

Technique Tip:

How to use double tonguing and apply it to music

This piece follows Sprenkeling's ongoing series.

PART 1: "Use of Air and Breath Control: The Respiratory System" / AR Spring 2021

Use of air in everyday breathing and for good musical tone, with exercises for correct breathing.

PART 2: "More on Breathing plus Posture and Hands" / AR Summer 2021

Additional breathing exercises, posture, embouchure and hand position.

PART 3: "Articulation" / AR Fall 2021

added articulation to previous skills.

PART 4: "A Toolbox for Coordination of Air, Fingers and Articulation" / AR Winter 2021

covered all skills learned so far.

PART 5: "Daily study habits & how to work on a new piece of music." / AR Spring 2022

applied skills in daily practice.

PART 6: "How to play air and finger vibrato." / AR Fall 2022

added an expressive element.

PART 7: "How to apply articulations to music." / AR Winter 2022

Basic rules, and when to break them.

Your single tonguing has reached its limit and can't keep up with your fingers. The next step is double tonguing—but how do you employ good double tonguing in fast passages? It must sound the same as your single tonguing, to keep you from going back to single tonguing.



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She currently teaches recorder at the Real Conservatorio Superior de Música de Madrid. She recently released a CD, and taught in February at Lyon National Conservatory in France, in an Erasmus Program collaboration with recorder pedagogues Pierre Hamon and Sébastien Marq. Info: <https://lobke.world>.

Starting with double tonguing means taking a step back temporarily. (You may want to review the articulation article in **AR Fall 2021**.) Even though with single tonguing you can go faster right now, working on good double tonguing will take you much further over time.

There are three syllables used in double tonguing: *lere*, *did'l* and *dege/teke*. They all aim to alternate two parts of the tongue, so that while one part of the tongue is working, the other one gets a (very short) break. *Lere* and *did'l* only work with the front area of the tongue, whereas *teke/dege* uses the back and front of the tongue. Right now we will focus on this last type of articulation.

Double tonguing using dege/teke

Teke/dege is a great double articulation because of its versatility, a continuum from the softest *dege* (almost *rehe*) to the most crisp articulation using *teke*. It allows the front of the tongue to rest and prepare while the back of the tongue articulates, and vice versa, creating a really fast articulation.

At one end of this spectrum is the gentlest articulation—close to *legato*, but the tongue softly touches the palate. At the other end of the spectrum is *teke*, which separates the airstream in a clear way. Remember that *T* and its counterpart *K* are both just a way for the tongue to temporarily cut off the air. The articulation is not heavy or hard.

For both ends of the spectrum, the most essential element is the airstream acting as a motor that keeps the tongue running smoothly. Without a steady airstream, *dege/teke*, like any other articulation, will become extremely heavy and noisy.

In this article we will look at some of the major problems you can correct in order to get great, fast double tonguing: a heavy tongue, irregular rhythm and lack of speed.

How to fix a heavy tongue

Everything is interrelated: posture and air are the foundation for all other factors when we play. If your body is tense, especially in the neck and shoulder area, it can affect the way you articulate. Observe whether there's any tension in your jaw (it should be in a neutral, relaxed and still position) and if your embouchure is nice and loose (U-shaped mouth).

Your breath support should come from your core and not your chest muscles, because the latter also can cause tension in the neck. Are your shoulders, neck and throat relaxed? Are you using breath support from your abdominal muscles?

Using the airstream as a motor, the tongue “floats” on top. Remember that air is essentially the singing of our notes and musical phrases, while the articulation just makes it speak one way or another. This is why the tongue has to be as light as possible, with the airstream carrying it. Although this is easier to imagine for *T* or *D*, it also applies to *K* or *G*.

What makes a huge difference is to move the *K* or *G* as far forward as possible—that is, the spot where the tongue touches the soft palate. Pronounce the *K* several times: first as deep in your throat as you can, then working your way up and forward. Do you feel and hear the difference?

