



# How to Play the Recorder

## Video 1: Introduction

Hi, my name is Vicki Boeckman and I am a member of the American Recorder Society. I am a professional recorder player and have been teaching the recorder to students of all ages and abilities for almost 30 years.

In this video series I will help you with the basics of how to play the recorder. We'll go through topics of choosing an instrument, to basic care and maintenance, learning to breathe efficiently and producing a good tone, learning some basic articulation patterns, learning how to read music and finally on to playing real pieces!

The recorder is simple in design - without keys, or reeds, or other parts to worry about - and is as near to the human voice as can be. It is a delightful instrument that is relatively easy to learn in the beginning, and will give you endless hours of pleasure.

By following a few simple instructions and experimenting on your own, you will soon be on your way to playing!

Recorders come in all shapes and sizes, like saxophones or choir members. The most common sizes are Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass, but there are even smaller ones : sopranino and garklein, and larger ones: Great Bass, Contra bass and sub Contra bass.

Saxophone players use the same fingerings for all the sizes and are used to the music being transposed for them, but on the recorder we play the actual notes that we see.

Once you learn the two basic sets of fingerings for c and f instruments, you will be able to play many sizes!

## Video 2: Choosing an instrument

Hi! I'm Vicki Boeckman with the American Recorder Society. I'm talking about How to Play the recorder and today I will help you choose an instrument.



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I would recommend starting on a plastic instrument even if you have rediscovered an old wooden recorder that has been in the family for years, or have been the recipient of a wooden recorder. A high end plastic instrument needs only a minimum amount of maintenance and will often sound better than an inexpensive wooden instrument. The high end plastic recorders are modeled after original instruments in museums and actually sound like real recorders rather than cheap toys.

One fact of life, regardless of the material of your recorder, is that moisture - or condensation - will occur in the windway. This means it will clog up and sound unclear. This will happen more often with plastic than with wood, simply because plastic will not absorb moisture, but it happens in all types of recorders.

The recorder windway is very narrow, and the warm air we blow from our 98.6 degree bodies is much warmer than the wood or the plastic. The only thing that helps is warming up the head joint for a good 5 minutes or so before playing. I usually do this by putting the head joint in the pocket of my pants, or inside my blouse right up against my body. You then have your hands free to go about doing other things, or you can use this time to focus on breathing and posture. If clogging occurs during playing it is important not to get frustrated, but gently suck the moisture back up and continue playing.

The plastic instruments I would recommend are:

**Yamaha #YRS 302B** which will run between 15 and 20 dollars

**Zen-On Stanesby Jr. model # 150B** which will run about 38 dollars.

These instruments can be ordered through your local music store, or you can order on line through some well respected sites.

## Video 3: The foundation

Hi! I'm Vicki Boeckman with the American Recorder Society. I'm talking about How to Play the recorder and today we'll go over breathing and support, and posture while sitting and standing. The recorder is a member of the wind instrument family, so it is essential to be aware of how you breathe and support your tone. This is the foundation upon which all else is built.

Let's start without the instrument.



# How to Play the Recorder

First of all, I'm going to have you lie down on the floor in a semi supine position. If you are not able to get up and down from the floor without pain or discomfort, please wait and join me for the next group of instructions. For those of you able to lie on the floor without discomfort, find a couple of medium sized paperback books to rest your head on, plus a large one to put on your stomach in just a minute.

Choose a carpeted area or use a throw rug or a yoga mat to lie on. Lie down on your back, rest your head on the books so that your neck is completely free of tension, bend your legs so that your knees point up towards the ceiling and rest your hands on your stomach. Let your body settle into this position for a few minutes, adjusting slightly if you need to.

Inhale and exhale slowly through your nose and focus on the movement of your hands on your stomach. Continue this in your own tempo for several breaths. It is not necessary to top off and fill up completely by activating the upper chest.

Put the large book on your stomach and notice how it moves up and down with your breath. Inhale fully, pick a spot on the ceiling and aim your air at that spot as if you are blowing through a straw. Try to keep the book up as long as you can and notice the slight tension in your stomach muscles as you do this. Repeat several times. This will train your support muscles.

Roll over onto your side and get up carefully using all fours.

The next exercise will be sitting in a chair. Find a chair without arms - or a stool - that is right for your height. I happen to have long legs so I need a chair or stool that is rather high.

Shift forward on the chair, spread your legs and bend forward all the way so that your head and neck are dangling loosely and your arms are dangling alongside your legs.

Bring your arms up and hold on to your lower back and breathe deeply. Notice the movement of your lower back as you inhale and exhale. Continue breathing like this several times and start rising upward while breathing. Notice the changes.



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When you have gotten up to a sitting position, reposition yourself and relax your butt into the chair. Keep your legs apart and extended outward at a comfortable angle with your feet flat on the floor.

Free your neck and arms and imagine that you are a large marionette hanging from a huge set of strings from the ceiling above. Breathe deeply focusing on your lower stomach around and below your navel.

Rotate back and forth on your hip joint

- Blowing out to a point on hand
- Blowing a piece of toilet paper and holding it steady
- Blowing with various sounds (sssss, fffff, kkkk)
- Drawing name on glass with breath
- Show how to hold the recorder in a relaxed way

## Video 4: Tone production

Hi! I'm Vicki Boeckman with the American Recorder Society. I'm talking about How to Play the Recorder and in this segment I'm going to discuss tone production. Now that you understand how important the foundation of your breath is, we can build upon that and start to produce beautiful tones.

First of all it is important not to grip the recorder with your lips. Some of you may have played (or still play) the clarinet or saxophone or oboe, where you need a real bite or a fixed embouchure.

On the recorder, the embouchure is already built in by the exact measurements of the block and ceiling and chamfers of the labium and windway.

What we need to do is produce the most efficient and resonant flow of air through this tiny windway. You may remember from Video 1 that I said the recorder is as near to the human voice as can be.



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What I mean by that is that we form our sounds like a singer would, thinking about the resonance and “placement” of each one. Low notes will feel different and be “placed” differently than medium or high notes.

- Show how to hold the recorder in mouth – loose upper lip
- Licking finger
- Then blowing long notes
- Start on B then perhaps G
- Vowel sounds
- Air speed and direction
- Visualizing colors or tastes

## Video 5: Articulation

Hi! I’m Vicki Boeckman with the American Recorder Society. I’m talking about How to Play the Recorder and in this segment I’m going to talk about articulation.

Now that you have learned how to produce beautiful, resonant tones the next thing will be learning to articulate clearly with your tongue. When we speak we strive to enunciate clearly so that others can understand us.

When we play an instrument, we want to articulate clearly so that the musical phrases and ideas are clear. When playing a wind instrument our tongues are responsible for this. With string players it is their bows; with pianists, their fingertips. The most important thing to remember is that it has to be as natural as possible. Your tongue will be doing the exact same thing as when you speak normally.

- Speak *to*’s and *do*’s into palm. Notice the percussive effects of *to* as opposed to *do*
- Start by blowing a long, beautiful tone on B. then blow a series of connected *tos*
- Repeat with *dos*
- Combine, *to do, to do, to do*, as in ...“I have *to do* this and that.....”
- Play patterns of *to do*’s on G, A, B, C, etc
- Play various rythmical patterns (one 8th and two 16ths = *to*, *to do*,
- Dotted 8ths = *to*, *to do to do to do*