Reed Seasoning and Adjusting

Reed Seasoning and Adjusting Equipment

1. **Glass plate, 3/8th" thick. 3 3/4" X 7".** Best place to get it is at a glass repair shop, auto glass just fine. They will usually give it to you if you are nice to them and tell them you will give them your auto and/or home business. Make sure they polish the edges so you can't cut yourself! If you want something really flat and really heavy, buy the Granite Surface Plate, Item 88N85.01 from Lee Valley Hardware. You will still need the glass plate to use the Ridenour Finishing Tool for sanding.

2. **Reed Geek** Available at good music retail shops or directly from http://www.reedgeek.com for flattening reed table and most adjustments to surface of reed.

3. **Sandpaper.** 400 and 600 grit from any hardware store. 1500, 3200 and 6000 Micromesh from Mohawk Western Supplies 604 324-6787. Near the Knight Street bridge, 1565 E Kent. If there is no retailer in your city, available from: http://www.mohawk-finishing.com/default.aspx https://www.internationalviolin.com.

4. **Ridenour Finishing Tool** http://www.ridenourclarinetproducts.com/
(972) 572 8910. This is basically a sanding block, but the dense foam placed approximately 1/16th" from the edge allows the sandpaper to curve and miss the tip of the reed when sanding. Invaluable. Don't buy the whole RTG finishing system or book, just this tool.

5. **Cordier Reed Trimmer** The best value brand by far. One for each size of reed. Vandoren makes very fine trimmers designed to exactly duplicate their own tip cutting for specific models of their reeds.

Reed Care and Seasoning.

Buy reeds on the slightly hard side and adjust them from there, rather than clipping, which can affect the balance. I use a "Reed Geek" and sandpaper with a Ridenour ATG holder for adjusting at various points; but first, the reeds must be seasoned. In my opinion, all adjusting works better on "thick blank" reeds with thick conical profiles. There is just more "meat" to work with. With extremely thick blank reeds bought a little on the hard side, this comes very close to actually making your own reeds. A lot more work, but fantastic results.

Soak new reeds about 5 minutes in water. This prevents saliva penetrating deep into the cane. Play the new reeds for 5 minutes, not above mezzo forte. Dry out the table slightly, and then check the table of the reed for warping with the edge of the Reed Geek, and flatten it if necessary. Many reeds of alto sax size and larger are not flat on the back.

Sand the table of the reeds over 3200 and 6000 micromesh sandpaper. This is an abrasive that was developed for polishing commercial aircraft windows—it goes up to 12,000 grit, which is too fine for reed work but excellent for mouthpiece re-facing. 600 grit commercial sandpaper from a hardware store works fine, but I'm a fanatic. I place the sandpaper on a block of granite that is flat to within one micron. A 3/8" thick 3 ¾" X 7" glass plate works just fine, though.

Sand the face of the reed extremely lightly, just for the comfort of very smooth cane on the bottom lip—not enough to change the acoustics. Then place the reed table down directly on the granite or glass and press much of the water out with my thumb, pushing from the stock up to the tip. Most results come from the first sanding, but each time the reed is soaked, just a little more fiber comes up in the table, so repeat this process (except for the "front" sanding) the next two times you play the reed. It is now about 80% seasoned and just needs to be played a few more days to be performance ready. It takes about a week in all for the reed to have a polished ringing sound.

This gives an incredibly smooth reed table that seats well on the mouthpiece and seals the reed to the rails and tip of the mouthpiece when vibrating, improving articulation and tone. I estimate about 10% better response and smoothness. The pressing out on granite or glass prolongs the life of the reed as well as adding more "polish" to the sound. Moisten the reeds for playing by soaking in water, not saliva. 1-2 minutes for clarinet up to about 3-4 minutes for a Baritone sax reed. Once the seasoning is complete, you can leave the reeds in water for quite some time with no fear of them becoming "water-logged."

