

We keep the whistle steady and secure by using these four anchor points:

1. Your lips
2. Your top hand thumb
3. Your bottom hand thumb
4. Your bottom hand pinky

The importance of the first three is self-evident to most people, but the fourth is often unknown to beginners.

The secret to success is to rest your bottom hand pinky upon the whistle body *at all times*. If it won't easily reach the whistle, or if trying to reach it pulls your other bottom hand fingers out of position, there are two alternatives, which I'll explain on p. 9. The weight of the whistle is supported by the lower lip and the two thumbs. The mouthpiece rests upon the lower lip. The thumbs exert a slight upward force upon the underside of the whistle. The bottom hand pinky's slight downward force is needed to balance the hold and make the whistle secure.

Without the bottom pinky's downward touch, it becomes increasingly difficult to hold the whistle steady as you uncover four, five and finally all six holes. As the whistle becomes more and more unstable, you might unknowingly use the side of your bottom index finger to squeeze the whistle against your bottom thumb. Some people bite down on the mouthpiece in an effort to keep the whistle steady, which causes tension in the jaw and can damage the whistle. These are awkward strategies. Using the bottom pinky as a balancing anchor makes such squeezing and biting unnecessary, and ensures that the whistle will always be secure in your hands.

The six fingers we use to cover and uncover the finger holes should have *absolutely nothing* to do with holding or stabilizing the instrument. Their only job — and a very big job it is — is to freely interact with the finger holes. Please don't burden them with anything else!



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## Why Use the Left Hand as the Top Hand?

You can play the tin whistle with either hand as the top hand. However, if you play another wind instrument, such as flute or clarinet, or think you may want to do so in the future, you'll be glad you formed the habit of playing the whistle with your left hand on top. These other wind instruments, especially ones with metal keys, are designed to be played with the left hand closest to the mouthpiece, and it's much easier on the brain to play all wind instruments with the same hand orientation.

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## Seven Steps to Finding Your Personal Whistle Hold

Use the following seven-step exercise to discover the most comfortable and relaxed way to hold the whistle. I suggest you read through all seven steps before trying them out. A video of this exercise is included in the downloads that come with this book.

1. Sit at a table and pull your chair up close to the edge. You may want to place this book before you on the table (open to this page) with the bottom of the book an inch or two from the table's edge. Pick up the whistle with both hands and place the bottom opening of the whistle upon the table, between the table's edge and the bottom of the book. Sit or stand high enough that, leaning over the edge of the table, you can position your head to gently hold just the tip of the whistle's mouthpiece, centered, between your lips. Keep your teeth slightly apart and don't allow them to touch the mouthpiece. Holding the whistle this way (no need to blow yet), remove your hands. The whistle is gently held upright by your lips and the table. If the bottom of the whistle slides away, bring it closer to you.

2. Now, approach the whistle with your top hand and, *without* your top thumb touching the whistle, gently lay T1, T2 and T3 upon their holes. (Refer to the whistle diagram on p. 5 if you need to.) Cover and seal these holes with some part of the fleshy pad (the fingerprint) of each finger, not with your fingertips. Allow your hand to remain very relaxed. Depending upon the size of your hands, your fingers may arch more or less, or be nearly flat. (Completely straight fingers can be a sign of tensed muscles.) Try to avoid the "buckling" or "caving in" of