slightly firm but relaxed.

Fingering

You may have heard it been said that the saxophone is a very easy instrument to learn. Well, this is partly true, and that part is the fingering system. While being able to produce a beautiful tone may take some time, it's quite easy to learn the fingering. Also note that all members of the saxophone family have the same fingering, and most of it is the same as the flute fingering as well.

Your first note

The good news is that to play your first note on the saxophone you don't need any fingers at all, and as I mentioned earlier, this is the C# (C sharp).

How to play middle C#:

(quick recap of what I mentioned earlier regarding your first blowing attempt)

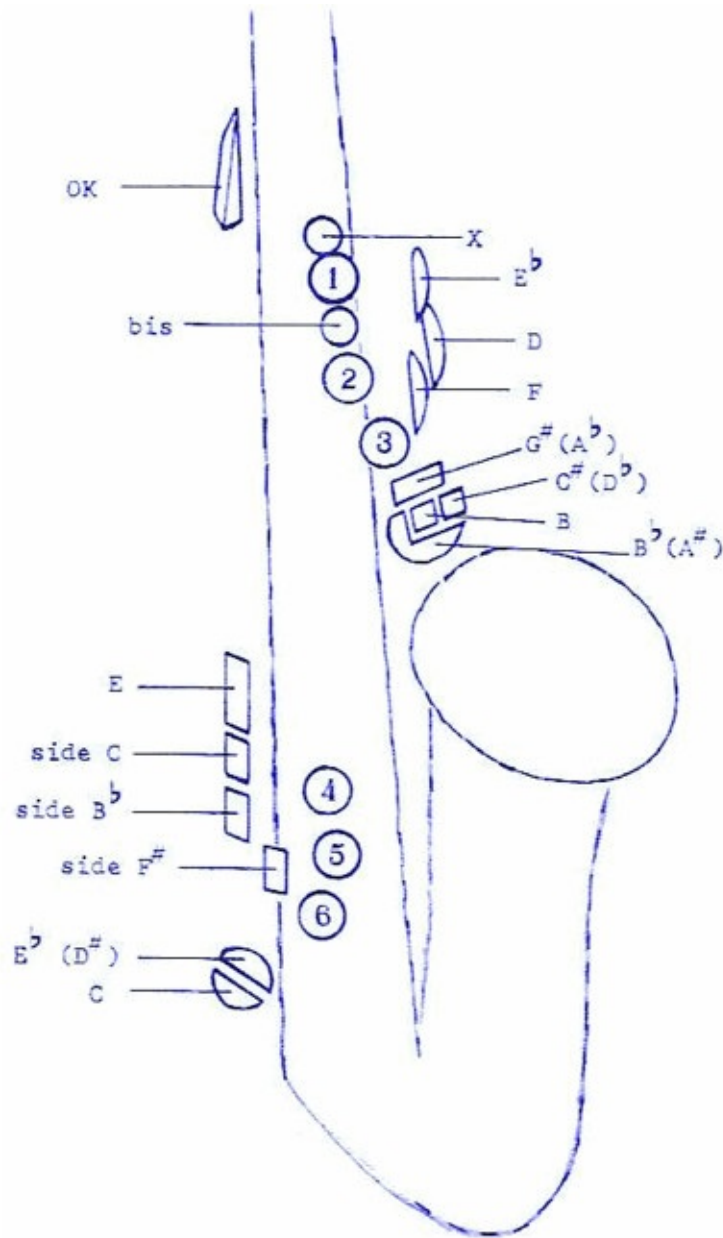
1. hold your sax firmly and comfortably in front of you
2. put the mouthpiece in your mouth, taking in consideration the embouchure position, especially regarding top teeth resting on your mouthpiece and bottom teeth resting on your bottom curved lip.
3. have the tip of your tongue on the reed to start, then release it with the "ta" sound to take it away from the reed to start the note while taking a big breath from deep down in your diaphragm and blow!

When you check the chart below you will see an alternate position for C# as well, but the no finger position is the most common. Next, study the fingering charts below and then watch the fingering video lesson to learn all the notes on your saxophone.

***Note** - the complete fingering video lessons are here:

<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/complete-saxophone-fingering-system>

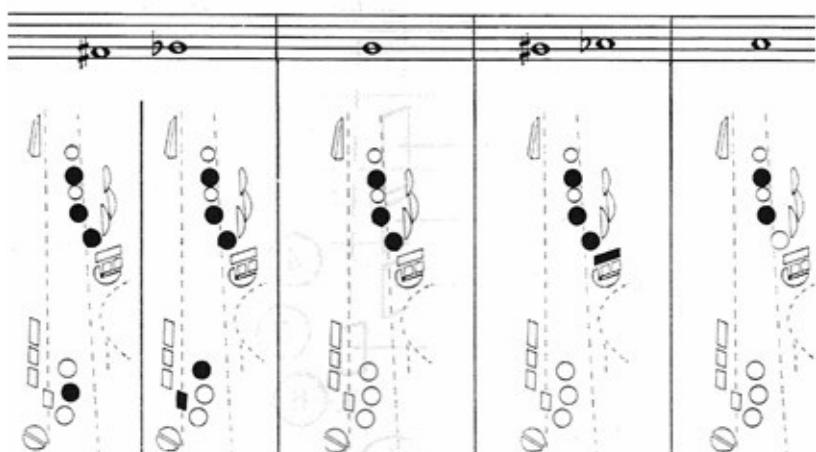
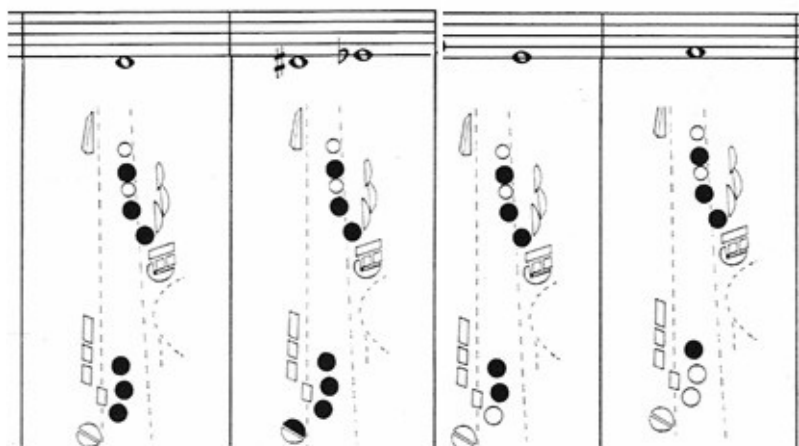
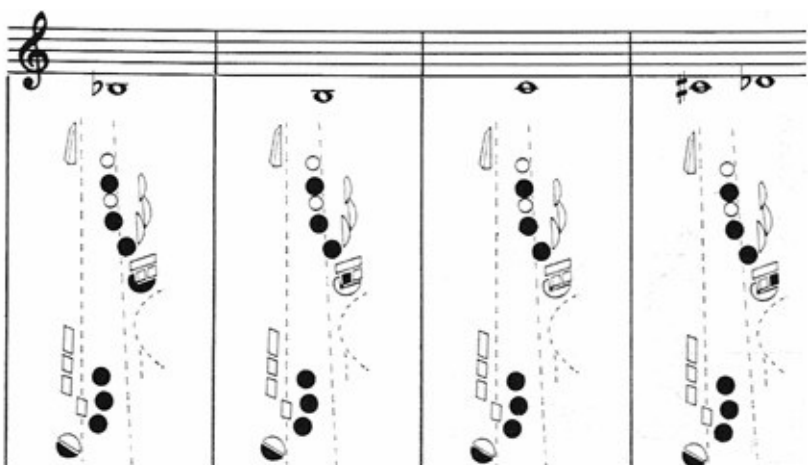
Saxophone Fingering Diagram:

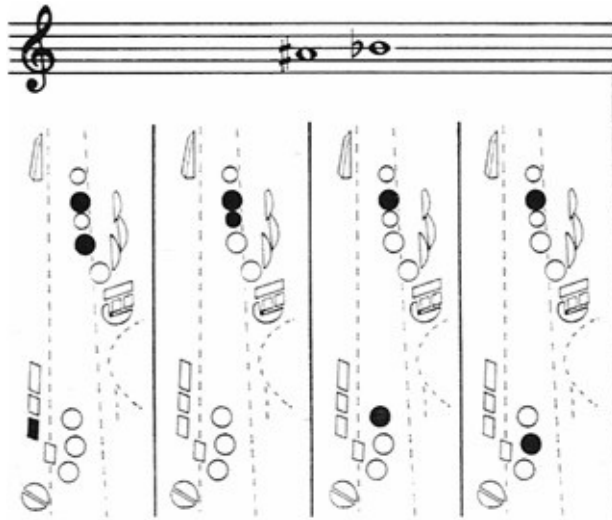


Notice the notes marked 1, 2, and 3 near the top of the sax and 4, 5, and 6 near the bottom. These are the main fingering positions – your left hand is at the top with index finger on note 1, middle finger on note 2, and ring finger on note 3. Right hand on the bottom notes with index finger on note 4, middle finger on note 5, and ring finger on note 6. Your left thumb rests on a pad and right thumb goes under a hook, which are behind the notes.