I keep all my reeds in D'Addario Woodwinds Multi-Instrument Reed Storage Case with Humidity Control Packs. Replacement Humidity Packs for these can be bought from Amazon very inexpensively. Look for: Boveda Humidipak 8 Gram (Medium) 10 Pack 2-way Humidity Control 72%. They each last 3-4 months.

When the reeds are about 2-3 weeks old, they are at their absolute best, generally, if playing approximately an hour per day. Since I "double" on all sizes of saxophone and clarinet, most of my reeds to not get more play than that. At about 4 weeks, the table gets a little rough and "pulpy" and may require one more table sanding. If the table feels rough at any point, I just give them about 3 passes over 6000 grit micromesh. At about 4-5 weeks, the reeds are still comfy and expressive, but can start to get "flabby." At this point, a great reed can sometimes be "brought back" by clipping the tip by about ¼ mm. This doesn't always work, but is worth a try, and the reed can be improved a bit in response after this by sanding it extremely lightly from 1 mm below the tip up to the beginning of the heart with the Ridenour ATG system or scraping with the Reed Geek. This however is the beginning of the end for the reed, and they are not suitable for performance, only practice. Another week or so and they are a goner.

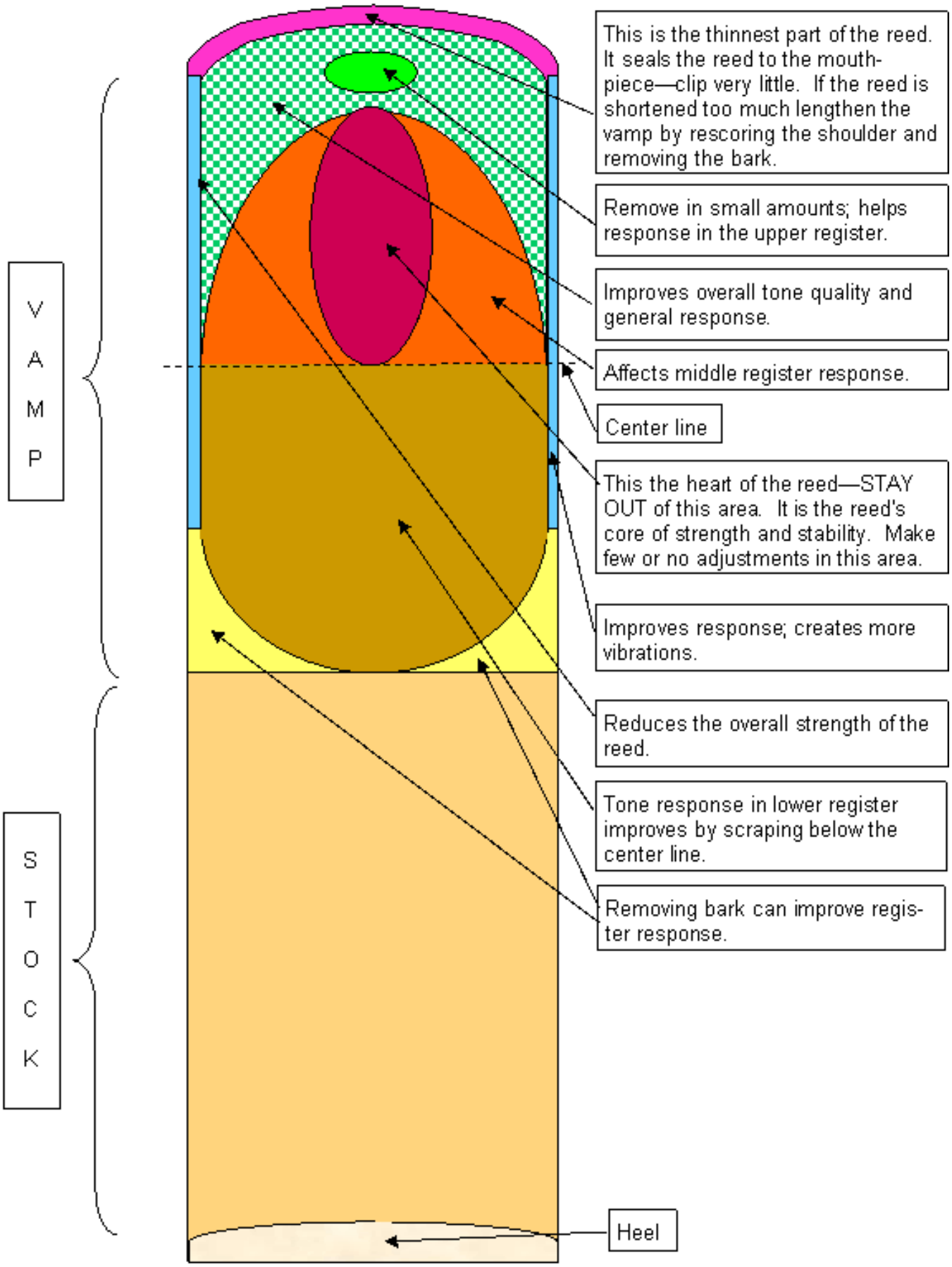
Reed Adjusting: The Detective Work

1. **Warped Table:** Examine the table of the reed by placing the reed on one angle of the reed geek and holding it up to a bright light. Look between the table of the reed and the sharp edge of the reed geek for light shining through, showing either convex or concave warping. Flatten it if necessary by scraping. Do this every day before and after soaking, for the first week the reed is being prepared.

2. **Side to Side Balance:** Place the reed on the mouthpiece on the instrument. Take the mouthpiece into your mouth, taking just a little less mouthpiece than normal and turn the mouthpiece clockwise about 30 degrees, so that your embouchure only controls the right side, with the left side of the reed free. Blow an open C# (sax) or G (clarinet.) Blow a good solid sfz ff WITHOUT tonguing, followed by a long diminuendo al niente. Do the same thing on the other side, rotating