

Flute Care and Maintenance

1. Learn to assemble your flute properly.
 - o Make sure that the mating surfaces are free of debris and grit.
 - o Line up the joints so that they are straight and gently push them together with a twisting motion. Never force.
2. Don't line up the body joint's end rod with the footjoints rod. This makes it harder to play.
 - o It seems to go in and out of vogue to lubricate the joints. Don't lubricate them if you don't have to. If they are very tight, consult a shop for appropriate lubricant, use it sparingly, and clean it off and refresh it frequently, since it can collect debris.
 - o If you will march with this flute, make sure that the joints are snug enough to prevent parts from flying off when the instrument is snapped up or down, and definitely think twice about joint lubrication. Marching is hard on instruments, so it makes sense to march with a spare instrument if you have one, especially if there is any chance of rain.
 - o Generally, the embouchure hole (the hole in the mouthpiece) should be aligned so that it is centered on the top row of keys. Remember that rolling the flute or the head joint out raises the pitch, or makes it go sharp, and that rolling the flute or head joint in lowers the pitch, or makes it go flat.
 - o Turn the foot joint so that rod aligns with the edge of the top keys on the body, or slightly behind them. Remember that key under the pinky of the right hand is depressed for most notes. Be sure it is properly aligned.
 - o The flute may be tuned to its tuning pitch, an A. A full ensemble of different instruments may tune to an F, so try to hear the perfect third as you play your A. A skilled musician will be able to tell if your flute is sharp (too high) or flat (too low) by listening to an A on a flute, but in general use an electric tuner. Pulling the head joint out lowers the pitch; pushing in raises it. A good player will also adjust the pitch of individual notes while playing with a combination of rolling, fingering, [embouchure](#) (the shape of the mouth and lips), and breath control.
3. Warm up the flute by playing or blowing warm air through it before tuning. The pitch will change somewhat with the temperature. If the flute cools off between playing passages, you can warm it up by closing the keys and softly blowing warm air straight into, not across, the hole.
4. After each and every playing session, take your flute apart, so that the three pieces are separated.
5. Thread a soft cloth through the needle-like slot in the end of your tuning rod and flip the cloth over the cleaning rod so that there is none of the rod showing at the top, otherwise, you will scratch the inside of your precious flute. Remove the moisture by gently sliding the cleaning rod through each of the sections. Go up and down all around the inside.
6. Return the rod and cloth to the flute case, and remove a soft chamois cloth. Carefully polish the flute with the cloth until it shines like a mirror. Be careful not to bend any keys or rub pads.

7. Rub the mouthpiece gently with the cloth, to remove the gunk and spit. Using your dusting stick (or pipe cleaner without the strip of metal), remove dust from underneath the keys.
8. Store and carry your flute in its case, avoiding moisture and temperature extremes. The case is the safest place, but if you play frequently enough and have a safe corner, you might also consider getting a stand.

Tips

- Buy *pad savers* that look like giant, fluffy pipe cleaners. Leave them inside your flute while it is stored. They soak up moisture and cut down on some of the cleaning. Don't leave them in there wet, though. Don't place the pad saver back in your flute right after cleaning. It must dry before you put it back inside your flute!
- Serious flute players should own multiple cleaning cloths. Clean men's handkerchiefs work well.
- Tie a cleaning cloth to the handle of your case, if there is no room inside.
- If your pads get sticky, so they make a little noise when they lift up, try cleaning them. Slide pad paper or a piece of clean cigarette paper under a key, then close the key. **Gently** pull the paper out while holding the keys closed lightly. The stickiness is due to moisture, so make an effort to keep the flute dry. Use this technique gently and sparingly, since it could damage the thin membrane that makes the seal when you close a key.
- Have your flute serviced periodically by somebody who specializes in flutes, or woodwinds, at the least. Misaligned keys or deteriorating pads, especially, can mean leaks, which can affect your [tone](#).
- Avoid storing a soggy cleaning cloth inside the case with the flute. Store it in the outer case, or if that's not possible, tie it to the handle or spread it to dry before putting it away.
- Avoid setting the flute on its keys, or any place it might get dropped or stepped on. If you would prefer to leave it out, get a stand.
- It's okay to use silver polish on the head joint occasionally, but never get any on the keys. If a polishing cloth doesn't do the job, try a bit of rubbing alcohol, applied to a soft cloth. Again, don't get it on the pads.
- Avoid squeezing the keys when you play. It will wear the pads faster and slow your playing. If you find that squeezing the keys improves the [tone](#), get the flute serviced. You probably have a leak.
- If you have a wooden flute or piccolo, consult an experienced player or repair person for additional advice regarding appropriate wood care and cork grease.
- There are two sorts of adjustments you can reasonably attempt yourself. If you're not sure, take the flute to a shop.
 - If a key fails to lift when released, look to see if a spring (one of the tiny wires along the rod) has popped out of place. You may be able to push it back into place with the eraser end of a pencil or some similar, soft instrument.

- If your flute is consistently out of tune, the cork at the top of the head joint can be adjusted. Take the head joint off of the flute, insert your cleaning rod upside down into it. The rod should have a line towards the bottom of it, you need to try to get the line into the middle of the embouchure hole. You do this by untwisting the top and pushing in or out until aligned properly. This should be done about once a month.
- IN ADDITION: Never squeeze too hard on the keys. A lot of mistakes that flute players, beginner and even highschool players mistake is to hold the flute by the keys. If you are to adjust the headjoint, for example, do not grab/hold your flute by the Ab key or in that area. This can cause the flute's keys to break and bend, in which it can cost a lot to get fixed. Instead, hold the flute where the 'logo' is. If you have an Armstrong flute, for example, find where the ARMSTRONG label is written at the top of the flute. This is where you should hold the flute. There are no moving parts here, so you won't break anything by adjusting the headjoint. This is the same when assembling - remember to not take the flute apart by holding the keys. Always hold where the barrel (or where I like to call the logo spot for my younger students) is. This helps keep the keys safe, your pocket full (so you don't have to pay for those pricey repairs) and your flute in nice condition. The flute is a strong instrument, but can be damaged easily. If you take good care of it, the flute will take good care of you. Or your playing, playing test or 'chair' in band. A non-working, keys bent flute means that your playing won't be the best, thus meaning you could easily come last chair, all because of some dumb mistakes. Have fun fluting!