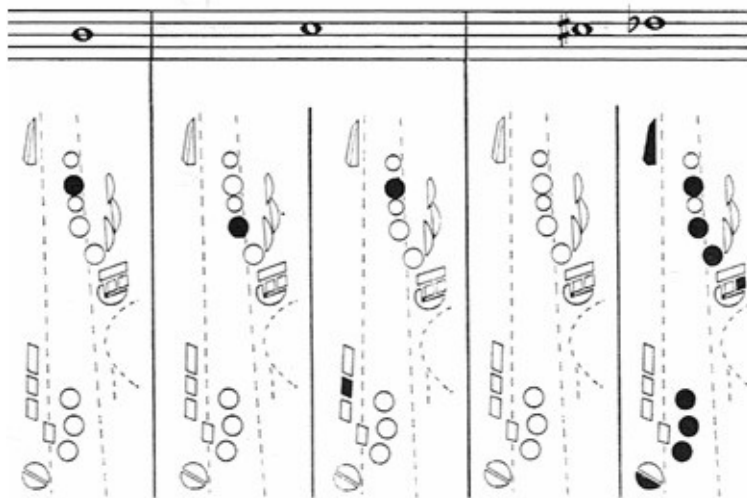
Below is the complete saxophone fingering chart for reference.

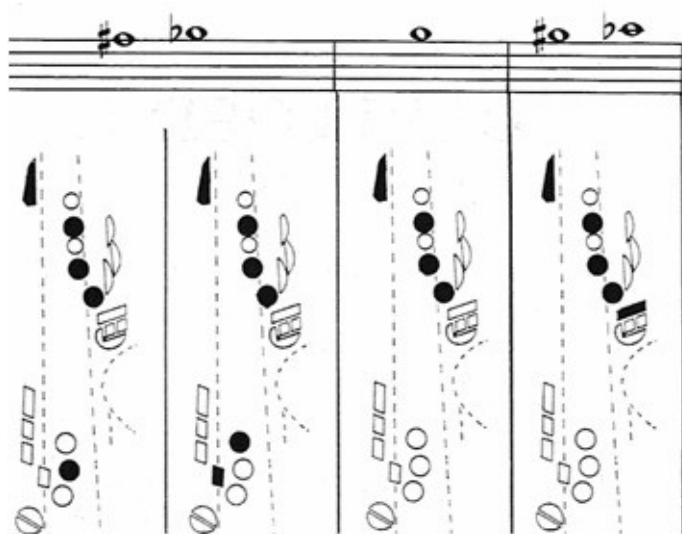
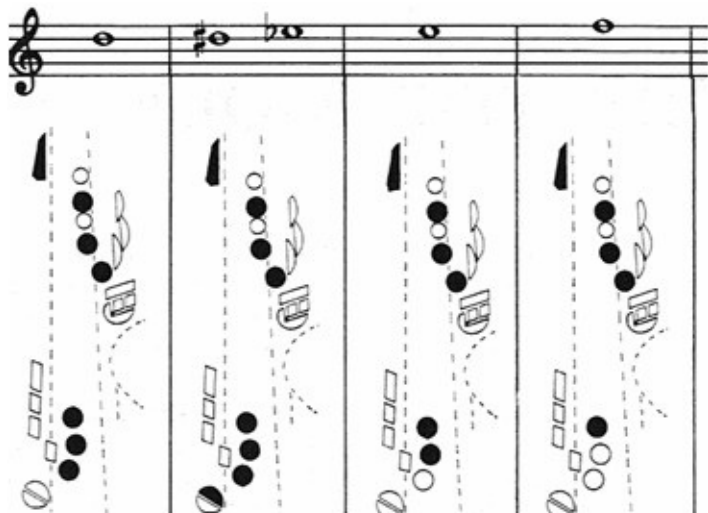
*Solid black indicates a depressed finger pad.





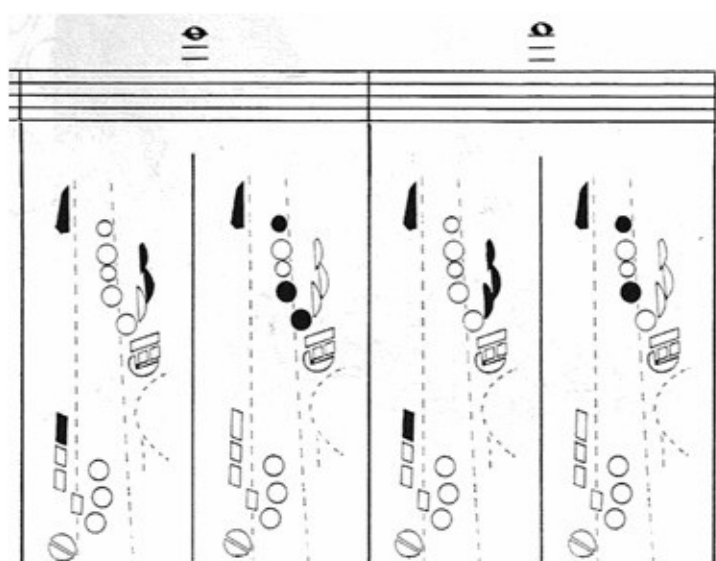
***Note** - there are 4 possible Bb (A#) positions
 see video link further on in Bb scale section
 for more detailed instruction on these.





Handwriting practice sheet for the word "to be". The sheet features a musical staff at the top with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). Below the staff are four vertical lines, each containing a series of dashed lines for tracing. The first line shows the word "to" in a stylized font, followed by the word "be". The subsequent three lines show the word "to" in a stylized font, followed by the word "be". The letters are composed of various shapes (circles, squares, triangles) and are designed to be traced by the student.

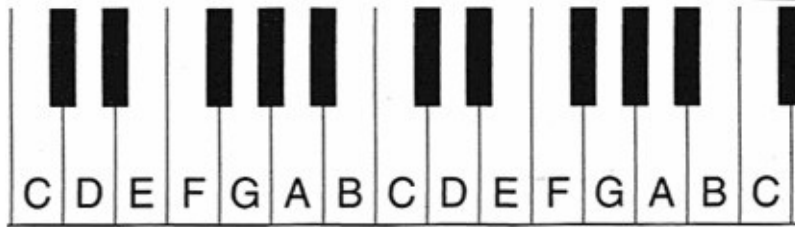
Handwriting practice sheet for the word "be". The sheet features a musical staff at the top with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). Below the staff are four vertical lines, each containing a series of dashed lines for tracing. The first line shows the word "be" in a stylized font, followed by the word "be". The subsequent three lines show the word "be" in a stylized font, followed by the word "be". The letters are composed of various shapes (circles, squares, triangles) and are designed to be traced by the student.



***Remember** you can watch the complete fingering lesson video – link is at the beginning of this Fingering section.

The Major Scales

Some basic music theory



As a musician, the saxophone is my best friend, my second best friend is the piano keyboard. I highly recommend you become familiar with the keyboard as well, if you're not already.

Why? When talking about things like intervals, whole steps, half steps, flats, sharps, and the notes of a scale etc., we have a perfect visual on the keyboard that we don't have on any other instrument. So, whether one plays a keyboard instrument or not, there can be advantages just by understanding it visually.

