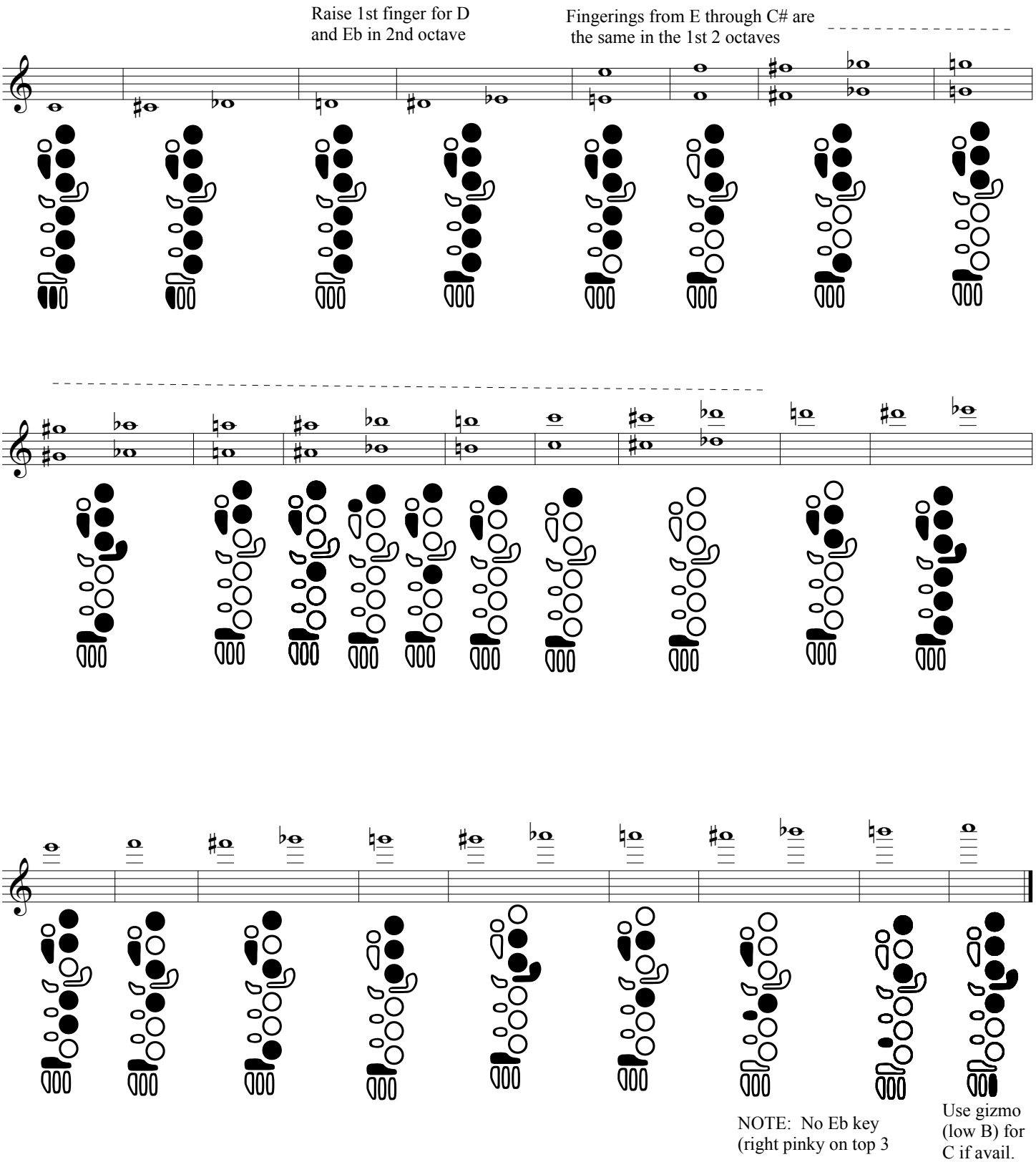
Flute fingerings



Exposed: The Rule of Thumb (Bb) and Other Flute Myths and Mysteries

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Myth #1: The thumb Bb is inferior to other Bb's on the flute. In fact, there is no discernible difference in sound among the three Bb's. Each has its place. In general, use the thumb Bb in flat keys. Don't slide with the thumb from Bb to B-natural. Use the lever when needed to avoid sliding or making an awkward slur (G to Bb, for ex.) using one and one. (See Ex. 1)

Myth #2: Pull the head joint as much as necessary to bring the flute into tune. This often makes matters worse instead of better. The flute is manufactured to produce the best pitch with the head joint pulled no more than 1/4". Excessive pulling will distort the scale. Many, perhaps most, young players play with the head joint positioned too high, causing the air to go too much across the hole, with a consequent raising of the pitch level. The correction lies not in pulling the head joint further, but in bringing it down and perhaps rolling it in.

