

REED HARDNESS TIPS

TIPBOOK TIP 01: Hardness

The main difference from one reed to another is how soft or hard they feel. Reeds are often classified with numbers, e.g., from 2 to 4 in half strengths. The higher the number, the harder or more resistant the reed plays.

TIPBOOK TIP 02: Names Instead of Numbers

Some reeds are measured with words instead of numbers. The hardness can be indicated as Soft (S), Medium soft, Medium (M), Medium hard, or Hard (H). There are also some models like Rico's Select Jazz™ that let you fine tune the strength into smaller increments such as 2 Soft, 2 Medium, or 2 Hard (2S, 2M, 2H, 3S, 3M, 3H, 4S, 4M, and 4H).

TIPBOOK TIP 03: Harder Reeds

Harder reeds allow for a louder, heavier, darker, or fuller sound, but they require strong support and a developed embouchure (mouth muscles). These reeds allow the performer to project more in upper registers of the saxophone without sacrificing tone texture. While these reeds perform well at louder dynamic levels, they often produce a stuffy, less desirable tone when used by students who have not developed a strong, supportive embouchure.

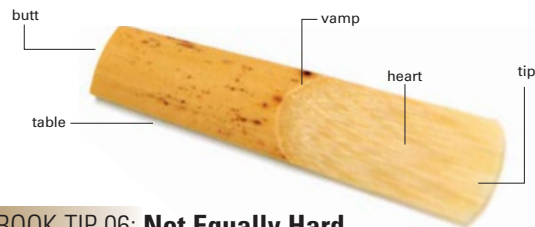
TIPBOOK TIP 04: Softer Reeds

With a softer reed, playing softly is easier. A soft reed speaks (produces a sound) more easily and gives a bright, transparent sound. If it's too soft, the sound may get very thin or buzzy. Soft reeds may be more difficult to play in tune. Playing on soft reeds may also lead to "biting" and other improper practices. This is the result of the performer overcompensating to bring the pitch up because of the softer reed. A softer reed will also tend to speak too easily. This can be a problem when trying to execute soft entrances in the upper register.

TIPBOOK TIP 05: The Same Thickness

Contrary to common belief, a 2-strength reed is not thinner than a 4-strength of the same reed brand or model. It is simply made of a softer, less resistant piece of cane. Softer reeds have a shorter play life. Eventually, most saxophonists chose a 3, 3.5, or an even harder reed.

REED SELECTION TIPS



TIPBOOK TIP 06: Not Equally Hard

Because cane is a natural product, each piece of cane will vary slightly in resistance despite being cut identically. As a result, ten reeds of the same strength from inside the same box will not be equally hard. A box of 2.5 reeds may contain some harder and softer 2.5 reeds.

TIPBOOK TIP 07: Reeds & Mouthpieces

Which reed strength and model to choose depends on various factors, your mouthpiece being one of them. For example, a mouthpiece with a smaller tip opening requires a heavier reed. A reed that is too soft will close up and not respond at all. Conversely, a mouthpiece with a large tip opening will play easier with a lighter reed.

TIPBOOK TIP 08: Choosing Reed Strengths

For beginners the best choice often is a medium-soft reed, such as a 2 or a 2.5 on a mouthpiece with a small to medium tip opening.

TIPBOOK TIP 09: Tip Openings

Tip openings are usually stated in thousandths of an inch. Most popular alto sax mouthpieces have a tip opening between 70 and 100. Popular tenor sax mouthpieces typically have a tip opening between 90 and 120.

TIPBOOK TIP 10: Reeds & The Environment

Pick harder-playing reeds when humidity is very high, or when you play in resonant or large venues. A lighter-playing reed works better in dry air, dry acoustics, and small rooms. The reed that sounds great in a small, insulated practice studio may not be the best reed for your next concert.

TIPBOOK TIP 11: French & American Cuts

There are two style of reeds: French cut and American cut. French cut reeds, mainly used by classical saxophonists, have a thinner tip and are a bit thicker in the heart area. Reeds with an American cut usually feature a slightly thicker tip and less heart, producing a fuller, focused sound.

TIPBOOK TIP 12: French Filed Cut

Reeds with a file cut or "double cut" have an extra strip of the bark removed in a straight line, just below the vamp area. This allows for extra flexibility and a fast response.

TIPBOOK TIP 13: American Un-filed Cut

A 'regular' or unfiled cut, sometimes referred to as "single cut," helps produce a powerful tone.

TIPBOOK TIP 14: Different Series

Most makers offer several models of reeds. The best way to find the right reed for your sound, playing style, and mouthpiece is by trying each. Reed makers provide useful information on the characteristics of their reeds. For example, Rico makes eight different models of saxophone reeds.

RICO	An affordable multi-purpose "American Cut" reed
RICO ROYAL	French filed for flexibility and fast response
LA VOZ	Unfiled for powerful tone
FREDERICK L. HEMKE	Dark tone, quick response
PLASTICOVER	Resists changes in moisture and climate, fast response
GRAND CONCERT	More wood in the heart, great projection, articulation, and response
RICO SELECT JAZZ (filed)	Huge sound with powerful projection
RICO SELECT JAZZ (unfiled)	Powerful projection combined with fast response
RESERVE	A premium reed made from high-density cane to produce a highly consistent reed

TIPBOOK TIP 15: **More Than One**

Even though high-end reed makers produce reeds with a consistent quality, you shouldn't judge an entire series of reeds on one single reed. Always play a couple of them.

TIPBOOK TIP 16: **Premium Cane**

The quality of the cane is important for a reed's longevity and a consistent response and playability. Premium reeds such as Rico Select™ Jazz offer a higher yield of playable reeds because the cane is more carefully selected.

WETTING REED TIPS

TIPBOOK TIP 17: **Wet It First**

You won't know how good a reed is until you have been playing it for a while. A dry reed doesn't vibrate properly, so always wet it first.

TIPBOOK TIP 18: **Water or Saliva**

To wet a reed, keep it in your mouth for a while or put it in a glass of clean, lukewarm water for a few minutes. Using water can help extend a reed's life. Storing a reed at the proper humidity with products like Reed Vitalizer™ help reeds moisten faster and play more consistently.

TIPBOOK TIP 19: **Use A Mirror**

You can also wet a reed by laying it on a wet piece of glass or mirror. Some reed cases have a special bottom for this purpose however, these cases do not allow for an even flow of air.

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Reed Selection Tips & Maintenance