Our western musical system is comprised of 12 notes. If you look at a piano's C note and count all the proceeding white notes up to the B you will have counted 7 notes; C D E F G A B. Now include the 5 black notes and there's the 12 notes.

Understanding the keyboard is simple because when we look at a piano there are a lot of notes but after that stretch of 7 notes it's just repetition.

Sharps and Flats

Sharps and flats are the black notes on the keyboard. Which ones are sharp and which are flat? Well, both. Look at the two white notes C and D. There is a black note that sits between them. If we play from C up to this black note we would think of it as a C sharp. If we play the D and go down to the same black note we would think of it as a D flat. It's the same note but it has two names. Same goes for the rest of them – the black note between the F and G can either be called an F sharp or a G flat. In musical notation sharps are noted by the “#” sign and flats by the “b” sign. So, F#, Bb *etc.*

Every one of these notes has it's own chords and scales that follow the same set of rules which make each one different from the other as far as the number of sharps or flats they have. For example, G major has one sharp and F major has one flat. These rules are what makes the system work so every scale has the exact same familiar sound to it, making it possible to have an established system in place.

There are eastern musical systems that have different rules and therefore a different sound. For example, an eastern scale has smaller intervals than our smallest quarter note interval and therefore gives a very different overall sound. A scale can also have more notes than our eight note scale. It's things like this that make for a very different musical sound.

The cycle of 5ths determine the number of flats or sharps in a key.

We start off with C because it's the only one that uses just the white notes on the piano (no black notes which are sharps and flats) to make a proper and complete major scale: C D E F G A B C. The number of sharps and flats a key has is determined on something called the cycle of 5ths – count up 5 notes on the keyboard from C to G, then D *etc.* Each time a sharp is added: G has one sharp, D has two *etc.* Five notes down from C is F, which has one flat, 5 down from F is Bb, which has 2 flats and so on.

The number of flats or sharps a key has will show in the key signature, which is at the beginning of any musical notation and you will see an example of this in the scale exercises coming up a little later. These are important things that a musician must know when attempting to read a piece of music: the key it's in, and the time it is to be counted in (key signature and time signature).

Introducing The C Major Scale

Our first actual playing exercise will be the C major scale. Just as the single easiest note to play on the sax is the C# because there are no fingers involved, the C major scale is the easiest to play because it's the only major scale that has no flats or sharps. To make it as easy as possible for you since you're just starting out, we'll do this scale backwards, meaning we play it top to bottom, from middle C down to the low C.

Why is playing it backwards easier?

The reason for this is because starting on low C can be difficult at first so we'll likely be eliminating some frustration right from the beginning by starting in the middle of the horn rather than from the bottom where it's harder to play for beginners.

After studying the previous Saxophone Fingering Diagram you should know that the main saxophone note keys are the ones numbered 1 2 3 for the left hand, and 4 5 6 for the right hand. These six notes, along with the low C, which is marked and located just below the number 6 note, form the entire C major scale.

Find the notes for the C major scale in the above fingering charts and play them consecutively going down as in the musical notation below:

C Major Scale



***Note** – view the first fingering lesson videos here:

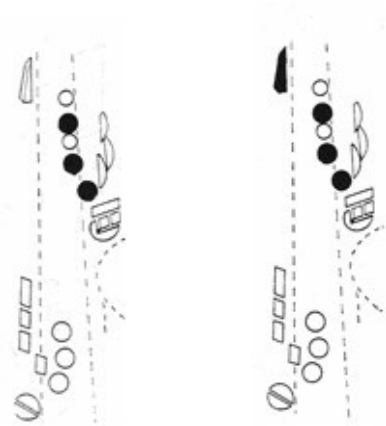
<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/fingering-part1>

<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/fingering-part2>

Introducing the G Major Scale

The second scale we're going to learn is G major. As you learn the fingerings you will also learn the musical notation because it will be included as we move along. Reading notes is easy, it's easier than reading words and you can do that right?!

Below is the low G as it sits on the music staff followed by the high G along with the fingering. Notice that the only difference for the high G is the addition of the octave key.



The Octave Key

Before we go any further we have to talk about the saxophone octave key. It's located directly above the left hand thumb rest:

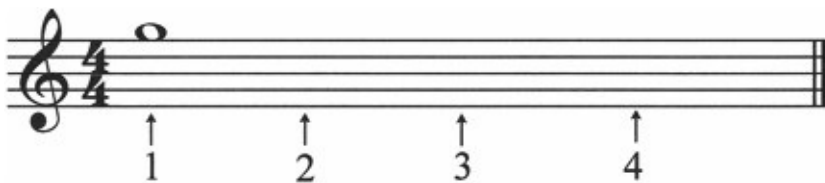
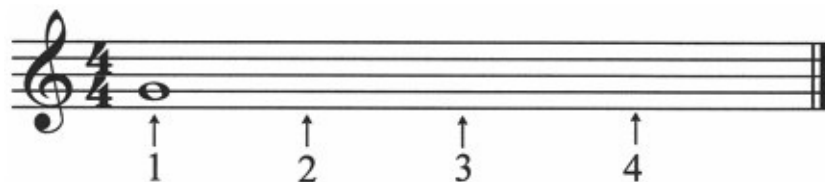


The octave key is not a note, but a key which when pressed releases a small pad on the neck and another one a little further down on the sax which open a small hole making it easier to play notes in the higher range of the horn – this includes all notes above middle C#. By pressing the octave key we can use the same fingerings for most of the notes as we do in the lower octave.

This “break” or “transition” between the low and higher octave which happens at C# to D, meaning the last note of the lower register moving to the first note of the upper register, can sometimes cause problems when going from one note of the low register to a note in the high range. Any such problems can be fixed by making sure you have good embouchure, air support and are smoothly and quickly hitting the D and other upper register fingering at the same time as the octave key. Spend time hitting the middle D from different notes: C# to D, C to D, B to D *etc.* Again, focus on what you are doing right when things are working. (There is more on this in the lesson video which has a link further down).

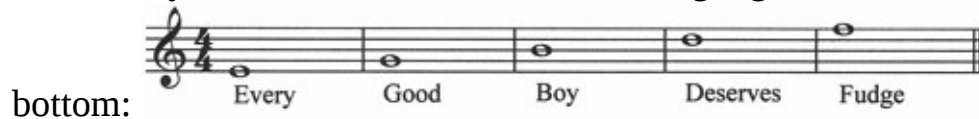
Playing the G note exercise

This first exercise is playing a G for one bar. Below is the G as it sits on the musical staff, both low and high G - Grab your sax and play this low G. As you play it, count the 4 beats in your head and tap your foot – 1 2 3 4 in the steadiest rhythm that you can. A metronome can be useful for practicing these lessons. Although it’s only one note, you can spend some productive time making sure you are hitting it right and have it come out right each and every time. Start off by tonguing it, while holding it count 1 2 3 4 then stop it with your tongue after the 4th beat. Repeat the same for high G.



A little more on reading music and theory:

The musical staff has 5 lines and 4 spaces. A simple rhyme you can use to identify and remember the notes that sit on the 5 lines of the staff is “**E**very **G**ood **B**oy **D**eserves **F**udge”. The first letters of the words in this phrase represents the order of notes starting from the bottom line of the staff – E, G, B, D, F. As you can see, our G note is sitting right on the second line from the bottom:



The notes in the spaces of the staff are F, A, C, E. The helpful trick in learning these notes is to remember they spell FACE.



Let's take a look at the 5 things that make up the musical notation for the single G note exercise from above:

1 – the 5 lines going across are called **the staff**

2 – the symbol on the far left that looks like a fancy letter S is called a **treble clef**. There are other types of clefs but the treble is the most commonly used and is the one us saxophone players use.

3 – the number 4's sitting on top of each other is the **time signature**, and since it's 4/4 that means it's 4 quarter beats per bar – 3/4 would mean three quarter beats per bar *etc.* Just simple math.

4 – the circle (note) on the second line from the bottom means that it's a G. This note is a white circle, which means it's worth 4 beats within this one bar measure with a 4/4 time signature. We call this a **whole note** because it plays for the whole duration of the measure.

