

Don't Skip the Warm-Up

What is warming-up?

Warming up is the first thing you do when you pull out your flute for the first time during the day. It is a collection of exercises you play to get yourself and your body prepared for your practice session.

Do you have to warm up?

You don't have to....but you should. Warming up will help you sound and play better for the rest of the day. Just like athletes warm-up before practice or a game, we also have to warm up. You wouldn't see a basketball player jump into a big game without taking the necessary steps before hand to make sure he'll perform his best. Likewise, we can't suddenly play our recital piece after not playing for 8-hours and expect to sound our best. We warm-up in order to give ourselves the best set of conditions to play under.

How long do I have to warm up?

There is no set length that you should warm-up for. I like to think that your warm-up length should be proportional to how long you intend to practice. A good place to start is whatever a third of your practice session is, warm up for that amount of time; so if you plan on practicing for 10 minutes, then you should spend roughly 3 minutes warming up, if you plan on practicing for 30 minutes then you should spend 10 minutes, or if you practice for an hour then you should warm up for 20 minutes.

What to Focus On: AT&T

Air - Using our air is the most important things we do as flute players, it's how we make a sound on the instrument. During my warm up, I like to be sure I am using as much air as possible while maintaining a good tone. This means taking good full breaths and not being afraid to use more air than normal.

Tone - If we're using a lot of air, it's easy for our tone to get really out of control. That is why we work on putting more air through the flute while maintaining a good tone. When we play our first note of the day, but sure our embouchure is set up like normal, there is minimal tension throughout the body, and you are as open as possible. Don't think of playing loud, but rather playing full.

Technique - Half of the fun of playing the flute is pushing the buttons. Remember, the key to great technique is tension-free hands and fingers. If you notice that your fingers are tense while warming up, this is your opportunity to relax them and play slowly. Practicing with tense hands and fingers will almost guarantee that the rest of your playing for the day is tense. The most important part of warming up our technique is making sure our hands and fingers are as relaxed as possible.

What to Play

Everything you play should center around AT&T.

Starting with long tones, my favorite exercise to play are slow descending steps (taken from Marcel Moyse's "De La Sonorite"). This is focusing in air and tone.

The image shows three staves of musical notation for a descending step exercise in 4/4 time. The first staff contains four groups of notes, each starting on a C and descending by half steps: C4, B3, Bb3, A3; C4, B3, Bb3, A3, G3; C4, B3, Bb3, A3, G3, F3; and C4, B3, Bb3, A3, G3, F3, E3. Each group is marked with a repeat sign and a double bar line. The second and third staves show the same exercise starting on a higher C (C5) and descending: C5, B4, Bb4, A4; C5, B4, Bb4, A4, G4; C5, B4, Bb4, A4, G4, F4; and C5, B4, Bb4, A4, G4, F4, E4. The notes are connected by slurs, and there are repeat signs at the end of each group.

Starting on C in the staff, play each grouping twice. First time with a strong full sound with no vibrato, second time with a strong full sound with vibrato. Once you reach low C, repeat the entire exercise up and octave.

To get my fingers moving, I like to work through my chromatic scale. Keep your air flowing, and tone warm and full through the entire scale.

When working on technique, relaxed hands are key!

The image shows two staves of musical notation for a two-octave chromatic scale in 6/8 time. The first staff shows the scale starting on a low C (C4) and ascending: C4, C#4, D4, D#4, E4, E#4, F4, F#4, G4, G#4, A4, A#4, B4, B#4, C5. The second staff shows the scale starting on a low C (C3) and ascending: C3, C#3, D3, D#3, E3, E#3, F3, F#3, G3, G#3, A3, A#3, B3, B#3, C4. The notes are connected by slurs, and there are repeat signs at the end of each line.

Starting on low c, play a two octave chromatic scale at a quick tempo being sure you're using a lot of air and your tone is open. The speed should be engaging but doable. Move up a half step to D-flat and do the same thing. Continue moving up half steps until you've reached the end of your range.

Scales are the
original musical
phrase

No warm up is complete without practicing your scales! There are tons of ways to play your scales. The last page shows how I practice my scales each day.

Playing scales up and down can not only be boring but also make your warm up seem to last forever. Here are some ways to spice up your scale life:

- **Remember that scales are the original musical phrases.**
Play a scale like you are playing the most beautiful melody ever, because you are!
- **Don't confuse your warm up scales with your competition scales.**
Competitions scales are meant for competitions. You're not preparing for a competition when you're warming up, you're just warming up!
- **Change up how you play your scales rather than simply "up and down".**
Emphasis a different note, work on keeping your vibrato spinning, play it at different dynamics.



Warm Up Scales

