

Caring for Your Clarinet

In order to continue to work properly, it is very important that your clarinet be properly maintained. Not only is a clarinet a musically artistic device, but it is also a mechanical tool requiring cleaning and service just as any machine would. Fortunately, maintaining a clarinet is not a difficult task when the student follows a few simple procedures on a regular basis. The following steps should be taken to keep your clarinet looking and sounding great.

Every Time You Play	Once a Week	As Needed
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Wipe fingerprints clean with a handkerchief.2. Swab your clarinet thoroughly to remove condensed moisture.3. Gently wipe any moisture from the mouthpiece.4. Store your reed in a good reed case.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Remove old cork grease and apply new cork grease to all joints.2. Check the clarinet for loose corks, screws and springs. Don't tighten them yourself! Let your teacher know if something needs to be adjusted.3. Gently wash your mouthpiece in lukewarm water.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Have any loose or leaking pads replaced by a professional repair technician.2. Once or twice a year, you should oil the bore of a wooden clarinet. Do this only under the close supervision of your teacher.

Daily Maintenance

The greatest danger to your clarinet is moisture. The condensation that naturally collects inside your instrument as you play can not only cause pads to leak and eventually fall off, but can actually cause the wood from which the clarinet is made to mildew and rot. Consequently, you absolutely must swab your instrument dry every time you play.

Swabbing a clarinet is quite simple. Once you have finished playing, store your reed in your reed case and carefully set the ligature aside. Remove your mouthpiece and wipe out any moisture with your handkerchief. Never pull a swab through your mouthpiece, as this will erode the interior of the mouthpiece over time. Turning your clarinet upside-down, gently drop the weighted end of your swab into the bell and allow it to exit through the barrel. Pull the unfurled swab all the way through your instrument. If the swab becomes stuck, do not try to force it through the instrument. Instead, disassemble the instrument at the point where the swab is stuck and gently pull it out. You may use tweezers to grasp the swab if it is out of reach for your fingers. You should pull your swab through the clarinet at least three times to make sure you have removed all of the accumulated moisture. See the pictures on the following pages for examples of how to correctly swab your clarinet.



Step 1: Insert the weighted end of the swab Step 2: Gently pull the swab through Step 3: When the swab is through, repeat

Weekly Maintenance

The corks that seal your instrument should be greased at least once a week. Don't wait until it becomes difficult to assemble the instrument before you apply cork grease, since this means that the corks are already dry and will have begun to wear down. When applying cork grease, always wipe the old grease off with a lint-free cloth that won't be harmed by staining, such as a shop towel. Apply the new cork grease around the entire surface of the cork so that the entire surface is covered without excessive build-up. Gently twist the greased joints together, wiping off any extra grease.

About once a week you should take a moment to visually inspect your clarinet for any loose or missing screws and springs. Never adjust a screw or spring on your instrument yourself. Only your band director, private teacher, or professional repair technician should make adjustments to your instrument. Notify your director as soon as possible if you notice a mechanical problem with your instrument.

Occasionally, you should take some time to clean your mouthpiece by gently scrubbing it with your mouthpiece brush in lukewarm water. Do not allow the mouthpiece to soak in the water for a long period of time, however, as this can damage the cork. Wipe excess water off of the mouthpiece after washing it and allow it to fully air dry before greasing the cork and returning the mouthpiece to the case.

Occasional Maintenance

About once or twice a year, you should treat your wooden clarinet with bore oil. The first several times you oil your clarinet should be done under close supervision of your director or private teacher. Improper oiling of the clarinet bore can actually damage the delicate grenadilla wood from which the clarinet is made or soil and ruin the instrument pads. Proper oiling of your clarinet will keep the wood moist, resonant, and more durable.

From time to time, your clarinet will need repairs and adjustments by a qualified repair technician. Pads will wear out with use, and corks will deteriorate in time. The better you care for your instrument, however, the less frequent and less costly your trips to the repair shop will be. Prevention is the best medicine for your clarinet. Proper instrument maintenance is part of your responsibility as a musician.