5 – the circle sitting on the very top of the staff means it's a G, but an octave (eight steps higher) than the lower G.

6 – the double lines to the far right tell us it's the end of the piece – one single

line would mean it's the end of the bar – in this example it happens to be both.

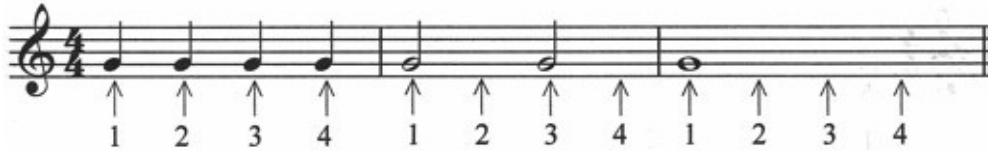
There are more notes above and below these 5 lines and you'll learn them all as we progress.

Get Rhythm!

Hey, the notes grew some legs! We have added stems to some of the notes below. As you saw above, the whole note has no stems, just made up of a single circle. When we color that circle in and put a stem on it, it's now a quarter note, meaning it's value is a quarter of a whole note. As you can see the first bar has four of these quarter notes to make it equal the whole note. The second bar has two notes that aren't colored in but do have stems, these are half notes. They are worth one half the value of a whole note and twice the value of a quarter note. Again, it's just simple math.

Check the 4/4 time signature on the left. Each bar therefore has to have notes that add up to 4 quarter beats, which they do.

First bar is quarter notes – second bar is half notes – third bar is a whole note



The G major scale ascending and descending:



***Note** – You can view this first set of G exercise lesson videos here:

<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/g-scale-octave-key-break>

Below is another exercise in the key of G. Let's look at a few more things regarding notation:

1 - the # sign on the top line tells us to play every F note as a sharp. This is because we are in the key of G, which has one sharp in it, the F#. This was covered previously in the Major Scales section but just in case you forgot!

2 - Why do some stems go down and some go up from the note?

Generally speaking, we write all notes lower than B with the stem pointing up and all notes that are B or higher with the stem pointing down.

3 – the G that's not solid black but has a stem is a half note – it's worth 2 beats, so it's played twice as long as a 1/4 note and half as long as a whole note. The G at the very end is a half note tied onto a G that is a 1/4 note, this makes it worth 3 beats (2+1).

4 – the symbols following the last note are rests (a little more on rests later). They tell us not to play any notes at all, just count beats in your head. The squiggly one equals one beat and the small rectangle one is worth 2 beats. Every bar must add up to 4 beats, so because the last bar has a note in it that is a 1/4 note, we must add in the necessary rests to make the bar have 4 beats. – the G note is one beat plus 3 beats worth of rests equals 4 - again, this part of musical theory is just simple math.

Developing Technique

Gradually ascending G scale exercise:

The musical score consists of seven staves of music in 4/4 time, written in treble clef. The exercise is a gradually ascending G scale, starting on G4 and ending on G5. The notes are as follows:

- Staff 1: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (half).
- Staff 2: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (half), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter).
- Staff 3: D5 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (half), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), C5 (quarter).
- Staff 4: B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (half), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), F#5 (quarter), E5 (quarter).
- Staff 5: D5 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (half), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), F#5 (quarter), G5 (quarter).
- Staff 6: F#5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (half), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter).
- Staff 7: D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), F#5 (quarter), G5 (quarter), G5 (quarter), F#5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (half), G4 (half).

While you play, keep the 4/4 count by tapping your toe as steady as you can, or better yet use a metronome, and if you don't have one consider getting one. Also, tongue every note and remember the F is sharp because it's in the key signature at the very beginning of each staff line after the treble clef sign.

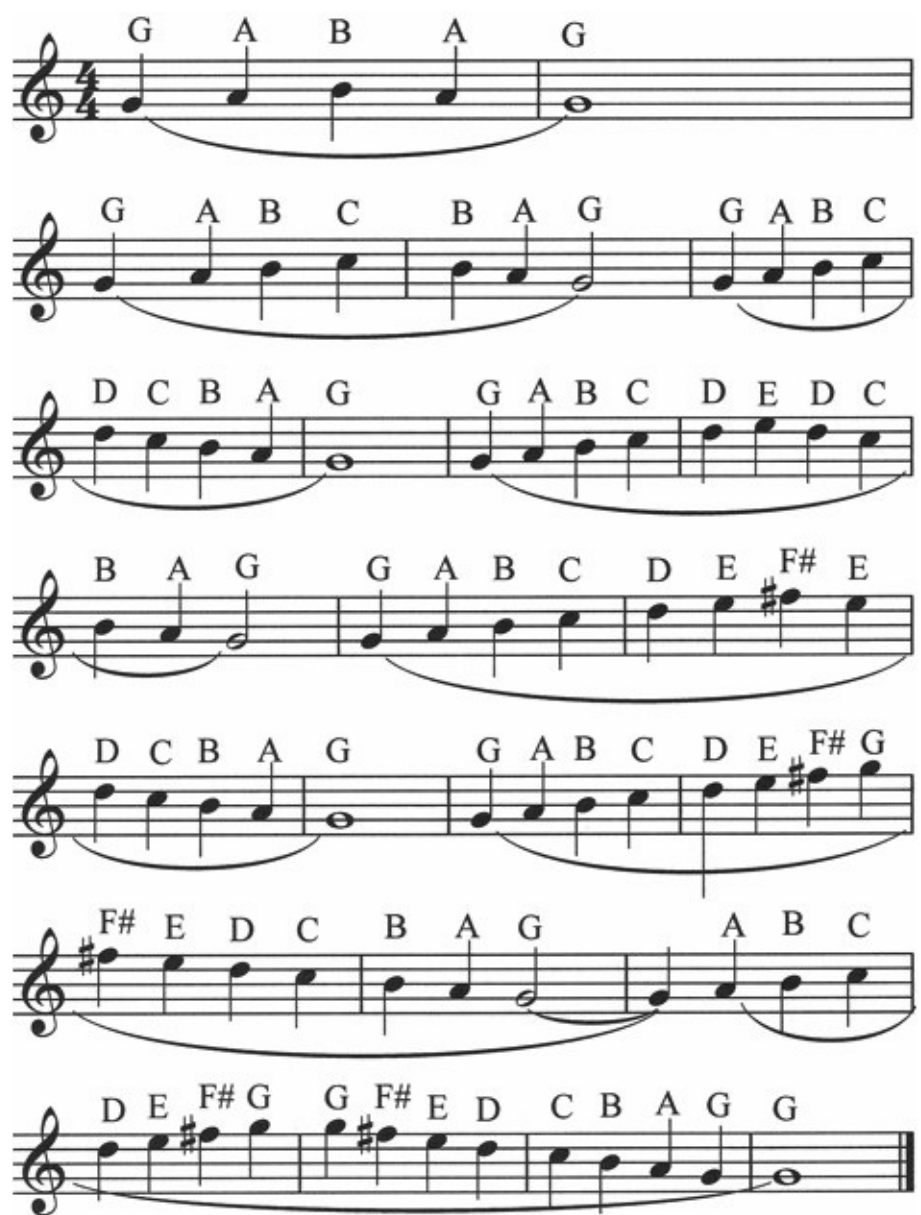
The numerical names of the notes were added to make your first reading attempt a little easier. If you're not familiar with the musical notes it's ok to cheat at first and look at the letters, eventually you won't have to because you'll start recognizing what the notes are just by the lines and spaces of the staff they sit on – remember, Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge and FACE.

***Important** – make sure you spend a lot of time learning the notes and music notation so far. We start moving faster after this and if you don't feel comfortable and very confident with everything up to this point you may get a bit overwhelmed or frustrated so really learn the C and G scales and exercise up to here before going too far. And make sure to PLAY EVERYTHING SLOW AT FIRST to ensure smooth and correct fingering.

Playing it right is better than playing it fast.

Slurring Exercise:

The exercise below is the same as the previous one except for all the lines. These lines are called slurs. A group of notes that are within a slur line means they don't get tongued. Only the first note is tongued and the rest that fall within the slur line are played consecutively without any use of the tongue (they're slurred together), just use a nice and steady supply of air and fingering.



