

# The BREAK

Mastering the Middle Register of the Clarinet

by Paula Corley

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## Part I

### How to Cross the Break

“The break” can best be described as an interruption of fingering continuity and change of resistance that occurs between these two notes:



The register key is added to produce the middle (clarion) register. New note names are now attached to fingerings already learned. Unlike other woodwind instruments, the clarinet overtone series skips the octave and goes to the 12th due to its acoustical design.

### Exercise One (new note names, not new fingerings!)

1a.

1b.

1c.

1d.

### Practice Suggestions:

Fingerings for each measure are the same except for the addition of the register key. Memorize the new note names.

Practice the intervals until the sound is focused. Embouchure and tongue position are the same for both registers - "E". The top teeth should grip the mouthpiece firmly enough so that there is no mouthpiece movement. Do not let the upper register notes lose focus due to a loosened grip.

Use fast air. Make the bottom note sound vibrant and blow enough air through the instrument to create resistance. The clarinet is an air-resistant instrument, so it is normal to feel some resistance.

Before you add the register key, do a very slight crescendo just until the upper note speaks. The slight crescendo accounts for the resistance change that occurs when the register key is added. However, do not “blow harder” in the middle register. The slight crescendo should not create middle register “explosions”.

If the upper note does not speak, take more reed surface inside your mouth. Adjust the bottom lip down on the reed so that it can vibrate freely.

Most squeaks are caused by hand position errors. Notice the left thumb when adding the register key. If this tone hole is uncovered, the upper register note may not respond at all.

**Selected Studies**  
**from *Rhythmical Articulation* by Pasquale Bona**

Tempos are suggested and musical expressions are intended to reflect common practice.

75 ♩ = 80 - 92

87 ♩ = 120

“Crossing the break” can be a source of frustration for developing clarinetists. *The Break* is a logical guide for mastering this important step in clarinet performance. The method is divided into two parts.

**Part I** contains:

- the clarinet overtone series and how new note names attach to previously learned fingerings
- how to incorporate ‘right hand down’ as a developmental technique
- one octave scales across the break
- first melodies in the clarion register that teach basic musical concepts needed for advanced performance
- break crossing drills in 9 key signatures
- how to play in the altissimo register from high C to G above the treble staff

**Part II** contains studies from *Rhythmical Articulation* by Pasquale Bona, selected and edited for clarinet to prepare students for upper level performance. *Rhythmical Articulation* was originally written to assist singers with rhythmical and pitch accuracy.

**Range:** The range is appropriate for developing clarinetists (low B to B just above the treble staff). Third-line B natural is often referred to as “the break” because it is the note where the register key is added to produce the middle register. These studies and exercises center around third-line B natural and provide a means to develop smooth connections between the lower and middle registers of the clarinet.

**Technique:** The studies have been adapted for clarinet to cover nine key signatures. Appropriate articulations, dynamics, and expressive markings have been added to reflect common practice in the classical style. Advanced rhythms and time signatures are introduced with moderate tempos. Musical terms have been added to identify phrases and suggest expression.



**Paula Corley** is a Texas music educator whose passion is the clarinet. She is the ‘mayor’ of Clarinet City, a website for all things clarinet and is currently the pedagogy chairman for the International Clarinet Association. Paula is also the instructor of clarinet at Texas Lutheran University and the founder of clariNETWORKS, an annual event for students and teachers of all ages that provides access to some of the clarinet world’s most successful clarinet teachers and performers. She is an artist-clinician for Buffet Crampon and Vandoren.

Originally from Mississippi, Paula is a career music educator, having taught many years in public schools and in higher education. Her books about clarinet and clarinet teaching are well-known and her articles about clarinet pedagogy have appeared in *The Instrumentalist*, *The Texas Bandmasters Review*, *The Clarinet*, and *WAVE* - an online resource for music educators hosted by Vandoren. Paula has over 40 conference presentations to her credit including The Midwest Clinic, ClarinetFest, Texas Music Educators Association, Texas Bandmasters Association, and workshops in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Indiana, Mississippi, North Carolina and Virginia.

Paula supports new music and has commissioned two original works - *Unfamiliar Territory* for clarinet and wind band by Michael Markowski and *Road Trip* for clarinet quintet written by Clifton Jones. Links to recordings of these works can be found on her site [clarinetcity.com](http://clarinetcity.com), along with articles, videos, and helpful information that is free to download.

Paula is a graduate of Southern Methodist University and Mississippi State University where she was named Alumnus of the Year for Music in 2013.

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