

Saxophone Care and Maintenance

Saxophones are easy to maintain – with regular swabbing and a little attention to handling, a saxophone should not need much more than a yearly adjustment.

Never eat or drink anything besides water before or while playing a wind instrument, since sugar and food particles will accumulate inside the instrument and mouthpiece, causing sticky pads and fostering bacteria growth – YUCK!!

Assembly:

When assembling a saxophone, there are a few key points to remember to avoid bending keys:

- Try to handle the body of the sax by the bell. Since saxophones are fairly heavy, picking the instrument up by grabbing the key mechanisms will bend them.
- To avoid bending the neck, put the mouthpiece on the neck before attaching the neck to the body of the sax. If you put on the mouthpiece while the neck is on the body, there is a much greater chance of putting too much downward pressure on the neck and bending it.

Maintenance

Saxophones should be swabbed after playing and before being put away in the case. When a person plays the sax, warm breath comes in contact with the cooler surface of the inside bore and moisture condenses and forms small droplets. If this moisture is not removed, it can drip on to the pads and damage them. When the leather pads become wet and then dry out over and over again, they become hard, their shape gets distorted, and they lose their ability to create a seal on the tone holes, causing leaks. Often, water will accumulate in the bow, and this can simply be poured out the end of the bell.

The best swabs are pull-through types that have a weighted piece on the end of a string that is dropped through the instrument while the absorbent swab is pulled through afterwards.

Pad Savers are not recommended! These types of swabs are long and fuzzy and are designed to be left in the instrument while being stored in the case. There are several drawbacks to these swabs, as agreed upon by most repair technicians. The worst part of these swabs is that although they absorb moisture from the bore, they actually hold it there, right against the pads! Moisture needs to be removed from the instrument as completely as possible. These swabs also tend to shed their tiny hairs which get into the key mechanisms and actually create leaks when they get stuck to the pads and tone holes.

A saxophone should never be set down on a chair, the floor, a table top, or anywhere else. It should either be in the case, in the player's hands, or on a saxophone stand. Also, never store anything on top of the keys while in the case as this added pressure will bend keys!