MaestroMeet

Clarinet: reading any part on a B flat clarinet

Written C sounds the note in the second column; the third column is the note you play, with the fingering you already use.

The part is headed	Written C sounds	On a B flat clarinet, read every note	And change the printed key by
Clarinet in B flat	B flat, a tone below	as written	no change
Clarinet in A	A, a minor third below	down a semitone	add five sharps
Clarinet in C	C, at pitch	up a tone	add two sharps
Clarinet in E flat	E flat, a minor third above	up a fourth	add one flat

maestromeet.com/guides

1. Fix the key first, once, before the downbeat, using the last column. The first column names the words printed at the top of the part; the last column says what those words do to the printed key signature. An A part with two flats printed becomes three sharps played: five sharps of change removes the two flats and leaves three. Adding a sharp means removing a flat first, and the other way round.

2. Then the eye shifts every note by the same number of staff steps, and the new key supplies the sharps and flats. Down a semitone is one step: a note on a line moves to the space below, a note in a space moves to the line below. Up a tone is one step the other way. You re-see the page shifted, rather than calculating note by note.

3. Printed accidentals travel with the note: a sharp still lifts your played note a semitone, a flat still lowers it, a natural cancels what the signature did. Where a bar knots up, pencil the played notes above it before the rehearsal; professional parts are full of exactly those marks.

4. Learn it on music you already know by ear. Take any simple written tune you could sing from memory; public-domain songbooks are free online if your shelf is bare. Play it once as printed, so the sound is fresh in your ear. Then play it again pretending the page is headed Clarinet in A: the printed notes stay exactly as they are, and you play each one a semitone lower with five sharps added to the key. Every wrong note now announces itself, because your ear already knows the tune. Five minutes a day for a week fixes a transposition for good.

5. About the A clarinet: reading down a semitone works, but the part was written for the A instrument because the key lies better on it; sharps multiply on the B flat and the fingerings get harder. Borrow an A if you can. Bass clarinet parts come in two notations: treble clef, sounding a major ninth below written, fingered exactly as on your soprano; and bass clef, sounding a tone below written, which you read a ninth higher in treble clef to use your usual fingerings. Check which notation your edition uses before the first rehearsal.

Two tricks from the professionals

- Pencil the played key signature at the start of every line until the new key sticks, then rub it out.
- When a run turns black with accidentals, pencil only the first played note of each beat; the key you fixed in move 1 fills in the rest.