

# Getting Started With Recorder

The Recorder is a wonderful way to begin learning music at a relatively low cost. It has few moving parts and, if constructed of plastic, is regarded as maintenance-free. It is highly portable, and of a size accessible to young children as well as adults.

There are a few things to be aware of as you begin to select your own instrument..

## 1. **Look for a Soprano “C” Instrument.**

Unless otherwise arranged with your teacher, your instruction is intended to be given for a Soprano sized recorder. Recorders come in a variety of sizes, each with its own range of notes and fingering. Make sure your instrument meets this criteria!

## 2. **Look for “Baroque” or “English” Fingering**

These two terms are really referring to the same fingering system. There is another fingering system, more common in previous years, called “German” fingering -- this is to be avoided! Not only will your instrument not match your instruction book, but you will have problems keeping some of your notes from sounding too high or too low.

## 3. **Purchase an Instrument of Sufficient Quality**

Yes, it is true that a recorder is cheaper than other musical instruments. However, there are many “recorders” on the market that have very low manufacturing standards which should be regarded as toys. Such “recorders” do not produce notes reliably and accurately. A serious student will not be able to make much progress working with these, nor will a serious teacher be able to help their student to enjoy playing if their instrument cannot function reliably. One need not spend an exorbitant amount of money, but expect to spend between \$10 and \$20 for your instrument. In many cases, this will still be less than the cost of a single lesson, and may yield many months or years of enjoyment.

## 4. **A Word about Materials**

Most students will be looking for a plastic instrument. There are a few low grade wooden recorders on the market, but most wooden recorders are more expensive, require more care and maintenance, and are not designed for beginners. The plastic recorders can generally be classified into two groups. Some recorders are made of a clear plastic tinted to a bright color. These are very popular among children, but not generally approved by teachers. The other type is constructed of ASB resin plastic, usually white, very dark brown, or some combination of the two. These recorders are quite opaque, and tend to have better resonance and tone -- meaning that they are less shrill and do not squeak as easily on high notes. This type of plastic is much preferred

## 5. **Look for a Separated Bore and Mouthpiece**

Many recorders have a one-piece design where the entire instrument is cast at once. This type of instrument might seem preferable for parents of younger children who may perhaps remove and lose some of the pieces. However, there are important reasons why superior instruments are constructed in three separate pieces.

The bore is the bottom portion of the instrument when it is being held in playing position. Playing on an instrument that has a separate bore means that the lower holes of the instrument (C/C#, D/D#) may be adjusted to one side to allow the player to reach these holes comfortably with the pinky and ring finger. This is essential for players with smaller hands, but also preferable even among very elite recorder musicians. Having a separate bore also means the instrument can sometimes be adjusted for a left-handed player.

The mouthpiece is the pointed part that is placed in the player's mouth. This is the area that, due to the design of the instrument, sometimes traps condensation (spit) during a playing session, muting or even blocking the sound. Having a separate mouthpiece allows the instrument to be cleaned more thoroughly and easily. A second and perhaps more important reason for having a separate mouthpiece is that this is what allows a recorder to be "tuned". Any instrument that is going to be played in a group may need to be adjusted up or down so that all of the instruments will sound the same when playing the same note. It will not matter how well you are playing the song if you are out of tune compared with the rest of the group, because it will sound like you are doing something wrong.

## 6. **Brand Matters**

I do love a good deal, but when it comes to purchasing a recorder, it is best to stay conservative. There are many no-name or off-brands that look like more expensive models. However, without having a competent professional to evaluate the instrument, there is no real way to know how accurate the notes will sound. It is very frustrating to purchase a cheaper recorder, find it insufficient, and then to have to purchase a brand name instrument after the fact.

The grade of the instrument is also helpful to note. Some instruments are designed for chamber and ensemble work or soloing for professional musicians. The better brands will probably offer some of these very high priced instruments along with student grade recorders, which is what you will be using.

## Some Instruction Books:

“Red Hot Recorder” and “Razzamajazz” By Sarah Watts

Red Hot is the teaching method, Razzamajazz a supplement. Both series include piano accompaniment and CDs for home practice and are really fun and catchy tunes. Hard to find copies here in the states, but snatch them up if you can!

“It’s Recorder Time” by Alfred D’Auberge and Morton Manus (pub. Alfred’s Music)

Great for children’s private lessons and group classes. Introduction, starts with B (quarter notes), and works down through notes requiring more fingers. Great pace, but no second volume. No note-reading experience required.

“Learn To Play Recorder” Morton Manus (Alfred’s Music)

“Teach Yourself to Play Recorder” Morton Manus

“The Recorder Fun Book” By Larry Newman

“Recorder Fun!” (pub Hal Leonard)

Accompanying CD available. Does not use all of the notes on the scale. Not recommended.

“Recorder From The Beginning” By John Pitts (EJA Publications)

Works well for children and groups.

“Basic Recorder Lessons” by Ralph Wm. Zeitlin (Omnibus Edition)

Excellent Series -- this one volume contains 3 graded instruction books and one song book. Very thorough and systematic. Moves at a fairly quick pace. Would highly recommend for private lessons, not for group instruction due to the pace.

“The Recorder Guide” by Johanna E. Kulbach and Arthur Nitka (Oak Publications)

Covers both Alto and Soprano recorder fingerings, even some duets for Sop/Alt together. Also contains guitar chords. Real folk music melodies from around the world. Not great as a children’s first recorder book (too sparse on method) but terrific for those wanting to move to Alto after learning the basics on Soprano, and for adults with some notation experience.

“The Sweet Pipes Recorder Book”

This is a wonderful (though dated) series designed for adults and children around age 10 up. It uses a sound and consistent method. It does not include information on reading notation, however.

“95 Dexterity Exercises And Dances for Recorder” for both “C” and “F” by G. Rooda

Preparation for the more technical proficiency required to play classical repertoire. Not for beginners, but a great resource for those who want to advance in their recorder playing. Purchase the C book for Sopranos, and the F book for Altos.