

Common Wind Instrument Problems and their Solutions

BRASS INSTRUMENTS

Piston Valve Instrument doesn't play	Starting with third valve, remove each piston valve one at a time to make sure it is in the right casing facing the right direction. The numbers usually face the mouthpiece. Reinstall the valves correctly and try again.
Piston Valve keeps spinning in casing and doesn't click into place	Check each of the valve guides one at a time to make sure they are right side up and are not broken. Use another valve as a model if you are not sure. If the guide is broken you need to take to a professional instrument repairer.
Piston Valves move but are sluggish and stick occasionally	Remove the valves and valve caps one at a time. Clean the valve casing with brush or a soft cloth on a short cleaning rod. Clean the valve using a brush and a solution of water and brass soap. Dry thoroughly and replace after adding a few drops of valve oil.
Piston Valve is completely stuck	Apply a few drops of oil to the valve through the valve slide. Leave for an hour or two and then try to release by hand.
Upper/Lower Valve Caps stuck	Tap carefully around the perimeter of the cap with a small rubber or rawhide hammer. If this doesn't work then apply some 'WD40 Specialist Fast Release Penetrant' to the threads, wait an hour and then try the tapping action again. Once removed, clean the casing threads using valve oil and a cotton bud and then apply a small amount of tuning slide grease to the threads before reinstalling.
Tuning Slide/Valve Slide stuck	Try to remove by walking the slide back and forth as you pull on it. If this fails, add 'WD40 Specialist Fast Release Penetrant' to the opening. Let it sit overnight and try again the next day.

Water key spring is weak	Carefully use smooth jaw flat nose pliers to bend the “U” portion of the spring up towards the key.
Water key cork is missing or leaking	In some models a pencil eraser makes a good substitute. You can also install a foam craft bead into the water key cup which makes a good temporary seal. You may want to keep on hand an assortment of “real” water key corks.
Water key spring is broken or missing	Take the slide out and use a pony tail bobble around the key to replace the spring. Do not use rubber bands as they contain sulphur which will mar the finish.
Amado Water key is stuck in open position	Oil all access points, wait 1 hour, manipulate by hand.
Amado Water key is stuck in closed position	Oil all access points, wait 1 hour, push/tap closed with pen/mallet.
Mouthpiece is stuck	Use the Steiner Mouthpiece Extractor. Avoid using any kinds of pliers or vice.
A brace has broken loose at the solder point	Secure the brace immediately with a plastic coated twist tie or plastic zip cable ties. A loose brace can create a domino effect causing damage that is much more expensive to fix—especially in the area of the leadpipe.
Trombone slide is stuck	Thoroughly clean the inner and outer slides firstly by using a snake brush then a soft gauze cloth on a Trombone cleaning rod. If this does not work to allow the slide to move freely, then the problem is a mechanical one and needs to be professionally repaired. Continued use of a damaged slide will cause more damage to the inner slide and reduce the life of the instrument.
Rotary Valve string is broken	Follow Steiner Music instruction document showing how to replace.

Rotary Valve is stuck	Do not try to free the valve by forcing the lever. Give the valve a healthy dose of valve oil using the following method. Pull the adjoining valve slide, empty the water, and place 8 - 12 drops of rotary valve oil into the valve slide itself. With the open tubes facing up, put the slide back onto the instrument and then turn the horn 180 degrees to let the oil run down into the valve. Wait an hour for the oil to penetrate then work the valve stop arm vigorously to “clean” and oil the valve in its casing. This will be a a stop gap measure and you are advised to have the instrument cleaned to remove any corrosion and debris that are keeping the valves from moving freely. An alternate/additional way to oil the valve is to remove the valve cap, place oil on the gap around the circumference, and then pull the valve slide out (without depressing the valve) creating a suction that will draw the oil into the valve casing.
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WOODWIND INSTRUMENTS

Flute/Piccolo

Won't play certain notes or won't play at all	1. Check to see if any springs have come off the spring cradles—especially the trill keys. Use a spring hook to replace. 2. Check the A key to see if it wobbles. With a well-fitting screwdriver, tighten the rod until the A key binds and then back 1/4 turn. 3. Check the Ab key lever to see if it is bent and touching other keys. Using your fingers carefully bend the Ab key back into position so it doesn't stay open.
Will play everything except low C	Check to see if pressing the roller on the foot joint closes the C# key. Holding the C# key down with your finger use a pad slick to gently pry up on the low C key. Then check with a feeler gauge to see if both keys close when the roller is pressed. If you went too far push down and check again.
Headjoint cork is too loose	Wrap with blue masking tape until new cork is fitted

