

SLAP TONGUE 101

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- 1) Practice making a sucking sound at the roof of your mouth (like calling a horse) while keeping your tongue tip on your bottom teeth (similar to anchor tonguing). Find an old bass clarinet reed or a bad bass clarinet reed. Form an embouchure. Place approximately the same amount of reed you would typically use in your mouth without the mouthpiece (bark side down). Without moving the jaw, grab the reed with the middle of the tongue by forming a suction from your tongue (like when you make the horse call sound mentioned above). The tip of the tongue should stay anchored behind the bottom teeth. Try to hold the position of the reed—when you create the suction against it, you will feel it pull against your fingers. You should be able to pop or “slap” the reed when you release the suction on the reed. You can also practice grabbing your index finger with your tongue if unsuccessful with this first step.
- 2) Now try step 1 with an assembled bass clarinet mouthpiece and neck (still no instrument). Avoid jaw movement—this will lead to squeaks later. You don’t need to press too hard into the reed with your tongue—you can bruise your embouchure and tongue if too forceful. Learning this technique can be exhausting to the middle and back of my tongue—I feel a burning muscle sensation when I slap tongue for a long time. I assume it is muscle fatigue, because it feels similar to the last reps when weight lifting!
- 3) Once you can maintain your embouchure in step 2, you may assemble the rest of the bass clarinet. Practice the slap without producing sound first. Once successful, add a “cough” of air immediately after the release of the reed on a low note. Slapping is easier to learn in the low register and takes more refinement/precision in the higher registers and on smaller clarinets. The timing of air after the “slap” may take some coordination and patience. Remember to keep the embouchure stable throughout.
- 4) After successfully slap tonguing while playing, practice slapping slow scales to increase range.
- 5) Once comfortable in the 2nd register of bass clarinet, try slapping on a low E on soprano clarinet. The jaw must be still and the tongue motion is much smaller, but the technique is the same. Practice slapping scales for range.

Common Problems

- Jaw motion—major cause of squeaks
- Tongue protruding from sides of embouchure—yes, this is a thing!
- Using a part of the tongue too far back requiring too much reed/mouthpiece in mouth, which also leads to squeaking and voicing difficulties.