



# OBOE VIBRATO

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## Air Support and Relaxation

- Low air support and a lack of tension in the shoulders, neck, and head are essential for vibrato development.
- Stick out the stomach while breathing in through the mouth. The throat should be relaxed ("tubular") to efficiently pull air into the lungs. While playing, engage stomach muscles to flex inward and direct air through the oboe.
- Next, stretch! Roll the head, stretch the neck left and right, roll the shoulders, and with arms extended in a "field goal" formation, lean into a corner (ideally) or a doorway to stretch the lower neck, shoulder, and upper back muscles. Oboists have a tendency to "hold" these muscles in place while playing, and if they hold tight around the air column, this can prevent vibrato development.
- Experiment: play an easy long tone while moving the upper body (roll a shoulder, lift the bell left, right, up, and down) to check for lack-of-tension in the torso, neck, and head.

## Developing Vibrato

- Most oboists use chest and lower-throat vibrato. Start exploring by using stomach vibrato (originally called "diaphragmatic" vibrato). This form is usually easiest to access). While increasing the speed/subdivisions, notice that the vibrato mechanism ascends into the chest and throat.
- It is important to ascend above and descend below the central pitch to get a natural sounding vibrato. Many students start by forcing the vibrato "up" and do not allow it to relax down.
- If the vibrato stops suddenly as the speed accelerates, muscles around the air column are tightening and stopping the vibration. Take time to stretch/relax and try again starting from a slower speed.
- Occasionally students display a natural fast, mid-throat vibrato. Either slow the speed and widen the "wave" (bringing the vibrato into the lower throat/chest) or start anew from the stomach (above).
- With an IDRS subscription, view an excellent lecture on the possibilities and pedagogy of oboe vibrato by Michigan State oboe professor, Jan Eberle: <https://www.idrs.org/video/collection/jan-eberle-oboe/>

## Exercises

- Start working on stomach vibrato (originally called "diaphragmatic"). Aim to go both above and below the note you are playing.
- Once you can control the note's rising and lowering, play with a metronome QN=60.
- Increase metronome speed and continue vibrating above and below the note. Maintain a relaxed upper torso posture, and "invite" the vibrato through your air column.
  - Notice that your internal vibrating mechanism ascends up your torso as the speed increases (and vibrato "waves" become more shallow), eventually moving from stomach to chest, chest to throat, throat to back of mouth.
- Final Thoughts:
  - Vibrato should not be strictly metronomic; we use the metronome to develop a wide variety of speeds and wave depths.
  - Practice applying vibrato to every note in a phrase, then to specific notes, to develop control. Listen to professional recordings (of oboists, vocalists, string players, etc.) and refine your approach to vibrato for each style period and piece of repertoire.
  - Have fun! Vibrato can add color and beauty to our sound, and teaches us about control and freedom on our instrument.