Do the same with *teke*. Start with a really low, guttural *K* and end up bringing it forward. Notice how it feels. What is more comfortable, and why?

In general, the more guttural your *K* is, the heavier and noisier the sound, because you tense the base of your tongue and throat. On the other hand, if you try imagining your *K* as far forward as possible, using the air as the motor and imagining a very light tongue, you will see how your *Ge* and *Ke* will improve drastically!

Your *D* or *T* should also be light and effective. The energy should be



Teke/dege is a great double articulation because of its versatility.

away from the palate, not towards the palate—like a cat's paw as it touches water and immediately draws it back.

Another thing that makes a difference is to focus on the fingers as the “leader”: the tongue follows the fingers. This helps to take the focus off the tongue and make it lighter. Of course, your fingers must be rhythmic for this to work. My advice is to always practice a difficult section slurred before articulating it.

Last, think about the vowel you form with your tongue. If it's “oo,” that will make your tongue heavier, because the tongue sits low and bowl-shaped within the mouth. Instead use “i” (as in the word “still”) or “e” (as in the word “yes”), but with good embouchure in a U-shape or “kissy mouth” (like the German sound of “ü”). This will make a world of difference, eliminating extra noise your tongue might make.

How to avoid irregular double tonguing

When we practice *dege* or *teke*, the rhythm may become a bit irregular, like a dotted rhythm. A highly effective exercise is to reverse the order of the consonant, like this: *keteketekete* or *gedegedegede*. This is not easy at first, but you will soon get used to it. Practice it on repeated notes (*example 1*).

A *K/G* on a strong beat tends to be too heavy, so try to focus on keeping it light, even on a strong beat.

A second exercise is to play triplets. Although *tekete tekete* and *degede degede* are an option, it means repeating *T/D*, so that the front part of your tongue gets less rest than the back part. That's why I prefer to play *tekete keteke* and *degede degede* (*example 2*).

1

Te - ke - te - ke Te - ke - te - ke Te

Ke - te - ke - te Ke - te - ke - te Ke

De - ge - de - ge De - ge - de - ge De

Ge - de - ge - de Ge - de - ge - de Ge

2



Te - ke - te Ke - te - ke Te - ke - te Ke - te - ke Te
De - ge - de Ge - de - ge De - ge - de Ge - de - ge De

1: Practice teke/dege on repeated notes, both normal and reversed,

2: Alternate syllables in triple meter.
Tekete keteke or degede gedege.

3: Scalelike motion in triple meter.

Again alternate the syllables.

4: More scalelike motion.

Up a mini-scale and down.

5: Arpeggios. Again alternate the syllables.

6: A few measures from an Allegro.

G.Ph. Telemann, Sonata, TWV41:C5,
Essercizii musici.

7. Another excerpt. Frescobaldi's Canzona detta la Bernardinia

3



De - ge - de Ge De - ge - de Ge

Ge - de - ge De Ge - de - ge De

4

5 De - ge - de - ge De - ge - de - ge De - ge - de - ge De - ge - de - ge De - ge - de - ge De - ge - de - ge etc...

Te - ke - te - ke Te - ke - te - ke Te - ke - te - ke Te - ke - te - ke Te - ke - te - ke Te - ke - te - ke

Ge-de-ge-de-ge-de-ge-De Ke-te-ge-te-ge-te-ge - te-ge-te-ge-te-ge-te-ge Te-ge-te-ge-te-ge-te-ge - te-ge-te-ge-te-ge-te-ge-te Ke-de-ge-de-ge-de-ge

6 de Ke-de-ge-de-ge-de-ge-Te-ge-Te-ge-Te-ge-Te-ge - Te

7 Te-ge-de Te-ge - de Te-ge-de-ge-de-ge-de Te-ke-te-ke-te-ke - te.

How to correct double articulation that's too slow

Make sure you work on your single tonguing, to make it as light and fast as possible. This is muscle training, so it's recommended to do it regularly: you will see that the tongue becomes more agile and can go on for longer.