<p>Concert Bb or Concert A are tuned correctly but the flute isn't playing in tune with itself, or the high notes don't come out properly.</p>	<p>The head cork is either out of place or the screw plate is no longer holding the head cork firmly in place against the bottom of the head cork assembly. Remove the head cork and make sure that the cork is held firmly between the two metal plates on the head cork assembly. Make sure when you re-insert the head cork assembly that it is snugly in place – if it moves easily then it is time to replace the cork. The cork needs to be firmly in place so it won't move and so that when the cleaning rod is held inside the head joint firmly against the head cork, the line is exactly in the centre of the embouchure hole.</p>
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<p>Bb doesn't play properly either one and one or thumb fingering</p>	<p>The screw that runs through the C key (l.h. index finger) has worked its way loose and is unable to hold the left hand key assembly in place correctly. Screw that screw in so that it is snug. The Bb pad very likely won't move now. Push that pad down so that it is on the hole and then slowly loosen the screw just until that pad pops open. Then move the pad up and down to ensure that it will continue to move easily and freely. If it is still a bit sluggish unscrew that screw a tiny bit more. If either Bb fingering still isn't working properly then very likely a small cork has fallen off.</p>
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<p>Headjoint tenon is stuck or won't go in</p>	<p>Check to see if there is something lodged in the receiver. If not, the parts are likely badly out of round. Have it professionally repaired. Attempting to force the part will only cause further damage.</p>
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<p>Footjoint is loose and falls off</p>	<p>The tenon is worn down and needs to be resized by a professional instrument technician. Until that can be done use a small piece of blue masking tape or a piece of a post it note on the tenon as a temporary fix.</p>
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<p>Pads are sticky</p>	<p>Use Steiner pad dryer</p>
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Clarinet

Clarinet won't play or squeaks on every note	1. Check to make sure there is a slight delay (lost motion) when the A key is pressed before it touches the Ab key. If there isn't, use a well-fitting screwdriver to back the adjustment screw on top of the A key out until there is a slight motion before it contacts the Ab key. To keep it from going out of adjustment again, back the screw out two complete turns and apply a tiny drop of purple thread lock to the screw and then readjust. 2. Check the four right side keys to see if any are bent and staying open. Straighten the bent key(s) using fingers if possible or by using smooth jaw pliers and/or pad slick. An old trombone mouthpiece shank does a good job as well. 3. Check for a broken or chipped mouthpiece.
One and one fingered Bb/Eb stuffy or won't play or no response from RH notes	Check to see if pressing the first ring on the lower joint closes the inline Bb/Eb key pad on the upper joint AND the first pad on the lower joint at the same time. If not, use a pair of smooth jaw pliers to gently bend the bridge key up or down so that when the first ring on the bottom is pressed that the Bb/Eb pad closes at the same time as the first pad on the bottom joint. Check both pads closing with a feeler gauge. The upper pad can be adjusted a bit lighter than the lower.
High notes sound awful or completely out of tune	Use a stiffer reed
Low E and Middle B notes are stuffy and unresponsive when pressing only the right or left hand E/B alone	Check to see if pressing the RH E/B key closes the F/C pad completely. A common problem is that the F/C key gets bent down by using too much finger pressure. Holding the F/C pad closed gently lift the crow's foot with your pad slick and test with feeler gauge to see if pressing the E/B key closes the F/C and the E/B pads with the same pressure. If you went too far, gently push down on the F/C lever to lower the crow's foot and test again.

