

Correct tongue position.

First let me say that I don't believe there is such a thing as one correct tongue position. Everything depends on a person's physical make up. We all have different size body parts and that certainly includes the tongue. The one thing I think most people will agree is that a low tongue position in the back by the molars, middle of the tongue, will most likely cause an unfocused and perhaps flat tone, especially in the throat tones. Though when the tongue is too high in front you are creating a small air passage and that can contribute to getting a forced, bright tone.

As a student I had trouble tonguing up to high G and Leon Russianoff told me it was probably because I was closing off the air passage when I went up high by raising my tongue too high in the front trying to voice those notes. Once I got the concept of keeping it a lower in front the problem went away. Later Joe Allard tried to get me to keep my tongue high in front so I could tongue the reed tip to tip but he realized my tongue was too large and I was choking off the tone. At first I was very confused by the whole thing until I analyzed myself more and realized what was happening. Now I always think low in the back of my throat and keep my tongue low in the front and high in back, never the EE feeling like so many players do.

I have the middle of the tongue up high in between or up near the upper molars. Then I like to angle the front of my tongue in an arch so that the front of my tongue touches my lower lip above my lower teeth. When I tongue I do use near the tip of my tongue and it goes in a slight upward angle to the reed instead of a straight stroke like Allard tried to get me to do. I use the back of my tongue and area by the larynx to voice my high notes, not just the front of my tongue. I'm not saying that's best for everyone, but it works for me because I have a large tongue. That way too, I get a darker, fuller sound than when the front of my tongue is high in my mouth. One has to consider your physical attributes and experiment to find the best position. It also depends on the quality you're looking for too, you may like a brighter or darker sound so go for it. The only correct way to do anything on the clarinet is what works best for you, the Russianoff way. ESP