More Rhythm

Introducing the eighth note

So far all the notes we've been reading have been the whole, half, and quarter notes. Next we will learn how to read the eighth note which falls next in line because it's worth half as much as the quarter note, meaning it takes two eighth notes to play one quarter beat in a bar – where we have 4 quarters making up a bar it would take 8 eighth notes to complete a full bar in 4/4 time.

Notice how we count them in the example below:



Count by tapping your foot, raise your toe, when it hits the floor count one. When it comes back up count the and (&). So you are counting one and two and three and four and... rather than before when counting only quarter notes and counting one two three four...

Don't play!

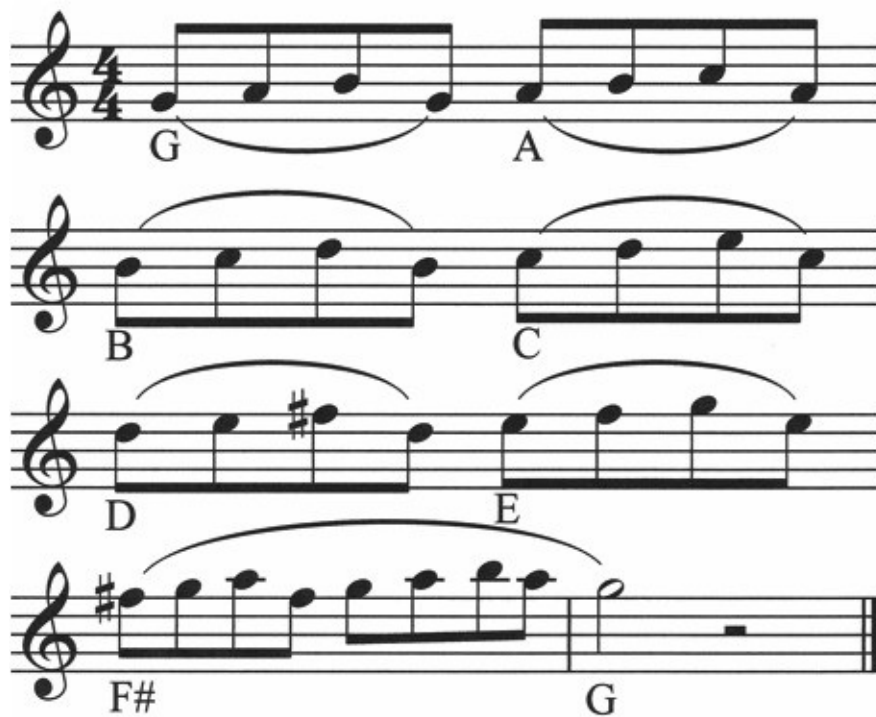
Sometimes when reading music you're asked not to play and this is notated with a rest. For each note value you've learned so far there is a rest which corresponds to it, meaning it's worth exactly as much as it's note counterpart but silence takes place of any actual note.



The first one is a whole note rest, notice how it hangs from the staff line above it. After the G quarter note is a quarter note rest. After the eighth note is an eighth note rest. The last one is a half note rest which looks like the whole note rest except it sits on a line instead of hanging from it.

G in 3rd's exercise:

I call this little exercise G in 3rd's. It's based on the G major scale going up in groups of thirds, each time landing on the next note of the scale. The first big difference from previous exercises are the lines that connect all the note stems. This makes them eighth notes instead of quarter notes so they are only worth half as much. You count two of them for each quarter beat so there are eight of them in each bar as opposed to four like in the previous exercises. Count 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and *etc.*



*Notice in the third and fourth lines the first F# in the bar automatically make the following F a sharp as well – because the second one is in the same bar it doesn't require another accidental sign to be put in front of it.

Triplets:

This exercise is similar to the previous one in that it uses every note of the G scale to set off the proceeding notes, except here they are in the form of triplets – triplets are three notes of equal value played over a quarter beat. So, 1 2 3 over one quarter beat.



G major chord:

In this exercise we play the notes which make up the G major chord – the 1, 3, 5 and 8 (G, B, D, and octave G)

Note the time signature! 3/4 means each bar has 3 quarter beats in it so you count 1 2 3 1 2 3 *etc.*



***Note** – see all the G major scale variation exercises as video lessons here:
<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/g-scale-variations>

Playing Your First Songs!

You will be learning a variety of songs later on, but for now we start off as simple and easy as possible with Twinkle Twinkle Little Star and Happy Birthday. These two songs are made up using the notes we have been practicing so far, will get you accustomed to reading music lead sheets, and along with the other songs in this course will prepare you to be able to read just about any pop song you want to learn down the road.

We've already covered some basic theory, learned all the notes, learned and practiced some scales and exercises, and now we start putting it all together by reading some actual songs.

Twinkle Twinkle Little Star

This first song has only quarter notes and half notes and a melody every one knows so there should be no problems if you've been studying the exercises so far. Start slow and steady. It helps to use a metronome. A slow metronome setting is around 75 BPM.

Quick recap:

Each quarter note (black note) is equal to one beat, of which there are four in each bar since the time signature at the left reads 4/4.



Happy Birthday

This next well-known melody will introduce eighth notes. Also notice the time signature is 3/4 and not 4/4 like in the previous song. So instead of each measure having 4 beats, it now only has three.

Count 1, 2, and play the G notes on count number three. These two G notes are eighth notes because they're joined together and so played over one beat, giving each of them half the value of a quarter note.



***Note** – view the video lesson for these first two songs and counting rhythms here: <http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/counting>

Articulation

We may describe someone as being “very articulate” if they seem to express themselves well with the use of distinct words, which are expressed with clarity. We as sax players need to be concerned with the art of articulation as well because our artistic expression depends on it.

What exactly is articulation?

Articulation, in regards to playing the saxophone refers to how we group our notes together in order to get our phrases across as a musical message. This is done primarily with our tongue to either slur the notes for a smooth, legato sound and feel, or by releasing the notes in a much more separate and short way. This is the exact opposite of the slur technique and it's called **staccato**.

We have three ways to operate when delivering a note or a group of notes out of our saxophone; slur, which uses no tongue and is notated with a long line over or under the notes. Regular tongue which does not use any notation. Then we have the short and very separated staccato notes which use a short tonguing technique and is notated with a dot either over or under the note:



It's very common to see these all together in an exercise or piece of music:



You can practice all the exercises in this book three different ways to improve and expand your articulation:

Slurred, staccato, and with regular tonguing.

Dynamics

Just as articulation will help you to express different musical ideas and phrases, dynamics will help you to be even more expressive.

What are dynamics?

Simply put, it's the volume you play at. You must learn to control your saxophone at a very low volume, an extremely high volume and several noticeable levels in between.

When practicing these exercises at different levels of volume it's important to control the air support from your diaphragm and not your throat. We use our throat as a sort of valve by opening it up to allow for more flow of air but not as the pusher and supplier of air, that job is for your diaphragm.

In musical notation, dynamic phrases that start very quietly and build in volume are notated as such with large line marks that look like a greater than sign called a **crescendo**, meaning to gradually increase volume, and a less than sign called a **decrescendo**, meaning to gradually decrease volume. You can see these two signs in the music example below.

These dynamic terms, along with all others in musical notation are written in Italian. Words such as piano, which is marked with a "*p*" to mean "play quietly" and forte, marked with an "*f*" which means to "play loud".

Other common dynamic markings are a combination of these:

mf (mezzo forte) = play medium loud

ff (fortissimo) = play very loud

mp (mezzo piano) = play medium quiet

pp (pianissimo) = play very quiet

Here is an example of a few dynamic markings:



The dynamic markings here are telling us to start the G quietly and gradually get louder as we approach and hit the high G, then gradually get quieter and finally play softly again on the G of the last bar.

Introducing The Bb Major Scale

The third scale we're going to learn is the Bb major scale. This will help move you forward in a couple of ways:

1 - help control the lowest part of the horn which can at times be difficult for anyone, let alone a beginner.

2 - help to control the full range of the horn. From working in both the scales of G and Bb we can work on playing from the lowest to the highest notes.

