Intro to Vibrato: What the heck is it and how do you do it?

1. **Vibrato in wind instruments is a fluctuation in intensity of sound, not a variation of pitch.**

2. The best vibrato is one that enhances the expression of sound without disturbing intonation.

3. Vibrato should only be added to your sound after you have established proper air support and have a good sense of intonation.

4. **The best vibrato is a natural vibrato.** Never, ever force vibrato!

5. Listen to great singers and great string players to get a sense of how a beautiful vibrato should sound.

6. Dr. Scott Pool, Bassoon Professor at UT-Arlington studied bassoon vibrato extensively and wrote his dissertation on vibrato after inserting cameras down the throat of subjects and watching what happens when they used vibrato on the bassoon. He found that what actually happened was akin to vocal vibrato and has this to say on the subject: **“Vocal Vibrato is a by-product of correct relaxation and balance between the muscles.”** Lack of vibrato (straight tone) is actually a means of creating tension. Bassoon (and most likely oboe) vibrato should come from the opening and closing of the vocal folds, thus creating amplitude fluctuation. **These are involuntary muscles.** You cannot just make your vocal folds open and close. In order to achieve this effect, one must concentrate on relaxation of the laryngeal muscles. **Keep the air support**, but concentrate on where tension lies, and work to alleviate it.” (Visit [www.scottpoolbassoon.com](http://www.scottpoolbassoon.com) to read his complete dissertation.)

7. Sing! Sing! Sing! Worried about your vibrato? Sing with vibrato first. Relax your throat enough that it feels easy to sing with vibrato. Then “sing through your oboe”!

8. Make sure your reed will let you use vibrato. Sometimes, particularly if the opening of the reed is too small, it will be difficult to produce vibrato.

9. Once you have figured out how to allow vibrato to enter your sound, practice it daily until you can vary the speed and color of your vibrato. A beautiful vibrato is flexible and can add a myriad of expressive tone colors to your sound.

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HOW TO “PRACTICE” VIBRATO

1. Metronome Work (easiest with abdominal pulses)
   - Set your metronome on 60
   - Turn on your tuner
   - Begin by pulsing your air once on every beat while keeping the pitch centered on the tuner. (Think of saying “Ha” with a sharp “h” sound or imagine panting like a dog.)
   - Once you have mastered one pulse (it should be audible!), try two pulses per beat, then three, then four, etc. being careful to only advance the number of pulses when you can control it and it is audible.
   - As the speed of the pulses increase, do not be afraid to let the vibrato move up into your throat.
   - Begin on notes that are in the middle register (C, B, Bb, A, Ab)

2. Play Around with Your Singing Voice (easiest with throat pulses)
   - Using a piano, find a pitch that is in your vocal range. Sustain that pitch and “massage” the air with your throat muscles (think “ee-yah-ee-ya” if you have trouble or just sing using a normal vocal vibrato).
   - Soften the “ee-yah-ee-ya” until it feels like your throat is barely moving, but always keep moving the air forward as you “sing” the pitch.
   - Try singing pitches in different registers, noticing how the back of your tongue shifts around according to the register (we call that voicing).
   - Grab your oboe and try to do the same thing! Start with first or second octave notes, however, as these are usually the easiest to get vibrato on when approaching it vocally.

3. Focus on developing the method that seems to be the easiest for you.
   - Whenever you have a long note in band, especially if it is a loud tutti passage, try out your new vibrato. (No one will be able to hear you!)
   - When practicing at home, start by adding vibrato to any long notes (whole notes or longer), even if it feels awkward. (You have to start somewhere!)
   - Revisit the exercises above as part of your warm-up. Consistent attention to vibrato yields the fastest result. You have to go through the, “This feels really awkward and I sound stupid.” phase in order to get to a point where it will start to feel natural.
   - Remember that the reed will play a role in how easy it is for you to execute vibrato. If you are really struggling, it may be related to how the reed vibrates. Try a different reed and see if it makes a things easier.
   - Most importantly: Air support is critical to a great vibrato. The air must spin fast enough through the reed to facilitate a good vibrato. The core of the note should always be there- vibrato is an added feature, not the main event. (This is why using the tuner when working vibrato is a good idea.)