Myth #3: The flute vibrato cannot be taught. It is a natural outgrowth of musical maturity and will occur naturally. The vibrato does indeed sometimes occur naturally. And it is almost always wrong.

Myth #3b: The proper vibrato is a diaphragm vibrato and the throat vibrato should be avoided at all costs. First, "diaphragm" vibrato is a misnomer; the diaphragm is an involuntary muscle. It is possible, but it has the dual disadvantage of being a lot of work and of being difficult to produce as fast a vibrato as is often needed and to control the width. A <u>controlled</u> throat vibrato will produce the best results. (See Ex. 2)

Myth #4: Flute fingerings are sacred and no alteration is ever acceptable. Horse feathers. The flute is a hunk of metal with holes in it. Whatever fingering combination produces the best pitch and tone quality in a given situation is the fingering of choice. There are several examples in the third octave, so rest easy. An alteration here and there for better intonation or response will not endanger your eternal salvation.

Myth #5: Never move the jaw. In order to decrease the size of the aperture, the most efficient means is to bring the lower lip up or out, which necessitates a slight jaw movement.

Myth #6: In tonguing, the tongue should come between the teeth (because the French do it that way). For an occasional soft attack, this sometimes works well, but it should not be done as a standard practice. The belief that French flutists routinely do this is erroneous.

Myth #7: Learning to take a proper breath requires years of study, effort, meditation, and self-denial. The truth is, breathing is a perfectly natural human function. Simply take a full, deep breath and use it in the most efficient manner (in the case of the flute, with a small, focused aperture).

Myth #8: Flutists must learn to live with a sharp 3rd-space C#. On most modern flutes, the C# is much less a problem than on older flutes without an improved scale. In any event, the C# is easily played in tune if the player is properly set up.

Myth #9: The low register is necessarily weak and there's nothing to be done about it. Not true. Many modern head joints are cut so as to permit a much stronger low register. The player must pull the corners down, drop the jaw back, and play more into the flute. (Low-register practice is also not a bad idea.)