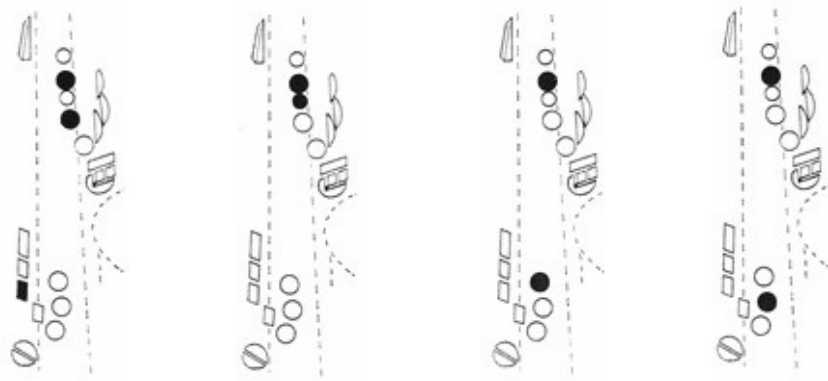
Start off by playing this one backwards too! Just like the C scale, playing the Bb major scale descending will make it easier because starting on the low Bb can be very difficult at first. As you come down the scale and approach the lower notes you might start to lose control of them. If this happens it means your sax is not getting enough air to make those notes, so increase the air support from your diaphragm. In other words, gradually get louder as you approach the lowest note.



The first thing to notice is the key signature - Bb and Eb. These are the two flats of the Bb major scale. The rest of the notes are not new up to this point because we've used them in the C and G major scales already.

Four Different Fingerings For Bb

There are actually four different legitimate fingerings for the middle and high Bb notes. Take a look at the following illustration which shows all four Bb fingerings (or A# which is the same note).



The only common finger for all four is the index finger of the left hand which holds down the B note on all four fingering examples. Practice all these until you know them well. You most likely will not end up using all four of them on a regular basis, although certain musical situations or musical passages may be easier played with one fingering than another. Trills are a good example of this because some are pretty much impossible with certain fingerings so more options are a good thing.

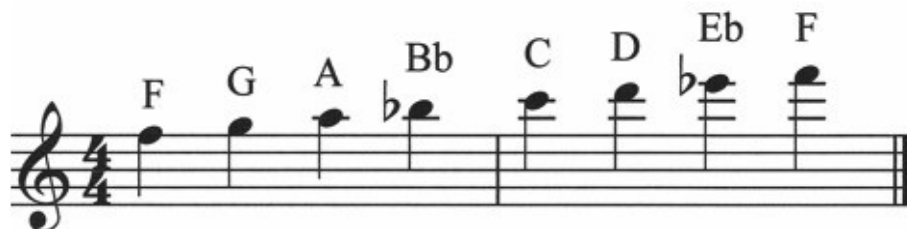
After decades of playing, I can personally tell you that I've never used the fourth example, rarely used the third, and will normally use the first and second, and more often the second because I treat it like a one finger note even though you need to press two pads. The second lower note is called the bis key, and because it's smaller and closer to the B key it only requires the index finger to press both these notes down. Personally I find this the most natural and easiest to play most of the time.

***Note** – for a close-up video lesson on the 4 Bb fingerings:

<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/4-ways-to-play-b-flat>

Getting familiar with high notes above the staff

So far we've only gone as high as the G note which sits on the top of the staff. It's time to get familiar with the remaining notes that go above this. We're going to do some exercises in the key of Bb and so have a look at the notes below. It goes from middle F to high F. All notes are labeled with the appropriate letter which you can use until you get familiar with the musical notes.



Notice that all the notes above G have either a line going through them or are sitting on a line, just as the notes on the regular staff do. Play these notes as an exercise eventually trying to memorize the notes without looking at their letter names.

You may notice that as you get higher, the sound of your sax might get thin or you may even have a harder time producing these higher notes. To prevent these things from happening make sure you work harder in producing more air flow and support from your diaphragm... in other words blow harder! Yes, just like the bottom notes need more air support, the higher notes do too.

***Tip** – As you go up slowly from the middle F, notice which note starts to sound thin or gets harder to play. Then go back down a step or two and hit it again, this time try things like opening your throat and oral cavity more along with increased air support from your diaphragm.

Don't be intimidated by a long row of consecutive eighth notes, especially the high ones, they're just part of a scale and you can play it very slowly. Only increase speed as you get familiar with the notes and their smooth fingerings.

Using the Bb major scale to develop the full range of your saxophone



Bb major chord



Bb major chord –2 octaves



***Note** – video lesson for the full range exercise in Bb is here:
<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/b-flat-full-range-exercise>

The Chromatic Scale



I had been playing sax for a couple of years and a guy just starting out asked me “ how many of the chromatic scales do you know”? I thought for a second and replied “ All of them” – “Wow” he said. My other friend and I had a big laugh over it cause they’re all the same. Chromatic simply means every consecutive note, so unlike all other types of scales which have different relationships between semi tones and whole tones, a chromatic scale is made up of simply playing every semi tone in a row. The chromatic scale above shows every note of the western musical system.

If you start on C, play every note until you get to the C an octave higher, you have just played the C chromatic scale. Start on C# to the higher octave and you have just played a C# chromatic scale. The notes in both these scales are the same, they just started and ended on a different note.

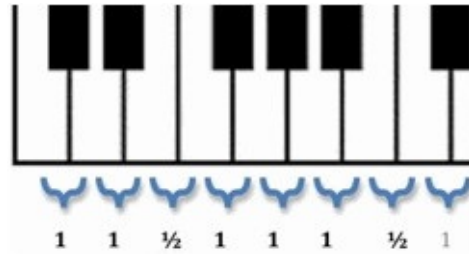
Playing chromatic scales all up and down your horn is a great exercise because it ensures you’re going off of every note. Some will be smooth and others not so much. Your job is to take the sections where you have problems and work them out slowly until the transition from those notes are as smooth as the rest.

Play them up, play them down, play them slow and build up your speed BUT...

Start playing the scale very very slowly, as slow as it takes to make the hardest transition of notes go by smoothly...never skim over a group of notes that give you even the slightest bit of trouble.

All The Major Scales

As mentioned above in the chromatic scale section, there is a certain relationship between tones and semi-tones in the formation of scales. In the major scale this equates to a tone, tone, semi-tone, tone, tone, tone, semi-tone. As you can see in the illustration below, the 1's representing a tone and the $\frac{1}{2}$'s a semi-tone. Every major scale is made of these intervals in the exact same order.



In this following section we lay out all the major scales, of which there are 12 - one for every note of the western musical system. Learn them all. Eventually you will memorize them. Each one of them has it's own sound on your sax and it's own feel on your fingers. Some may be easy to play and others not so easy at first but practicing will take care of that!

C major



C# (Db) major



*Notice – going from C with no sharps or flats to C# which has every note being a sharp!

D major



Eb (D#) major



E major



F major



F# major



G major



Ab (G#) major



A major



Bb (A#) major



B major



Awesome Major Scale Exercise

Below is a great exercise because it's simple and will help you gain technique very quickly by spending just a few minutes a day on it. The first one is written in C but once you learn it you'll want to play it in all the keys.

I believe this exercise made a huge difference in my technique during my first weeks and months on the sax and it will help you too.

You can see the concept behind it - if you notice the quarter note on all odd numbered bars with a letter above them you see that these letters form the C scale: C D E F G A B and C.

The scale starts by descending for the full scale from middle C down to low C and after ascending it stops on the next note of the scale, which is D and does the same thing. Each time starting on the next note of the scale until it ends on the C again at the very top.

You can do this as a daily exercise for all the scales you learn. Start slow, concentrating on playing even notes, and at a constant volume. This is where a metronome is valuable.

Following the C there are a few more of them written out in D, Eb, E and F. Once you can play a few of these you will be able to apply this exercise to all the scales after learning them which can be included in your daily practice routine.

This exercise will sharpen your musical mind and give you smooth, and eventually fast moving fingers! Again, go for even notes and a steady tempo and even volume.

You should know all notes and their fingering at this point in order to implement this exercise to all the major scales. If you don't you can refer back to the fingering section.

