

Beginning Oboe Player's Care Package

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The following supplies are inexpensive and easy to find but are SO IMPORTANT for developing good playing habits and to keep the oboe in good working condition. I've listed the items below and describe each in detail.

Small reed case

Water container for soaking reeds

Swab

Small cotton rag

Paint brush

Travel size toothbrush and toothpaste

Small bag for carrying these items

ONE: A STURDY REED CASE

I notice that student oboists often open their oboe cases to get reeds out of either plastic "coffin" cases or plastic tube "vials." These cheap plastic containers are usually used to ship commercial reeds, but don't do a great job at protecting a student's reeds on a day-to-day basis. Why? Because "coffin" cases often don't stay shut and it is easy for students to crush their reeds in the case while trying to snap it shut. For the cylindrical vial cases, students often accidentally smash the ends of the reeds into the cotton or foam padding in the tube while putting on the cap to close them. Reeds are expensive and fragile, but sturdy reed cases can be made inexpensively!

(See www.oboeforeveryone for making a DIY reed case, or use the "recipe" below):

Materials needed to make a sturdy reed case:

1 empty Altoids container or other similar box

Weather Stripping for doors, size can vary, but I use 3/8" wide X 5/16" thick (available at most hardware stores)

1. Cut the weather stripping into short pieces (20 mm or so) and attach to the container. Make sure that the stripping is placed close enough so that reeds can't fall out.
2. An extra rubber band helps keep the box from opening.
3. Creative students can decorate the boxes with markers/paints for individuality.

TWO: A Water container for soaking reeds

Reeds should NEVER be soaked using just saliva. The saliva that our body produces contains enzymes that break down the fibers in a reed. Since we want our reeds to last as long as possible, I encourage you to use FRESH water to soak reeds for 5 minutes or less before playing. Simply dip the reed in the water, then let the reed sit in the reed case for a few minutes.

THREE: A Swab

Since playing oboe requires lots of air that is warmed and moistened from our bodies, a fair amount of moisture can accumulate in oboes over the course of a playing session. This moisture must be swabbed from the bore at the end of EVERY playing session to keep the oboe in good working condition. I especially encourage you to buy a swab with string on BOTH ends. That way if the swab gets stuck, you have a string on either end to pull out of the bore.

FOUR: A small cotton rag

Although I encourage you to wash your hands before you play, silver oboe keys can still get dirty and tarnish over time. For people with exceedingly acidic hands, they can even wear off the silverplating on the keys. One way to keep the keys clean and dry is to quickly wipe the keys before putting the oboe back in its case. Only a small cotton rag is needed, so I recommend taking that old, once-favorite t-shirt and cutting a 4x4 inch square from it to use as your new oboe cleaning cloth. Inexpensive, and a way to always remember that favorite shirt. ☺

FIVE: A Small Paintbrush

No, the paintbrush ISN'T for creative decorating of oboe bells. It's to keep instrument keys dust and dirt free. All that is needed is an inexpensive but CLEAN paintbrush--the kind you might use for watercolors in art class. Once a week brush all around and under the keywork, then BLOW the dust and dirt away.

SIX: Travel Size Toothbrush and Toothpaste

Your dentist will love you for this one. Food and reeds just don't mix, so brush your teeth before playing. You'll be amazed at how much longer your reeds will last. And fresh breath is always a bonus.

SEVEN: A Small BAG

Now that you have these small items to enhance your playing and the condition of your oboe, a small bag to keep everything in is a good idea. A small, zippered cosmetics travel bag, or school supplies/pencil bag is ideal. Make sure it closes tight and attach a small strap/tie that should be used to attach the bag to the oboe case's carrying handle. That way your reeds and supplies are always WITH the oboe case and won't be left behind!