Tenon cork has fallen or broken off	If parts of the cork are still attached remove the remaining cork with your fingernail. Clean the track with alcohol. Cut a 3/8" strip of masking tape and keep wrapping around the tenon until the parts fit snugly together. If the cork is still intact, but has come loose on one end. Add a piece of blue masking tape to hold the cork together until it can be repaired. Do not use super glue to try to glue the cork back down.
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Key holding pivot screw is missing	Check your instrument case and around where you were sitting! Insert the end of a paper clip through the post and into the key. Then bend the paperclip around the post to hold it in place and cut off the excess with wire nippers.
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Pads are sticky	Use Steiner pad dryer
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Saxophone

Will not play in the lower octave	Check to see that there is at least a 1/16" gap between the neck octave key ring and the post extending from the body. To adjust, place your thumb between the ring and the body of the neck and then gently push down on the octave key. Should you go too far, place a pad slick or tongue depressor under the pad and carefully push back on the ring until the desired gap is achieved.
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Fourth line D does not play or goes to a higher note	Press the thumb octave lever hard without pressing any other keys and see if the neck octave key opens. As in the previous case, make sure there is a gap between the ring and the post. On some saxes with a "spongy" cork stopping the thumb octave lever, a wider gap may be necessary. Check to make sure all pivot screws and screw rods are tightened all the way. Tighten with the correct size quality screwdriver. Check to insure keys still move freely. If a key binds, back the pivot screw out till the key releases and apply purple thread lock to keep the screw in place.
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<p>Low C#, B, and Bb do not respond while those down to low C do</p>	<p>Keeping the bottom hand fingers down press the G# key to see if the G# pad opens slightly. Using a leak light or feeler gauge to check, turn the adjusting screw above the G# key cup until both the F# and G# pads close completely when the F key is pressed with the G# lever held down. Once the correct adjustment is found, turn back two full turns, add a small drop of purple thread lock, and then quickly readjust and recheck.</p>
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<p>Neck will not tighten</p>	<p>Make sure the tightening screw is inserted into the unthreaded side first. If the neck still turns when the screw is tightened have an instrument technician expand and refit the neck tenon. Many saxes play stuffy because the neck leaks.</p>
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<p>All the notes work except G which is stuffy or won't play</p>	<p>Check to see if the G# pad is closing completely when the G# key is not pressed. While holding down the G# touchpiece press down slightly on the lever that closes the G# pad. There should be a slight "lost motion" when the low B and low C# keys are pressed before they touch the tabs on the G# touchpiece. If there is too much motion, bend the lever back up with your fingers or a pad slick.</p>
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<p>Notes from 4th-line D up to high G don't sound right.</p>	<p>The octave key assembly is preventing the proper switching between the two octave pads. The octave key on the neck is often the culprit since it is frequently squeezed improperly during the assembly of the instrument. The octave key on the neck should NOT open for the notes D through G. If it is opening, the solution is to place the thumb under the ring so the key is held open and then bend down gently but firmly on the pad portion of the key. If this does not resolve the problem you should refer to a musical instrument technician.</p>
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<p>Neck cork is missing or broken</p>	<p>Wrap with enough blue masking tape to allow the tuned mouthpiece to fit snugly until new cork can be fitted. (Apply cork grease)</p>
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<p>Key guard screws are missing</p>	<p>Use plastic twist ties to secure guard. Do not force screw with wrong thread or metal tapping screw into hole.</p>
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Key spring is broken or missing	Try to hold the key open fixing a ponytail bobble to the key arm. Do not use ordinary rubber bands. They will quickly mar the finish. This can be done on other woodwinds as well.
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Keys are not closing together (out of regulation) because a cork is missing between the key foot and back bar	First remove the guard or any side keys that are in the way. Then glue the appropriate thickness of cork to the top of the key foot using contact cement, or make a small patch the thickness of the cork by layering blue masking tape and cutting to size. Check the adjustment with a leak light. On models with adjusting screws, set the adjusting screw.
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Some notes are suddenly not playing properly	Check to make sure all pivot screws and screw rods are tightened all the way. Tighten with the correct size quality screwdriver. Check to insure keys still move freely. If a key binds, back the pivot screw out till the key releases and apply purple thread lock to keep the screw in place.
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Pads are sticky	Use Steiner pad dryer
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Bassoon

Whisper key pad has fallen off or has been damaged through improper assembly or storage.	Use tape to cover the whisper key nipple on the bocal until the pad is replaced. This is the same as engaging the whisper key lock.
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Steiner Music Ltd
Suite 2/3
48 West George Street
GLASGOW
UK
G2 1BP

www.stainershop.com

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