C major



D major (notice key signature – F# and C#)



Eb major (notice key signature – Bb, Eb, Ab)



E major (notice key signature – F#, C#, G#, D#)



F major (notice key signature – Bb)



Bb major (notice key signature – Bb, Eb)



B major (notice key signature – F#, C#, G#, D#, A#)



C# major (notice key signature – F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, B#)



***Tip** – as you move along you can spend an entire practice session or even a day on one key or scale. For example, the C# major exercise above can be first played very slowly exactly as written. Only increase speed when you can play all the highest notes perfectly and evenly too.

Next play it but this time slurring all the notes.

Next play it using the staccato tonguing technique.

Next play the C# major chord from top to bottom.

Image how good you can get at playing in the key of C# major if you spend hours and days only on this key! How easy would the key of C major feel after spending so much time on C#! Do this for every scale. This is how you make big strides.

Awesome Major Chord Exercise

Once you can play all the major scales, congratulate yourself! This is a big accomplishment, especially when you can memorize them. As you may have already guessed, scales are one of the most important elements in learning about music, and just as important are chords. Learning chords will not be a huge learning curve since they are part of the scale. The major scale as you now know is made up of eight notes – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 which are the degrees of the major scale.

So, when working in the key of C this would equate to C D E F G A B C.

A major chord is derived from the 1, 3, and 5th degrees of the scale, therefore a C major chord is made up of the notes C, E, and G. Chords are important because we need to know and understand them for improvisation and accompany instruments like guitar and piano play them all the time.

I touched on this earlier in the scale exercise section and demonstrated it in the scale lesson videos so if you followed them you may be already utilizing the major chord in your practicing routine.

This workout takes the chord exercise to a whole new level!



This exercise takes you through all the major chords, one going up the next coming down.

How to Improve Your Tone

This simple exercise known as **long tones** is one of the best ways to develop and improve your overall tone. Set your metronome to a medium tempo such as 120 BPM, or a tempo that allows you to play each 4 bars in one breath without passing out!

An important aspect of playing these is using the crescendo, which we talked about earlier in the Articulation Section. These are the signs under the notes that look like a greater than and less than symbol. You play each note starting as softly as you can and gradually increase volume to as loud as you can and then back down again.

You are not limited to only these notes of course, play a few consecutive notes from all three ranges of the horn – low, middle and high notes. The exercise below is with notes from the saxophones middle range.

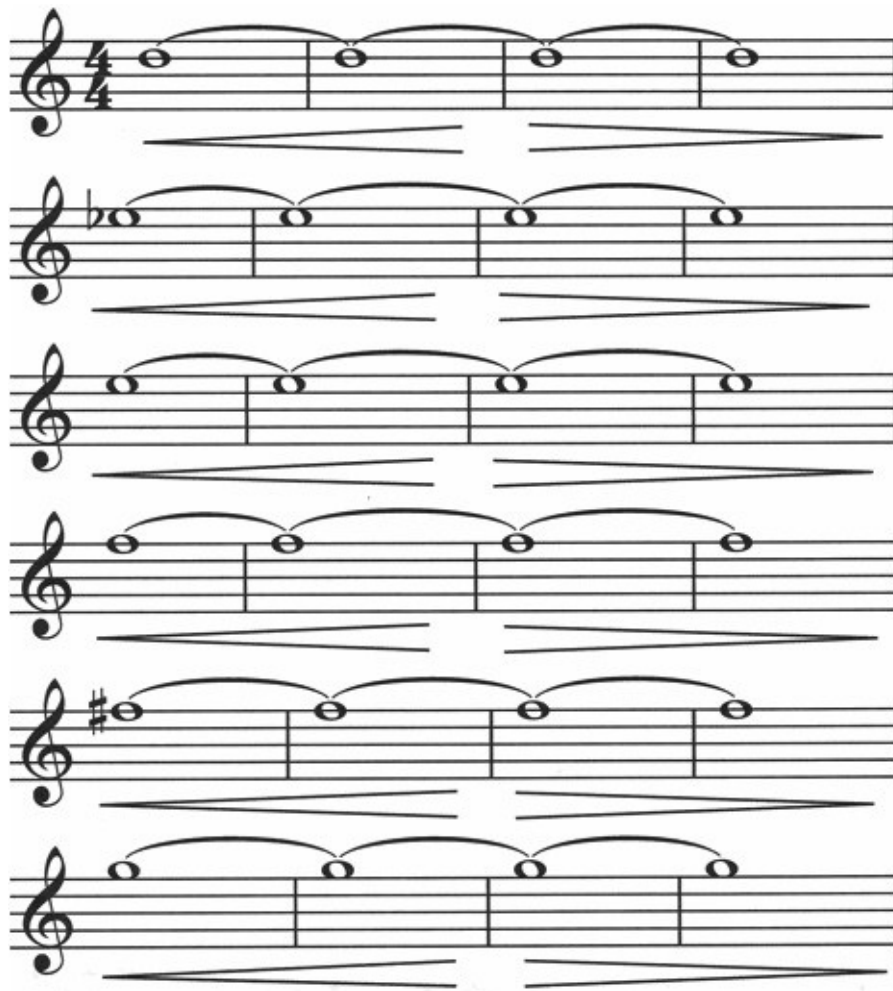
Although not the most exiting exercise ever invented, it will really speed up your tone development.

A great way to start your daily practice sessions!

The saxophone is not a perfect instrument, many notes have their own unique characteristics and behave differently from others. This can present challenges and so we get familiar with every note and figure out what these are and eventually overcome them.

When I was starting out playing the sax I was having a problem playing middle G. Sometimes I would get it right but usually I wouldn't. My teacher told me to spend the next 2 hours playing only that note. Trying different things with embouchure, opening my oral cavity and throat, breathing, tonguing. You know, after a couple hours of experimenting I was playing that G a whole lot better! Everything you do, write it down or make a mental note – did opening the throat that time make a difference? When I breathe harder does it make the note come out easier? Less mouthpiece in my mouth, or more?

Think about some of these things when you're playing these long notes!



Vibrato

**Note - if you're still struggling on getting a steady sound don't worry about this section for now, you can come back to vibrato a little later on in your studies after you're getting a decent and stronger tone.*

What exactly is vibrato?

Related to the word "vibrate" it means a tone or note that pulsates or vibrates as opposed to a tone that sounds pure and straight.

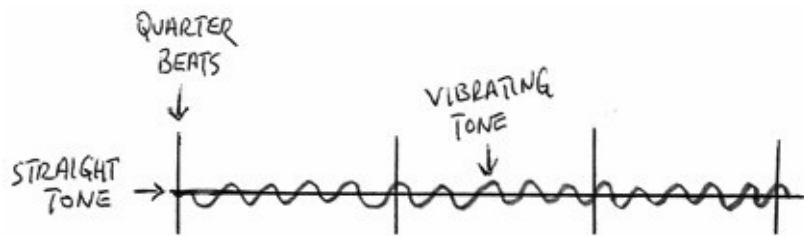
The use of vibrato can be a very expressive embellishment for almost all instrumentalists and singers. It's very natural, especially for singers and it's unlikely you'll hear any professional singer not use it to some degree while performing a song.

Like the human voice, the saxophone is also a very lyrical instrument and so using a good and well-developed vibrato will go a long way in helping you to extend your overall tone quality and add a special richness to your sound.

Before attempting to master the technique of vibrato you should hear it in action by listening to singers, saxophonists and other instrumentalists. The definition of what good vibrato is will vary because it's subjective to a person's individual taste. You might have heard an exaggerated vibrato being played or sung which almost seemed like a joke, but it obviously wasn't a joke since someone was actually performing it that way.

Most would consider a good vibrato to be like a certain spice you would add to your food: without enough of it you won't even taste it, but add too much and you may have ruined it!

The way to control vibrato is by rate and amplitude. The rate is the number of times we make it pulsate during a note or measure, and the amplitude is the range of degrees we allow it to go up or down from the natural straight tone. The illustration below shows a visual example of what vibrato looks like:



The Different Types of Saxophone Vibrato:

There are basically two main types of vibrato for saxophone playing: the jaw and the lip.

Jaw vibrato – arguably the most used and best method for producing a nice saxophone vibrato. This type of vibrato is produced simply by moving the jaw up and down to change the pressure on the reed. This change affects the pitch, timbre and volume of our sound.

