

## **Caring for Your Flute**

When learning to play the flute, it is easy to forget the most important part: caring for your flute! Nothing does more to improve the tone, pitch, and life of your instrument than proper assembly and cleaning. When you invest in a musical instrument, (and it is an investment!) you need to protect it and care for it as you would your first car. There are several things to remember when caring for your flute. The main points are how to put it together, how to take it apart, and how to clean it. These three things will be discussed throughout this lesson, and when we're finished, you will have a clean and shiny flute.

### **How to put your flute together**

Your flute consists of three pieces: the head joint, the body, and the foot joint. To join your flute together, hold the pieces tightly and rotate them together until they fit snugly. It is very important to remember to avoid holding the instrument where the keys and rods are located. Doing this could bend the keys and lead to serious damage. Instead, hold the instrument in the solid metal areas.



Most flutes are engineered to play slightly sharp when the head joint is pushed all the way in, touching the body. To correct this, you should pull the head joint out approximately 1/4th an inch. Because each player is different, you will need to tune your instrument each time you use it, adjusting the head joint to achieve a neutral sound, neither sharp nor flat. The embouchure of the head joint should be in line with the keys on the body, as should the rod on the foot joint. This will make the keys on the foot joint out of alignment with the keys on the body, but it will make reaching the keys with your little finger easier.

### **How to take your flute apart**

Just as you put it together, you take the flute apart by grasping the metal areas where there are no keys and gently twisting the instrument. Pull down as you twist until the pieces pop apart. If you feel pressure when trying to disassemble your flute, it is most likely because the joints that connect the pieces are dirty. Wipe with a clean, dry cloth to

remove any tarnish or dirt that has accumulated.

### **How to clean your flute**

When you play the flute, you push air down into your instrument. The more air you blow through your flute, the warmer the instrument becomes. Because of this warming action, condensation occurs and mixes with your saliva, leaving the inside of your flute moist at the end of a session. Leaving this water buildup in your flute will corrode the inside of the instrument and mold the pads of the keys, rendering you unable to play any longer.

When you purchased your flute, you should have also received a long, skinny metal or plastic rod. I suggest using a plastic cleaning rod because if the end of it pokes into the metal of your flute while cleaning, it is less likely to scratch the interior than a metal rod. Cover the rod with a soft, absorbent cloth, making sure the rod is completely, or nearly completely, covered. Then run the cleaning rod through the flute several times, making sure to pick up all wetness. When cleaning the head joint, make sure to avoid pushing the rod to the top of the instrument. Located there is the head cork assembly, which aids in tuning the instrument. Pushing on it can cause damage to your flute and force your instrument out of tune.



To clean the outside of your flute, take a soft polish cloth and clean away the fingerprints left from playing. This will prolong the cleanliness of the instrument by picking up any dirt or dust that may have gathered around the joints of the instrument. It also gives your flute a shiny look and feel. Although you may be tempted, never use silver polish on your flute to remove tarnish or fingerprints! This is not only messy but dangerous, exposing the pads and joints of your instrument to a substance that will cause them great damage. Though it may seem simple, a dry cloth is all you need.

If the pads of your keys stick when you push them down, chances are, dirt has gathered on them. To remove, simply take a piece of cleaning paper, available at music stores, and place it over the tuning holes. Close the keys gently over the paper and slide the paper out. Don't push the keys down too hard, or you risk tearing the pad. You may have to

insert paper several times to remove all the dirt from the pads. An inexpensive alternative to cleaning paper is to use ordinary tissue paper.

Once a year, I suggest taking your instrument to a music store for a professional cleaning. Your instrument will be properly taken apart and dipped in a solution to dissolve the tarnish that has developed in those hard-to-reach places. To maintain the beautiful finish of your flute, make sure to store it in its case between sessions.