

Articulation



Articulation, or the manner in which sounds are produced on the flute, is one of the biggest ways to change playing style. With articulation alone, we can take notes on a page and make them soft and smooth or sharp and accented. Articulation makes a flute melody blend in or stand out in a band ensemble, so learning the different articulations is extremely important to creating the sound you wish to hear. In this lesson, you will learn several different articulations and ways to improve your overall technique.

Basic Articulation

When creating notes on the flute, your tongue should hit your mouth just behind the teeth, on the alveolar ridge. This is the flat ridge just before your mouth curves up into the palatal region. When articulating different notes, only the front part of the tongue should move; the back part should stay stationary. To create a clear, crisp sound, curve your tongue upward so that only the very tip strikes against the alveolar ridge. Using more than just the tip of the tongue will make your articulation sound heavy. This is a problem many American flute players encounter, because of the manner in which we articulate our native language, English; because of this, it is important to remember to strike lightly and with as little surface area of the tongue as possible.

The best, and one of the only, ways to improve articulation is to first improve your tone. We speak in another lesson about tone quality and the best ways to produce a pure tone-keep your embouchure tight and your air flow steady, practice several different ways to determine how much air you need to send into the instrument and how much should shoot across the top, and don't force vibrato to cover up a bad sound.

When learning articulation, practice beginning each note with the

sound "tee" for single tonguing. Force air outward as you say the word, using "tee" to achieve good tongue placement and a light, crisp sound. Remember to use your stomach muscles to cut off a note at the end, not your tongue-your articulation should resemble "tee", not "teet".



Staccato

Staccato notes are short, separate, and accented. They sound almost abrupt, because staccato requires a slight pause between each note, heightening the detached, separated feeling of the music. As I discussed earlier, it is very important with staccato to cut off the note with your breath and not with your tongue.

To achieve a good staccato style, practice begins with stomach kicks. Place a hand lightly on your stomach, and say "ha" repeatedly, focusing on producing a short, clear sound. Cut the tone off by stopping the airstream, not by using the tongue; in this exercise, there should be no tongue articulation. When you have mastered a sharp, controlled sound with the stomach kicks, add the tongue, turning the sound into "tah" or "tee". "Tee" produces a lighter, easier sound than "tah", and is therefore more desirable in staccato playing. When the tempo increases, the stomach kicks must become smaller and sharper, and you must switch from single tonguing to double tonguing to maintain the style and feel of staccato. Changing from "tee" to "tee kee" or "tah kah" allows you to increase your speed and transitions between notes while still giving off a wonderful staccato articulation.

Legato

The legato style of playing is smooth and lyrical, with little to no silence between notes and easy, seamless transitions. It requires a softer articulation, although each note does have a distinctive

beginning, unlike slurring, a style similar to legato. When practicing legato articulation, many of the staccato rules apply, though softened. It is still essential to end each note by interrupting the airstream or changing notes, not by using the tongue. Stomach kicks are not necessary, although each note must be supported with as much air flow as the staccato.

Legato playing needs a smooth articulation, rendering the "tee" or "tah" too harsh. Instead, think "doo" or "da". With this tongue placement, it is easy to make the sound too heavy; remember to strike lightly against the alveolar ridge. When the tempo increases to the point where single tonguing isn't possible, using "da ga" or "doo goo" will allow you to play faster while maintaining the smooth, legato style.