

# Reeds-Read



Remember the children's story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*? In the story, Goldilocks has to try Papa Bear's bed, and it is *too hard!* Mama Bear's bed is *too soft*. Finally, she tries Baby Bear's bed and finds it *just right!*

**What About Reeds?** • Because reeds are a natural product made of wood, no two reeds are alike. In a box of 10 reeds, usually 2-3 reeds will be fantastic and a joy to play on. The rest will be too hard, too soft, or just not great. A particular reed may have sounded great yesterday and be horrible today. Tomorrow, it may be great again, or not. A few will always be too hard, a few always too soft. Only the player can decide. Thus, the love/hate affair with reeds! For this reason, please don't require that your student "use up" every reed in the box before you purchase new reeds.

**Quality, Quality, Quality** • Good reed cane comes from Southern France near the Mediterranean Sea. A good quality reed should golden wheat color (not a green or dead brown shade) and have fine straight even fibers that extend to the tip of the reed. The reed should be clear and smooth, not rough, and should have an even tip.

**Reed Brand** • Better quality reeds produce a better tone and are more consistent in quality, even for beginners. Therefore, we ask that parents purchase traditional (blue box) Van Doren reeds for students. While these reeds are slightly more expensive, they are worth it in quality. Do not purchase a different brand of reeds just because they are cheaper. The slightly greater expense of a high quality reed will more than make up for the frustration experienced from trying to play on a poor quality reed. As with any significant materials that directly affect learning, your student needs quality and consistency.

**Reed Strength** • Reeds come in different “strengths,” referring to the hardness of the reed. Beginning students will use a “2” reed and should expect to move up to a “2 ½” near the end of the school or during the summer. Following that, sizes increase to match as the student’s embouchure gets stronger and needs more resistance from the reed to produce an acceptable tone.

**Reed Purchase** • Reeds can be purchased online or at your local music store. It’s best to purchase them an entire box at a time, as they are cheaper, and there is a greater chance of getting more good reeds! [wwwbw.com](http://wwwbw.com) (Woodwind Brasswind) is a popular site to purchase reeds at reasonable prices.

**Reed Daily Care & Storage** • Reeds should be taken off the mouthpiece and wiped off at the end of band or practice session each day. Do not store the reed on the mouthpiece. Carefully place it back into the hard plastic case. Take care that the paper-thin end of the reed is not damaged. Keep at least three good reeds and alternate days of usage.

**How Many Reeds Should My Student Keep?** • Students should have at least three good reeds in their case at all times. Students should monitor this, and parents should purchase the reeds. Purchase new reeds *before* they are needed.

**When to Discard A Reed** • A great reed is something to treasure and take care of. Reeds are quite fragile (paper thin) at the end and are easily damaged. The reed tip must be completely intact and solid. It’s time to throw out a reed when the tip is damaged in any way: chipped, cracked, nicked, split, broken corner or ragged edge, broken tip or missing a chunk. Playing on a broken reed will produce squeaks, chirps, poor quality tone or most often, nothing at all. If properly cared for and not damaged, reeds should last 3-4 weeks. At that point, they are worn out and need to be tossed as a student’s embouchure will actually get weaker from playing on weaker reeds, affecting their range and tone quality/consistency. Don’t continue to play on them!

And finally, set up your student for success with proper reeds, instruments and supplies. Continue to encourage and support, and enjoy the journey with your woodwind student!