

# Oboe in the orchestra: the stand sheet

*Six things to remember when you sit down in the section.*

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## 1 You are the note everyone else takes

The A you give at the start sets the whole room, so know exactly where it sits on today's reed and use it as the anchor against which you weigh every other note. In the orchestra, resist the pull to lock onto a tuner when the players around you have drifted sharp or flat together: an oboe that is correct while everyone else has moved is the one that sticks out. Tune to the room.

## 2 Listen to the reed before you blame yourself

Much of what feels like a playing problem is a reed problem, so learn to read the crow. Take the reed alone, draw it a touch deeper between the lips than your playing position and push air through: a healthy reed answers with a rattly cluster of pitches around a C, sounding in more than one octave at once. All top and no bottom, or stuffy and slow to speak, is the reed telling you it needs easing or replacing. Two minutes reading the crow can save an hour wrestling one that was not going to give.

## 3 Keep the lips flexible

A clamped embouchure cannot tune, and clamping is easiest when you are tired. Begin practice by sounding the reed on its own and easing it gently in and out with the lips alone, listening to the pitch slide up and down. The slide is impossible if you are gripping, so the exercise both releases the lips and hands you the flexibility you lean on later.

## 4 Breathe out, not only in

The oboe uses very little air, which sounds restful and is not. The difficulty is the opposite of most instruments: in a long phrase you run short of room to breathe in while still holding stale air. Plan where you let air out as deliberately as where you take it in.

## 5 When you have the line, the wind follows you

When the oboe has the line, the wind around you take their length and their shape from yours, so settle both before the rehearsal rather than in it. Entries arriving out of rests have nowhere to hide: prepare the silence before them as carefully as the note itself, with the pitch already sounding in your head.

## 6 Ensemble is a matter of sight

Across a large platform sound arrives late, so playing by ear alone puts you behind the beat. Take the beat from the conductor and your ensemble from the principal of your own section, kept at the edge of your vision while you read. Where what you hear and what you see disagree, follow your eyes.

