

Proper Maintenance of Clarinet

When you are finished playing, and prior to storing it in the case, the clarinet should be properly cleaned. This removes the warm air and saliva that accumulated inside the instrument when it was used. It also keeps it shiny and clean. This is a delicate instrument, and if you want it to sound good, it has to be maintained. Be careful putting it back in the case.

Steps

1. Remove the reed after playing and store it in a reed case to dry. Put the rest of the clarinet in a safe place. Don't stand it on end, unless you have a clarinet stand (It holds your clarinet upright, and can usually be folded and stored in the bell), since it can fall over.
2. Use your polishing cloth to wipe fingerprints off the ligature and keywork. Then, carefully place the cloth back in your case. Don't use any kind of metal polish (unless the clarinet is all metal, ie: silver) or other substance on your instrument, except for key oil. Key oil makes the keys move more easily.
3. Pick up the clarinet and take the mouthpiece off. Use your swab (made of cloth, nothing else, other materials can damage the insides) and drop the cloth's weight and string through the clarinet going backward (from the bell to the barrel) and pull it through. This assures that the spit and saliva that went in can go out the same way, and not ruin the pieces on the bottom which get little to no spit or saliva. You may have to do this several times. Take the pieces apart and dry the tenons (these are the places where the joints of the horn fit together.) Then, fold the swab and store it in your clarinet case.
4. Get out some cork grease. Grease the corks by rubbing cork grease on them with your fingers. Cork grease comes in many different forms, but the most common looks like lip balm. However, lip balm is not an appropriate substitute for cork grease, and cork grease can be poisonous if ingested, so do not confuse the two. You don't need to do this EACH time you take your clarinet apart, or even very often, as too much cork grease will weaken the corks and make them prone to breaking apart. Just examine your corks regularly and apply cork grease as needed depending upon the dryness or wear in the cork. You may need to grease them more often in the dry winter months.
5. Take out your cleaning cloth and polish the keys to remove fingerprints and grime. Then you may, if necessary, take out your dusting stick. Dusting sticks are long, twisted, thin, wire, with a small, broom-like thing at one end, and a little thing that looks like a tooth cleaner at the other end. Gently clean between and under the keys with the mouthpiece-brush end, and brush the dust off with the broom end. Pay close attention to the tone holes that your fingers cover as they often collect gunk and grime from your fingers. You may wish to polish the

instrument again after doing this. This would also be a good time to oil the keys, if necessary.

6. Place the mouthpiece cap over the mouthpiece, then store the clarinet in its case. Put the case in a safe place.

Tips

- An alternative method to swabbing would be to purchase pad savers, which look like huge pipe cleaners. You just insert them and put the instrument in the case. They soak up the moisture from within, so you don't spend time swabbing. Pad savers also last for a long time, if handled carefully. You can get them for the upper and lower sections, and some stores also offer small ones for the mouthpiece. If the clarinet is really wet, you may want to swab, then insert the pad savers. However, pad savers swabs are not highly recommended for wooden clarinets because although they seemingly pull moisture away from the inner bore of the instrument, they also trap that moisture inside the swab which remains inside the instrument so the moisture cannot evaporate. That trapped moisture can cause more damage in the expansion and contraction of the wood than not swabbing the instrument at all!
- Every so often, you'll need to take your clarinet to the music store for a [COA](#) (Cleaning, Oiling, Adjusting). Some stores may send you a reminder when it's time for one, but otherwise, every sixth months to a year, maybe 2 years is good, or sooner if you notice something wrong with your clarinet.
- Use the pointed end of a tissue to absorb moisture in the mouthpiece, but not from within the window under the reed. You can also do this with a mouthpiece brush, which looks like a giant tooth cleaner (If you've ever had braces, you know what that is). Mouthpiece brushes are also not highly recommended as they slowly alter the inner dimensions of the mouthpiece.
- For mouthpiece cleaning, it's a good idea to soak the mouthpiece in a cleaning solution every once in a while to dissolve calcium deposits. The easiest way to do this at home is to mix three parts lukewarm water and one part vinegar in a cup, and vertically place the mouthpiece in. Make sure it is not too deep, or else the cork part of the mouthpiece will get wet, which is not good.
- You don't always have to grease the corks. If you do, they will rot and you will have to replace them.
- Regular polishing, swabbing, dusting, and oiling will make your instrument last longer, but obsessive polishing and dusting will wear down the finish on your keywork.
- Purchase a clarinet stand. They are really great when you have to leave your clarinet alone, since you won't have any fear of it falling over and breaking. You won't have to hold it if you want to polish it; just stand it up and get to work! Some clarinet stands fold up and can be stored in the bell, which is even better.
- Clarinet cases with shoulder straps are the best. They're much easier to carry, and it's harder to drop something that's hanging from your shoulder.
- Some people recommend swabbing each piece separately instead of the instrument as a whole.

- If your case is not big enough to hold all of your cleaning supplies, you could purchase a pencil box to hold extra reeds, swabs, and other necessities.
- Before you play any instrument make sure you do not have food in you mouth, this can make your instrument work improperly and get all sorts of disgusting little creatures (i.e. maggots <you don't wanna know>) to take up residence in your horn.
- Bore oil your clarinet once a year- while keeping it together, drop *one or two* drops of bore oil in the inside of the horn and hold it at a slight angle so it runs down slowly. Do this over a trashcan or sink and wipe off any drips that get to the bottom of the horn