the mouthpiece so that the right side is free. The initial resistance and the lack of ease of the diminuendo will inform you which side is "stuffier." If the "free" side (L or R) seems stuffy compared to the other, some cane should be removed from the stuffy side. Scrape around the heart and up to the center of the tip of the stuffier side.

3. **Low End Response:** Tongue repetitive staccato notes on the bottom 4 notes of the instrument. See how responsive they are. If they are dull, stuffy or just do not respond nicely, scrape the bottom 1/8" to ½" of the reed just above the bark. The less responsive the notes are as you move up from the bottom notes, the higher you have to scrape, but just up to the control point. Scraping all the way from the bark up to the control point of the reed improves response and resonance over the entire instrument.

4. **High End Response and Ease of Register Change:** Tongue pp repetitively on A above the staff and higher. At the same time check response to register changes by slurring up and down from C below the staff, to G above the staff and up altissimo high E on clarinet. These are all the same fingerings except for the thumb vent key and the first finger half-hole venting for the high E, so it is easy to test the response through the registers this way. On saxophone, play G on the staff, G above the staff and then high E with palm keys to test register changes. These two tests tell you if you need to work on the tip of the reed in the centre from 1 mm from the very tip, down to 3 mm below the tip.


VAMP
STOCK
This is the thinnest part of the reed. It seals the reed to the mouth-piece—clip very little. If the reed is shortened too much lengthen the vamp by rescoring the shoulder and removing the bark.
Remove in small amounts; helps response in the upper register.
Improves overall tone quality and general response.
Affects middle register response.
Center line
This the heart of the reed—STAY OUT of this area. It is the reed's core of strength and stability. Make few or no adjustments in this area.
Improves response; creates more vibrations.
Reduces the overall strength of the reed.
Tone response in lower register improves by scraping below the center line.
Removing bark can improve regis-ter response.
Heel