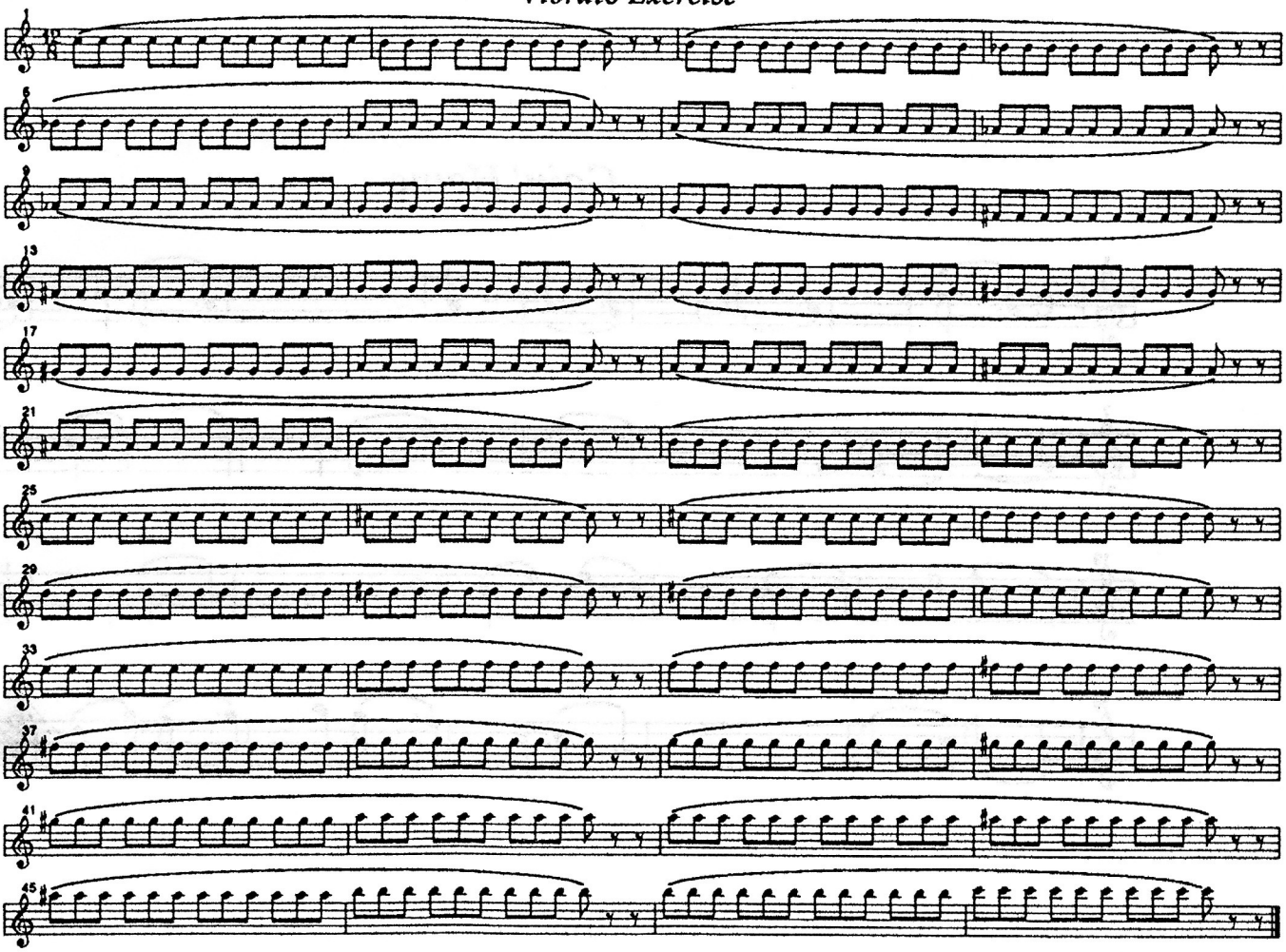
Mystery #1: How can I make a finely tapered release without the pitch going flat or dropping an octave? Pull the lower lip to the side slightly, which makes the aperture smaller, which in turn increases the air speed, thus helping maintain the pitch.

Mystery #2: How can I develop a fast double- and triple-tongue? First, the choice of syllable is crucial. The most is efficient is ti-ki (short "i"), which brings the fore-tongue and the back-tongue closer together. See attached for double-tongue exercise. In triple tonguing, the most efficient of the three ways is the displaced double-tongue. (Ex. 3)

Mystery #3: How can I develop a more facile technique? There's no real secret here. Daily practice on scale and arpeggios throughout the range of the instrument is indispensable. The most important arpeggios are the majors, minors, dominant sevenths, and diminished sevenths.

Mystery #4: What is the proper "voicing" on the flute? A common problem is keeping the teeth too close together. Extensive use of the oral cavity — as in whistling or singing — is as necessary on the flute as on the French horn, for example. Many cracked notes are caused by setting the oral cavity for the wrong octave. Try singing and playing at the same time. (It sounds awful, but it works.)

Vibrato Exercise



This range works well for flute, oboe, and saxophone. The corresponding range for bassoon would be F in the staff down to 2nd-line B, then up to F above the staff.

Practice with the metronome, beginning at about M.M. = 60.

Encourage a big pulsation—beauty is not a concern at this point.

The ideal would be the solo-soli technique with an advanced player or a tape.

