

Saxophone Altissimo
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This handout is intended to provide some strategies for developing the altissimo register of your playing, including some preparatory exercises, a fingering chart for alto saxophone, and some additional resources that you should check out. Altissimo is perhaps the most trial-and-error prone aspect of playing the saxophone, so be patient and work hard on the exercises. It may take you months or even years to get a good handle on this challenging register of the saxophone.

Altissimo Preparation Exercises

Before working directly on altissimo notes, spend significant time working on the exercises below. Do NOT simply assume that playing the right fingering will generate the indicated pitch. You MUST also be using the correct voicing, and these exercises are designed to help you figure out this voicing.

1. Mouthpiece flexibility exercises

Sit at a piano for this exercise. Remove your mouthpiece from the horn – you will play it by itself. When you play your mouthpiece, you need to use a full air stream and full volume to get this to work – this is an especially important point. Blow!

Play your mouthpiece and figure out which pitch you are playing. Using the piano as a reference, try to play a concert A on the mouthpiece (on alto – you'll aim for concert G on tenor, concert D on baritone, and concert C on soprano). Try to hit the note directly rather than scooping into it, and work to keep the tone as stable as possible. Once you can do that, try to “scoop” down to concert G# and back to A, then down to G and back to A. Continue moving down by half steps as far as you can. You should be able to make it at least to concert E, hopefully a good bit further. You might find that the technique used here is similar to “playing” a descending glissando when you whistle – the shape of your oral cavity will change as the pitch changes. Feel free to expand the exercise to include any scale shapes you wish.

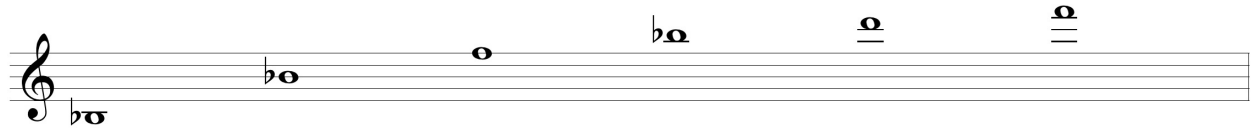
2. “Front F trick” exercise

This is similar to the mouthpiece flexibility exercises, but we will use the whole instrument. Play your high F, using the front F key instead of the palm key fingerings. Now try to “scoop” down to E, Eb, and perhaps further. You will notice that this is harder to achieve on the horn, so don't get discouraged. Keep at it.

3. Overtone

The saxophone is capable of producing the traditional overtone sequence, and working on playing these notes can be quite beneficial in the growth of your altissimo playing. The exercise is simple enough to understand, yet can be difficult to execute, particularly the higher notes.

Play a low Bb. Maintain the low Bb fingering and try to play each of the notes in the example below.

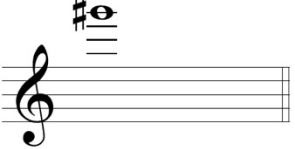




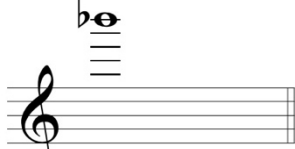

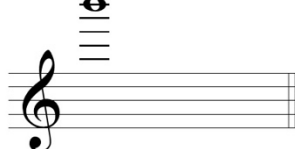

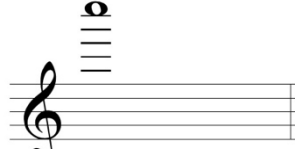

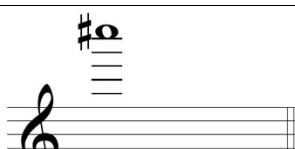

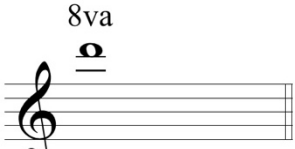



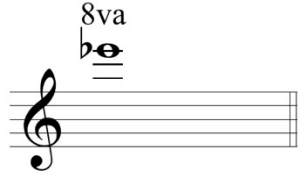



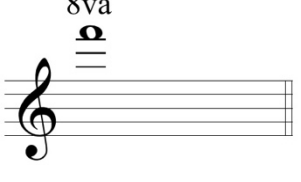

I find that students begin to struggle the most on high Bb and above. Once you break through and figure out how to play that note, you will be well on your way to executing the altissimo notes on the horn. Again, be patient and persistent. When you make a breakthrough, repeat as many times as you can, so that your body remembers the voicing.

Altissimo Fingerings

Keep in mind that when it comes to fingerings, there are many alternate options, and fingerings can be different on each of the different saxophones. You may need to experiment a bit. On certain pitches below, I've indicated a "technical" fingering (one that doesn't respond as easily but is better for more technical passages) and a "response" fingering (one that speaks better but may be more mechanically difficult - I use these when I need that one note to speak clearly).

(All pitches in the table below are **written** pitches on the saxophone, **not** concert pitch.)

	<p data-bbox="824 352 979 384">"Technical"</p>  <p data-bbox="1092 352 1247 384">"Response"</p> 
	
	
	
	
	
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Additional Altissimo Resources

Check out any and all of these terrific resources on saxophone altissimo:

Saxophone High Tones by Eugene Rousseau (new second edition), published by Etoile Music

Voicing: An Approach to the Saxophone's Third Register by Donald Sinta, published by Blaris Publications

Top-Tones for the Saxophone: Four Octave Range by Sigurd Rascher, published by Carl Fischer

Beginning Studies in the Altissimo Register by Rosemary Lang, revised and edited by Gail Levinsky, published by Ensemble Publications