Lip vibrato – we can produce this type of vibrato by moving the lips to make a “wa-wa-wa-wa” sound or motion. This will cause your embouchure to change it’s basic position therefore making it harder to control. This type of vibrato will also bring in more of the vibrato effect than actual tone, which may not be the desired result in certain musical situations.

Other possible ways to produce different vibrato sounds are with the throat and also the diaphragm. The diaphragm vibrato is more popular on other instruments like the flute and brass instruments than saxophone because it’s harder to control. We can produce an intensive vibrato by using the diaphragm to say the sound “huh-huh-huh”. This can be a good way to practice the engaging of your diaphragm into your breathing technique but won’t be the best way to produce a strong and well-controlled vibrato.

The last way to produce vibrato on a saxophone is by using the throat muscles. When we intensify these muscles we can make a kind of “quiver” motion and sound which was once popular back in the earlier part of the 20th century but has a very dated and square sound for today’s ears.

Nevertheless, could be good to know in case that’s something you need to re-create for some reason!

Summary:

1. A good vibrato develops along with your tone, so in these early stages don't expect to have a perfect vibrato. It will take time, same as with your tone.
2. Don't restrict the pulsations to a certain number of times in a beat or note. Try to make the vibrato even but not dependent on the tempo of the music you are playing.
3. Work to get the mechanics by playing long tones and exaggerate the vibrato until you have good control over it and use it in your musical exercises and phrases *etc.*
4. When using it in a phrase keep the pulsation even when going from note to note.
5. Listen to other sax players and singers you like and copy the way they use their vibrato.

Greensleeves

This is an old English folk song that dates way back to the late 1500's and is still being performed and recorded today by many musicians. That makes it a true standard and a good choice to have in your repertoire.

A few things to notice before playing:

The first thing to note is the time signature, which are the numbers 3/4 following the treble clef. This means each measurer (bar) gets three quarter beats. This is the same time signature as in the previous song Happy Birthday.

The next thing to notice is the key signature. There aren't any flats or sharps in the key signature so we can assume it's in either C major or A minor. As stated earlier, C major is the only major key that doesn't have any sharps or flats and A minor is the relative key of C major which is the only minor key that doesn't have any sharps or flats. So, how can we tell if this song is in C major or A minor?

Our first clue is that it starts with an A note, but that doesn't always guarantee that it's in A. Our second clue is that it ends with an A note and most of all, the note preceding the last A note is a G sharp. This is the real tell tale sign that the song is in A minor and not in C major.

The 7th note in any scale is a "leading note" which means it wants to lead to a resolution, or resolve. In this case the resolution is the arriving "home" at the very end which is the A. There are other leading notes in a scale that want to resolve somewhere but none are as strong as the major 7th wanting to resolve home (the root note).

Make note of all the above points, learn it and then play along with the backing tracks.

Greensleeves



***Note** – play-along audio and video lesson is here:

<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/greensleeves>

Amazing Grace

Another very old song, which is an English hymn to be precise. This tune is possibly one of the most recognizable in the entire English-speaking world and is still sung and recorded by many musicians today. A classic and standard in every sense of the word!

A few things to note before playing:

Just like the previous song this has a 3/4 time signature as well.

Have a look at the repeat signs, these are the double bar lines with two dots right after the first note and another one 16 bars later on the fourth line. This simply means everything between these two repeat signs is played twice and in the exact same way.

Also notice around the second repeat sign and at the 18th bar there is a number 1 and 2 inside some lines, these are called boxes and the first time through you play what's in the first box, the second time around after the repeat you skip that first box and go directly to the second box. These numbered boxes are a very common thing in musical arrangements.

When the melody picks up again after the second box it's the same as the beginning except it's an octave higher.

The little sign on top of the last note is called a **fermata** and simply means to hold the note a little longer. In this case, until you feel like stopping.

Make note of all the above points, learn it and then play along with the backing tracks.

Amazing Grace



***Note** – play-along audio and video lesson is here:

<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/amazing-grace>

Can't Help Falling in Love

This song was a monster hit by the one and only Elvis Presley who sang it in the key of D but I transposed it so you can play it in G, which goes along with most of our exercises. It has a beautiful melody and should be easier to play than some of the exercises you have been doing up to this point. It also contains the triplet figure, which we covered previously as well.

- 1 - Note the key signature of G, meaning all F notes will be played as F#.
- 2 – At the top there is a 4 bar introduction so just count 4 bars before the first starting melody note which is the G. Also, at the 10th staff line there is an 8 bar rest which will give you a little breather during the violin solo.
- 3 – Take note of the repeat sections! At the start of the melody you will notice a double bar line with 2 dots in front of it, this is called a repeat sign. Count 8 bars in and you will notice another one with the dots before the double bars, which tells you to play from the first repeat sign. There is another repeat section consisting of 4 bars located 3 staff lines from the bottom.

Make note of all the above points, learn it and then play along with the backing tracks.

Can't Help Falling in Love

A musical score for the song "Can't Help Falling in Love" in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The score consists of 11 staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. It features a whole note G4, followed by a double bar line and a repeat sign. The second staff continues with a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a half note B4, and a whole note C5. The third staff has a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a half note B4, and a whole note C5. The fourth staff contains a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a half note B4, and a whole note C5. The fifth staff starts with a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a half note B4, and a whole note C5. The sixth staff begins with a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a half note B4, and a whole note C5. The seventh staff has a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a half note B4, and a whole note C5. The eighth staff contains a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a half note B4, and a whole note C5. The ninth staff starts with a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a half note B4, and a whole note C5. The tenth staff has a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a half note B4, and a whole note C5. The eleventh staff begins with a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a half note B4, and a whole note C5. The score includes various musical notations such as treble clefs, key signatures, time signatures, notes, rests, and repeat signs.

continue below to part 2

Can't Help Falling – part 2



***Note** – play-along audio and video lesson is here:
<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/cant-help-falling>

Over The Rainbow

Most of us probably heard this for the first time in The Wizard of Oz sung by Judy Garland, who made this an instant favorite. This song has been recorded by many musicians as diverse as jazz tenor saxophonist Ben Webster to blues rock guitarist Eric Clapton and original piano rocker Jerry Lee Lewis, making this song a true classic and standard.

Things to note before playing:

1 - The first thing you may notice is extensive use of the slur marks. If you remember from earlier exercises these mean to play each note under the slur lines smoothly without using the tongue.

2 - The check mark at the end of longer phrases is a good spot to take a breath because you don't want to take a breath in the middle of a phrase.

3 - Notice the key signature has 4 sharps which means it's in the key of E major. This means all notes that are F, C, G, and D will be sharps. Warming up with some exercises in E would be a great idea before playing it.

4 – Don't worry about all the phrasing marks until you learn the notes first! After you learn all the notes it will sound ok, but when all the phrasing is in place it will sound even better.

5 – there are a couple of repeat signs and at the 7 bar rest you'll notice a box and another below it... simply play the 1st box first time through and the 2nd box the next time around.

Make note of all the above points, learn it and then play along with the backing tracks.

Over the Rainbow



*Note – the audio for play-along backing tracks is here:
<http://howtoplaysaxophone.org/over-the-rainbow>

NOT THE END!

There are things in this book that once learned, you may never need to look at again. But there are great exercises here that can stay with you as part of your daily practice routine for many years to come, helping to improve your technique and tone. I know because they did, and still are doing it for me, that's why I shared them with you.

Learning about the saxophone and trying to continually improve can be a life-long journey for many of us. If you have made it through all things presented here congratulations because you now have a very good, solid foundation on the basic principles of saxophone playing. Whether it takes you a month or two, or even one year to get through it, doesn't matter because it's not a race. After mastering these songs and exercises you're ready to conquer some more aspects of saxophone playing...

I want you to know that I am available on my membership site's forum where you can ask questions and communicate not only with me, but other saxophonists like yourself, from all over the world in various stages of development.

Stay in touch!

Johnny Ferreira

<http://HowToPlaySaxophone.org>

PS

Please take a minute to leave a comment or review and even give it a thumbs up at Amazon as it helps keep it relevant in the listings so we can continue to successfully make this book available to others who need it.

If you want to play blues and rock style sax then check out:

How To Play Killer Blues and Rockin' Sax Solos With 7 Notes Or Less

Available here: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B009SB9ST6>

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