

## EXERCISE: DISCOVERING YOUR NORMAL HOLD

Following the 20 steps in the exercise below will help you begin to find your optimal way of holding your flute. There are so many variables involved: the sizes and shapes of your fingers, hands, arms, shoulders, and neck, the outer diameter of your flute, its length and weight, the sizes of its finger holes, etc. It will take some time to become comfortable with your flute. This exercise is quite lengthy and involved. I recommend taking your time with it and returning to it often. (You may wish to read through all the steps before proceeding.)

You can stand or sit for this exercise. Take care to maintain relaxation at all times. It can be helpful to face a mirror. *The following describes the right-handed hold. You may reverse the hands if you wish for the left-handed hold.* If you are sitting, you may place this book on a table in front of you. If you are standing, place the book somewhere nearby within easy view, perhaps on a music stand.

1. Face straight ahead. Rest the headjoint of the flute on your left shoulder and hold the foot of the flute cradled in the palm of your right hand in front of you. Hold the flute so that the tone holes are facing the ceiling. Rest your right elbow against your abdomen if you like. Allow your left arm to droop relaxed by your side. The weight of the flute is being supported only and entirely by your left shoulder and right hand. You may wish to locate at this time the kind of shelf or support mentioned in step 8, below.

2. Now, raise your left arm and place only the fingertip of T1 on its hole. No other part of your left hand is touching the instrument. Allow your left thumb to rest, relaxed, under the flute, not touching it. Your fingers are relaxed and curved. Now adjust your left arm so that the back of your hand, your wrist, and your forearm form a fairly straight line. (This is strictly temporary.)

3. Next, place the fingertip of T2 on its hole. Both T1 and T2 remain curved and relaxed. Your left thumb is still not touching the flute. Note that if you have long fingernails you may not be able to place the tips of these fingers on their holes. I recommend keeping your nails short, at least on your left hand.

4. Now, no longer trying to maintain the straight line that you have formed with your left hand, wrist, and forearm, slowly rotate your left wrist to the left, that is toward your body or counterclockwise, keeping T1 and T2 nicely arched with their fingertips on their holes, until the base of T1 comes into contact with the flute, somewhere along T1's bottom joint. The tips of T1 and T2 will naturally shift on their holes as you rotate your wrist. Allow your left thumb to swing under the flute if it has not already done so. It is still not touching the flute. Allow your left wrist to drop and relax naturally. It will be bent in somewhat, toward your chest, when you are playing.

5. Now, let your left thumb come into contact with the flute wherever and however it most naturally wants to, keeping it relaxed. The weight of the flute is still completely supported by your left shoulder and right hand. If you have a B-flat thumb key, do not rest your left thumb on the key itself. Do not squeeze with your thumb and T1 *at all*. Stay relaxed.

6. Next, allow T3 to drop onto its hole, however it will. For most people this finger will be much less arched than T1 and T2 and it may be nearly flat. The fleshy part of the pad of the finger will probably be covering the hole instead of the fingertip. Let your left pinky relax and hang in the air wherever it will, nicely curved. Do not place it on the flute or hold the top of it against the underside of the flute. It should be ready to operate the G-sharp key, or the long F key, if you have either one of these. If you do not presently have either or both of these keys, you may have one or both of them on a future flute.

7. At this point, take stock of your left hand. *Relaxation is the top priority.* Experiment with changing which part of the base of T1 comes into contact with the flute. Keeping your playing fingers on the flute, try shifting the T1 contact point around, allowing your left thumb and wrist to move in accommodation. Try moving your playing fingers around a bit with each new trial placement of the base of T1. Find what is most comfortable for you. Allow your left wrist to relax and drop. Its position will change anyway once you put the flute up to your mouth.

8. The foot of the flute is still resting in the palm of your right hand. Now find a shelf or some support that is about shoulder height or a bit lower and rest the foot of the flute safely and securely upon it so that you can remove your right hand. Let your right arm hang down and totally relax it for a few moments.

9. Now raise your right arm, forming a fairly straight line with the back of your hand, your wrist, and forearm. Don't raise your shoulder. Allow your right thumb to hang somewhere in the air below the flute, not touching the flute, as you place the fleshy pad of the top joint of B3, the ring finger of your right hand, onto the bottom finger hole of the flute. The finger should be fairly flat with a slight arch to it.