

Reed Care 101

© Dr. Christa Garvey, 2012
University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire

1. Always brush your teeth before playing. Food and plaque can clog up reeds and make your key pads sticky.
2. Always store reeds in a case that holds reeds securely in place.
 - You can make inexpensive case with Altoids boxes. Go to www.oboeforeveryone.com for details.
 - The plastic 3-reed cases sold by Fox are also an affordable option
 - Clear plastic tubes and "coffin" cases that commercial reeds are purchased are not sturdy enough for long-term use
3. Make sure that your reed case is well ventilated. A completely airtight case (such as the clear, plastic tubes and "coffin" cases) can allow mildew to grow on reeds. Your reeds shouldn't be a science experiment :)
4. Soak reeds in water for 2-3 minutes in FRESH water, not saliva. Our saliva has enzymes in it that will break down reed fibers over time. If you want your reeds to last as long as possible, soak them in water!
 - Only soak the cane part of the reed in water, not the thread or cork
 - Try dipping your reeds in water and setting them on your music stand or in your case to hydrate. This way they won't over-soak
 - Reeds soaked longer than 5 minutes will become over-soaked and be more difficult to play
5. After playing, return reeds to their case.
 - If possible, quickly rinse out reeds in water and let dry for a few minutes before storing in a reed case. This will remove some of the lip skin cells, etc, that can collect on reeds and help your reeds last longer.

3 Signs That It's Time to Buy a New Reed

A reed can last anywhere from 2-3 or much longer, depending on how much it is played on and how well it is cared for.

1. If your reed is cracked:
Very small cracks in the tip of the reed will usually be OK to play on. If the crack extends beyond 1 millimeter and it is difficult to articulate notes and/or have sudden flatness or unstable pitch, then it's time to buy a new reed.
2. If the tip of your reed resembles Bart Simpson's haircut, has poor response (especially in the low range), and articulation is difficult, then it is time for a new reed.
3. If the reed looks OK, but doesn't make any (or only very little) sound when you blow through it, try these tests:
 - Soak it an extra 3 minutes in WARM WATER
 - Run water through the reed to clean it out (hold the reed upside-down with the water from the faucet running into the cork section first)
 - Pull a small pipe cleaner ([Dill's](#) brand is best) from the bottom of the tube through the top of a **well soaked** reed to clean out an accumulated gunkTry your reed after each stage. If all three suggestions don't help, consider the reed "dead" and purchase a new one.