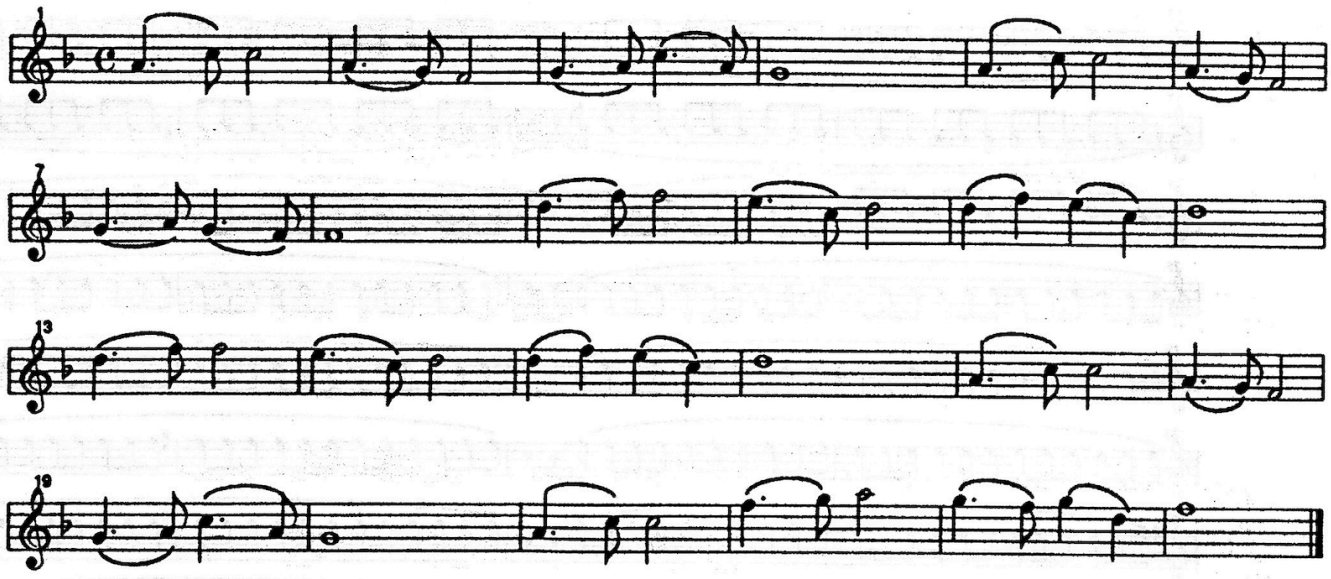
Move the tempo forward as control permits. If using a throat vibrato on flute, it should begin to run together at around M.M. = 80.

By the time the student can control the vibrato at a tempo of M.M. = 96 or so, it's usable. Find a melody in the middle register in long note values, such as "Goin' Home" (see other side of this page). There should be no attempt to measure the vibrato—just turn in on and try to make the tone sing.

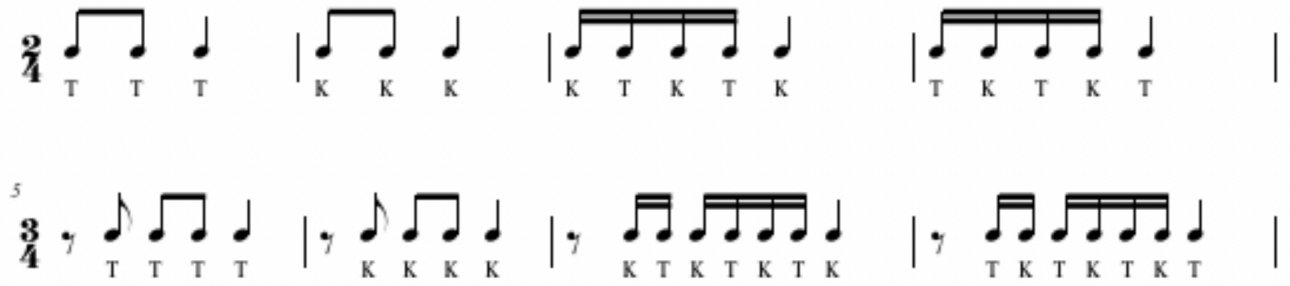
Continue work on the exercise until the student has complete control up to a tempo of M.M. = 120. As the student gains control, extend the range in both directions.

Finally, encourage the student to listen frequently to some of the many recordings available today of great players.

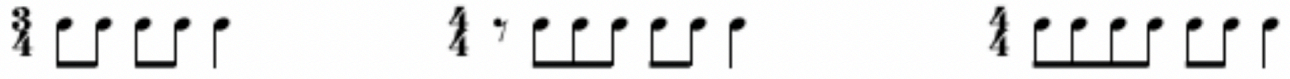
Goin' Home



Double -tonguing Exercise



Practice with metronome, starting slowly, gradually increasing the speed as control permits. Strive to make the K syllable sound match the T syllable. Start on a comfortable note in the middle register and work down chromatically, then return to the starting note and work chromatically up.



Gradually add notes, as shown above, up to as many as you wish.