UTM Clarinet Studio

Warming Up

➢ What is warming up?
Warming up is a period of time at the beginning of your playing wherein you focus on one aspect of playing at a time. This allows you to focus on fundamentals and start making any changes you’ve been working on in your lessons.

➢ How long does it take to warm up?
For younger players, 20 minutes is often sufficient; professional players may take an hour or more to warm up. In the end, this comes down to you: how much time you have available to practice on a given day, how much playing you need to do outside of practicing, if you’re making any fundamental changes, and how much material you need to learn in the remainder of your practice session.

➢ Why should I warm up?
Warming up serves several purposes. First, it gets your body ready to play and prevents injury: by slowly preparing your muscles for more strenuous use, you avoid hurting yourself by going directly from cold to full usage. Michael Phelps doesn’t swim races without warming up; you shouldn’t play without doing so.

The second reason we warm up is to get the instrument prepared to play. Our breaths are warm and contain humidity; when not used, a clarinet is cold and dry. This difference can cause cracking if a clarinet is played for a long amount of time without first being warmed up. In general, since we are warming ourselves up at the same time as our instruments, we take enough breaks that this isn’t a problem; if, however, one were to play a long rehearsal or concert without warming up the horn first…

Warming up also permits us to practice more efficiently. By taking 15-20 minutes at the beginning of your practicing to get everything working, you can spend less time during your practice session on things like getting your fingers to move cleanly, tonguing more quickly, etc… Reinforcing “the basics” by warming up gives you a more solid foundation of playing on which to build your practicing each day.

Finally, this step also helps us mentally prepare for practicing. When you take time at the beginning of your practice session to warm up, you’re also focusing your mind on playing and blocking out any interferences, including homework, tests, roommates, etc… Practicing is a time for you to focus on music, and your warm-up helps you do so by forgetting any stress and thus allowing your mind to concentrate on making music.
What aspects of my playing do I need to warm up?

Any physical part of your playing needs to be warmed up. These can be broken into three categories, to be performed in the following order:

1. Embouchure and air (tone)
2. Fingers
3. Tongue

By following this order, you’re building from one element to the next: nothing can be played without the air and embouchure, then you’re adding fingers to the equation, and you’re finally topping it off with articulation.

Where can I find more information?

Some examples for warming up are contained in the following pages. In addition, Bob Spring (clarinet professor at Arizona State) has put together some great thoughts on this subject (attached), and Kelly Burke (clarinet professor at North Carolina-Greensboro) compiled a lot of different exercises in her book “Clarinet Warm-Ups: Materials for the Contemporary Clarinetist” (Medfield, MA: Dorn, 1995).
Embouchure & Air Warm-Ups

How do I warm up my embouchure and air?

To warm up the embouchure and air, we use what are called long tones. These are just that: notes that are played slowly, and thus held for a long time. Many people skip this step because they think long tones are boring and unnecessary. However, this is where you can make the most improvement in your tone. Playing long tones allows you to focus on any changes you’re making in how you breathe, use your air, form your embouchure, and hold your tongue.

So, if you need to do long tones, how can you prevent them from getting boring? The key here is variety. You don’t need to do the same long tones every day; in fact, you can even base your long tones on a passage from a solo or etude that’s been giving you trouble. Simply retain the pitches, but play them as whole notes.

Another thing to remember here is that you need to play in all of the registers. If you’re having problems getting a good sound in all the registers, work on that now. If you’re having trouble in the altissimo or throat tones, this a good time to practice that. Even if this is the case, you can’t confine yourself to the problematic (or non-problematic) register: you need to play the comfortable register to provide a tonal model. In short, make sure that you play every note on your instrument in your long tones.

It is often helpful to use a tuner when playing long tones, either to see your pitch tendency or to sound another pitch and work on your aural skills.

Finally, remember that this is your best chance to improve your tone. Strive for your best possible sound. Always. Period.

General exercises:

- Chromatic
  - Guy p. 35 (bottom)

To even the tone throughout registers:

- Twelfths (Burke p. 19)
- Extended Twelfths
- Octaves
- Fifths
- Chords - simply play any chord (from your scale routine or a piece of music) as whole notes
- Returning High C (Guy p. 69)

To improve a particular register:

- Throat Tones: Guy p. 40 (bottom)
- Altissimo: Guy p. 45 (top)

To improve voicing & throat flexibility:

- Altissimo Twelfths (Klug p. 67, #1-2)
- Harmonics (Burke pp. 23-24, all exercises)
Finger Warm-Ups

How do I warm up my fingers?

We use fast passages or scales to warm up the fingers. These can (and usually should) be whatever scale routine you’re working on for your lessons, but sometimes you may choose to use a tricky passage from a solo, etude, or band piece. This is fine, especially because it can break up any monotony, so long you remember that all finger warm-ups need to be done with a metronome. (This does, of course, include the scale routine and Klose page.) It’s more important to play something smoothly at a slow tempo than to play a passage quickly but unevenly. Finally, since you haven’t warmed up your articulation yet, make sure that you slur everything; even if a passage is tongued, remove the articulation for the time being.

❖ Scales:
  Klose #1 (using different forms of the minor scale)
  Klose #3 (thirds)

❖ Chromatic Scale:
  Jean-Jean pp.1-4 (note: this can be combined with the tonal warm-up when short on time)
  Klose #2
  Anything from Opperman’s The Chromatic Machine (esp. pp. 66-67)
  Rimsky-Korsakov’s Flight of the Bumblebee (Opperman pp. 142-143)

❖ Chords:
  Larry Guy exercises (pp. 23-24 and pp. 25-27)
  Klose #4
ARTICULATION WARM-UPS

How do I warm up my tongue?

The tongue is warmed up in much the same way as the fingers. Sometimes you may wish to remove the fingers from the equation entirely and play simply on one pitch; other times, you might want to play a section that involves both tongue and finger movement. Either of these works, although the first method (no finger involvement) is advisable when you’re changing how you articulate. Whichever method you choose, the key is (once again) using a metronome so that your articulation is rhythmic.

Without fingers:
Burke pp. 39-40

Minimal finger movement:
Bursts of 5s & 9s (Klug p. 26, #1-4)
Jean-Jean pp. 14-15
Anything from Kell’s Seventeen Staccato Studies (esp. #4 & #5)
Anything from Wiedemann’s Staccato Etudes (free download: www.clarinetinstitute.com)

Lots of finger movement:
Alternate legato and staccato scales (Burke p. 41)
Scale pattern (Klug p. 27, using the articulation patterns provided)
All major and minor scales (Langenus #2)
Langenus #11-12
Hite #2
Remove pitches from difficult passage in solo, etude, or band music