Normally, when the syllables *teke/dege* are too slow, the tongue is still doing too much. You should work towards minimal movement of the tongue. Practice both slow and fast: on the one hand, slow and aware; on the other hand, from time to time, as fast as possible while still being relaxed, in small sections of three, five, seven and nine notes.

The trick is to think of the final note as if you were already there, focusing on that “breeze” of air that takes you to the end. Of course, for this you have to be able to play your notes fast enough: that's why it's good to work with small groups of notes.

This means that when you play it:

- slowly, you really think about blowing through the notes, as if they were one long note.
- rapidly, think about getting to that last note: don't put too much emphasis on the notes in the middle. Remember that the tongue follows the fingers!

If it's a difficult section, you may want to make sure you can play the passage slurred. Very important: tell yourself to relax in difficult and fast passages.

Getting to the actual music

Let's first do some exercises before using double tonguing in your music.

- As we saw before, the first step is to practice *teke/dege* on repeated notes, both normal and reversed, as in example 1 and example 2.
- The next step is to play mini-scales that are easy for your fingers, as in example 4. Don't forget to find a pattern of groups of three, as shown

in example 3.

- Now you can move on to arpeggios that are comfortable for you to play and memorize, as in example 5.

This is also a great warmup routine!

Next let's look at a G.Ph. Telemann sonata (example 6). As you can see, we start with *Ke*, since it starts on a weak beat, the upbeat. It is not *Ge*, because it's the beginning of a phrase, so *Ke* is a better articulation. The first scale is articulated softly, with *dege*. After the high C, the scale is broken, so this new section begins with *Ke*.

What comes next is a simulation of two voices: a higher voice as a drone on a G; and a lower voice playing the actual melody line. That's why I divide these notes in groups of two (a melody note and a drone note), articulating the notes of the melody line with *Te* and the drone notes with *Ge*.

In the third measure, this is interrupted by another scale, so I start the scale with *Ke*, to clearly divide it from what came before. The same thing is done for the scale after that—then we're back to the melody line with the drone, although this time the melody line is above the drone notes.

This is a good example of how to apply double tonguing to a piece, just like I would apply *T* and *D* with single tonguing. (In my last article, in **AR Winter 2022**, I listed some helpful rules of thumb.)

Example 7 is a fragment from Girolamo Frescobaldi's *Canzona detta la Bernardinia*. Although no staccato is written in the score, I've added it here for illustration. To make the volume level *piano*, apply *teke* as small and

short as possible. The *forte* therefore is played with *dege* and a broad airstream; instead of trying to blow louder, always try to find the center of the note and make it resonate as much as possible. Keep the *teke* light and staccato. This is a great example of how *teke* doesn't automatically mean *forte*, nor does *dege* automatically imply *piano*. They are tools of speech, floating on that wonderfully subtle airstream that makes the music sing.

Some final tips

- Don't go faster than what your brain can handle! The only way to create muscle memory is for your brain to follow what your body is doing—and, in this case, especially your fingers.
- In difficult sections, always think of playing small (except your full airstream) and relaxed.
- Work with short sections, and think of relaxing your shoulders and having minimal movement. Your articulation can be really soft because the air is the one carrying the music (and your tongue)!
- Continue knitting together *teke/dege*.
- Think of very light articulation, but don't forget your sound. Play as if the music were a beautiful Adagio.
- The airstream is spacious, but the fingers are as small as we can get them. Think of it as one long line, as if it were one long note.

As you repeat the short sections, make your repetitions very relaxed. Observe by feeling everything you do. Little by little you'll get closer to coordination. Relaxation is key! ✨

LINKS OF INTEREST:

- Lobke Sprengeling's web site: <https://lobke.world>
- Previous articles in her series on recorder technique: <https://americanrecorder.org/extra>
- Videos for this series of articles: www.youtube.com/americanrecordermag