



ET's Clarinet Studio

# Clarinet Reeds: Selection and Care

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The Studio

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Having a good reed instead of a bad one makes clarinet playing enjoyable rather than a chore. Unfortunately, commercially made reeds are highly inconsistent; some play well, others don't. By establishing a system of reed management, students can help hedge against many common reed problems.

## Recommended Brands

Beginners: Rico

Poor quality but inexpensive; only appropriate for beginners.

Intermediate: Mitchell Lurie or Rico Royal

Mitchell Lurie reeds are lighter and easier to use. They are slightly softer than a Rico Royal of the same number.

Advanced players: Vandoren V-12, Olivieri, others

These are generally the reeds used by professionals. They are premium quality and longer-lasting. However, they require an extensive break-in procedure, and most pros adjust them using a reed knife and other reed-working equipment.


## Reed Strength

Reed strength is indicated by a number (or designation) printed directly on the reed. Typical strengths are 3 or 3-1/2 (or a designation such as medium or medium hard). The strength needed depends on the individual player and the player's mouthpiece. A reed should provide resistance in order to achieve control and a good tone. However, a reed which is too strong will not respond adequately and may be breathy sounding or too hard to blow. A good private teacher can help decide which reed strength is best for you.

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AdChoices 

Beginners usually start on Rico 2-1/2. Once a reed routine is established, step up to Mitchell Lurie 3. Strength 3 is a bare minimum for playing in

the upper register. 3-1/2 is appropriate for most intermediate players (7th-8th grade). Professionals and advanced students generally use 4 or 4-1/2.

## Reed Rotation

Use a reed holder which can hold four reeds. Number the slots of the holder. Each time you rehearse or practice, use the next reed in the holder. For lessons, auditions, or performances, use your best reed.

Replace one reed at a time in your rotation rather than all of them at once. A reed should be replaced if:

- the tip is chipped or split;
- it sounds bad or is hard to play several rotations in a row;
- it is more than three months old.

Always keep new, extra reeds in a safe place. The time to buy more reeds is when the supply of extras runs low.

## Reed Holders

Vito and Reedguard both work well. I prefer Vito for two reasons: it is cheaper than the Reedguard (about \$2.50 v. \$4.50), and I feel it works better. When finished playing, always squeegee the reed gently between your fingers to remove excess surface moisture before putting it into the reed holder.

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