

When you assemble your flute, if you have a joint between the three top and three bottom finger holes, begin by lining up the six finger holes in a straight line. Initially line up the center of the embouchure hole with the line formed by connecting the centers of the six finger holes. Then, offset the center of the embouchure hole a small bit from this line by turning it in toward your mouth. This makes the instrument more comfortable to hold for most people. The maximum embouchure hole offset you will probably want to use can be seen by lining up the far edge of the embouchure hole, i.e. the edge that is opposite your lips, with the line formed by connecting the centers of the six finger holes.

The degree of offset is something to experiment with over time. A very small adjustment can make for major changes in your physical relationship with your flute. Since you will tend to position the flute consistently in relation to your lips, rotating the embouchure hole *toward* you has the effect of rotating the finger holes out and *away* from you. This in turn has a major impact on the orientation of your fingers, hands, arms, and upper body.

If your flute has a joint between the two groups of three finger holes, you have another option to experiment with. You can leave the six finger holes aligned in a straight line. But if you have small hands, short fingers, short arms, a flute with a large outer diameter, or any combination of these things, you may find that you are more comfortable offsetting the joint containing the lower three finger holes slightly toward you, and/or offsetting the joint containing the upper three finger holes slightly away from you.

THE FINGER HOLES, AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR LEFT-HANDED PLAYERS

The six finger holes of the flute are covered and uncovered by the middle three fingers of your two hands. Most people find that it feels most natural to use their dominant hand for the three holes at the bottom of the flute, i.e. the holes furthest from the embouchure hole.

Therefore, if you are left-handed, you may feel it is more natural for you to use your left hand for these bottom holes, in which case the flute will extend out to your left side instead of to your right. If you have a flute without keys, this may seem like a perfectly fine way to proceed. But the keywork on multi-keyed flutes is very definitely designed for right-handed use. Yet, some left-handed people do play the flute this way, an example being the great Irish flute players Cathal McConnell and Seamus Tansey.

However, if you are new to the flute I would advise you to try the right-handed way of playing. If this feels workable to you, so much the better. I say this for several reasons. First of all, even if playing left-handed seems to work fine on your current flute, you may move on to other flutes in the future. Some embouchure holes, even on keyless flutes, are not undercut symmetrically but are designed to be blown into from one direction only. It may be possible to find a flute maker who will make you a left-handed instrument, complete with left-handed keywork. This would no doubt be quite an expensive option.

Having said these things, I have to admit that, not being left-handed myself, I really cannot relate to the challenge of being left-handed and playing right-handed. You'll have to decide for yourself whether it is something worth considering. I know that when I try to hold my flute left-handed my brain seems to turn inside out and I shudder at the thought of ever having to play that way. But then I have been playing right-handed since 1973.

COMFORT AND STABILITY: THE ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD FLUTE HOLD

When you hold your flute, you want to be comfortable, as relaxed as possible, and have no worries, conscious or subconscious, about dropping it. You also want to keep the flute quite still while your playing fingers do their jobs. A wobbling or jiggling flute can disturb the embouchure. Shortly we will examine the anchor points of the flute hold and how to establish them.