

Blowing and Pressure

The most important area to concentrate on for the beginning piper is blowing the bagpipe steadily. Many pipers never master this, even after years of playing. The reason for this is that they did not take time in the beginning to practice it. You must master steady blowing in order to get good tone from your instrument. Even the best Bagpipe in the world will not produce good tone unless it is blown steadily.

Drones Only

When beginning on the bagpipe it is a good idea to play the chanter and drones alternately. First remove the chanter and cork the stock. Also, cork two of your drones, the middle tenor and the bass. Now practice blowing the bagpipe. Listen to the drone and try to keep a steady tone. Keep in mind not to blow too hard as you are only playing one reed. It should not be hard to blow. The key is the rhythm of your blowing and controlling the pressure on the bag.

When you blow, relax your arm slightly, feel it being blown off the bag. When you need to take a breath, increase the pressure on the bag. It is the transition between blowing/relaxing the arm and breathing/increasing pressure that you must work on making perfectly smooth. Apply the pressure to the bag with your elbow, not your forearm. If your bag is the correct size and your blowpipe the correct length, this should be comfortable. Remember to keep your arm working. Don't forget about it. As you get more comfortable with the bagpipe and your blowing becomes steadier you can add the other drones one at a time.

When you have more than one drone going you will have to tune them together. The sooner you start tuning your drones the better. The key here is to listen. Do not expect to be an expert at tuning right away and to not use a tuner as a substitute for your ear. It will take a lot of practice. However, tuning your drones without the chanter will be easier. Make sure you can blow one drone steadily before trying two drones. Try bringing on the middle tenor next. Move the middle tenor up or down on the tuning pin until your two tenors sound the same. This should not be too difficult. Turn the drone on the pin as you move it. Choose one direction for down and the opposite for up. Stick to this method for all the drones. Blowing the drones without the chanter is a good exercise for steady blowing and is practiced even by professional players.

Chanter Only

Cork all the drones and blow the bagpipe with the chanter only. Forget about playing tunes at this point. Play long notes (at least 10 seconds each), listen to the notes and try to maintain a steady tone. You will probably find that the higher notes (F, High G & High A) are more difficult to keep steady so spend more time on these. Also, be careful not to over-blow the High G and the High A. This is a very common habit. Listen for a good octave between the Low A and the High A.

You should practice blowing long steady notes on the chanter as often as possible, even after you are playing the chanter and the drones together. The more you do this

the steadier your bagpipe will be. Do not worry about playing tunes on the pipes at this point. You will progress more quickly and ultimately be able to produce better tone by concentrating on steady blowing from the outset.