



The U.S. Military Academy Band

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Double tonguing on single-reed instruments

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Perhaps you are saying to yourself, upon sight of this article, "It can't be done." In order to master double tonguing, single tonguing must first be a natural skill. Some fundamental necessities of successful single tonguing include:

- Proper placement of tongue on the reed
- Use of the correct part of the tongue
- Very firm support from the diaphragm
- Fast, continuous airstream behind the tongue

Where the tongue hits the reed will vary from register to register, as well as for different reeds and mouthpieces. The part of the tongue that touches the reed will also be varied from person to person, and is also dependent upon the style of articulation the player is attempting to achieve. Experimenting on your own will help you to find the location and placement that work best for you. I find that the very tip of the tongue, placed increasingly higher up on the reed as the register climbs, is a good rule for me to follow.

Diaphragmatic support and a fast, continuous airstream are extremely vital to successful tonguing. An exercise I have found to be helpful in developing these four fundamental skills is as follows: with the metronome set to a "comfortable" tempo (begin around 72 b.p.m. and adjust to faster as you improve), play, in common time, a measure of half notes, then one of quarter notes, then one of eighth notes, then a measure of triplets, followed by a measure of sixteenth notes. Keep all attacks very legato. Once the exercise becomes easy on one pitch, start playing each measure on a different scale degree or on another member of a chord. The possibilities are endless for this exercise. Make tonguing part of your regular daily warm-up/maintenance routine.

There is more than one approach to performing the skill of double tonguing. One (the most popular) involves the use of a guttural attack in combination with a regular tongue attack. This method, most commonly used by brass and flute players, is described by the syllables "ta-ka-ta-ka-ta-ka..." or "duh-guh-duh-guh-duh-guh..." If you can make your guttural attack match the quality of the tongue attack, this method can be very effective.

Another way to double tongue involves the use of both the top and bottom surfaces of the tip of the tongue. This up and down, sweeping motion can be compared to the motion of a paintbrush. First, look in the mirror and stick out your tongue. "Point" the tongue, much like a reptile points its tongue to catch an insect. The resulting small tip is best for this method of double tonguing. Touch the bottom surface of your tongue with your fingers, to "feel" the sensation on that part. It will seem awkward at first and requires some getting used to. With the mouthpiece in your mouth, try sweeping the tip of the reed with the two surfaces of your tongue. **Warning: use a reed you can stand to break...you will likely trash more than one during this learning process!** It may be easier, at first, to get used to

the feeling of using the bottom of the tongue by brushing back and forth across the top of the mouthpiece (place the reed as far down on the mouthpiece as you can to minimize the likelihood of folding it backwards). As you become used to moving the tongue in this manner, gradually move it lower on the reed until you find where response is best for you. Be sure you're using the smallest part of the tongue, at the very tip. The motion will be very small. Also, keep in mind that the motion you are performing differs completely from single tongue motion in that single tonguing requires you to take the tongue away from the reed, then place it back on to stop the sound. In this method of double tonguing, the tongue stays in the same place and moves up and down. Be continuously conscious of the speed of your airstream and the strength of your diaphragmatic support, as these factors will have great bearing on your success.

Double tonguing is not an easy skill to acquire, and you will need a lot of patience and hard work to develop it, just as with any other aspect of your playing. Experiment a lot with different attacks and tongue placements, and persevere until you have accomplished your goal.

This article provided courtesy of the [U.S. Military Academy Band](#) at West Point, New York