

Articulation Exercises

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Articulation is an essential part of our saxophone playing, as it essentially sets the style of the music we play. It is also a rhythmic activity, and can be extremely helpful in solidifying our time and technical evenness. Tonguing can be frustrating to work on, so we must be very patient with ourselves. Try to measure progress with your articulation over a longer period of time than you normally might with other areas of your playing. Your tongue is a muscle and needs time to gain strength and dexterity, and you must work consistently on your articulation to achieve success.

I suggest that you regularly include some rotation of the articulation exercises below in your practice routine. Each exercise works on a slightly different articulation concept, but in total, these can dramatically help your articulation, presuming that your tongue mechanics are solid. None of these exercises are my creation, but I have found them each to be very productive in my own practicing.

1. Single-note exercise

This exercise should be performed in all 12 keys, with each key being at a slightly faster tempo. Start at a conservative tempo, and continue to increase speed until you cannot come close to executing the exercise. Also, you can accomplish two things simultaneously if you sound your tuner on the tonic pitch throughout the exercise and work on your intonation.



Continue through
full range of instrument

2. Tongue-finger coordination exercises

The first exercise on the next page comes from a book by Jean-Marie Londeix. Take a number of scales through the full range of your instrument (ascending and descending) using each of the six articulations below. Work to increase speed over the long term. Again, use your tuner on this exercise to work on intonation.

Two slurred, two slurred



Two slurred, two tongued



Two tongued, two slurred



One tongued, two slurred, one tongued



Three slurred, one tongued



One tongued, three slurred



The second exercise (on the next page) is one that Debra Richtmeyer showed me. It is technically demanding, so you may need to wait with this exercise until your finger technique is good enough. Continue the pattern below until you run out of room at the top of the instrument. Play through the exercise at a handful of different tempos each day, making sure that the fastest tempo is near the limit of what you can do.



Continue through full range of instrument