

Jazz Mouthpiece Selection Guide for Saxophone

Before we get into this, a reminder that your musical setup is like a tool. Good or bad, they only work if you are using them properly. The best mouthpiece in the world won't help if you aren't using enough air, supporting your sound, using a proper embouchure and listening. In some cases, it can even make things worse. Understand that a new mouthpiece will help, but be sure you are doing everything to get the best sound out of your current setup.

Also understand that for many of us, mouthpieces are a "fluid" investment. I have a box of 7 mouthpieces at home I am not currently using, some I know I won't play again, and some that will find their way back onto a horn when I feel I need a change. Do spend the time to find the right mouthpiece, but understand that as your playing technique develops, you may find you want to change. I'm currently playing a Meyer Richie Cole on my alto and an Otto Link 6 on my tenor for jazz and a Rousseau 4R on both for classical.

Why are you buying a new mouthpiece?

The reasons to purchase a new mouthpiece depend on the ensembles you are playing with. If you are playing only in concert band, a new mouthpiece to replace your stock mouthpiece will help you improve your tone quality and intonation.

Volume and tone to compete with brass in jazz band
Improved Tone in concert band

What are you looking for?

Tone
Tuning
Volume

Rubber vs Metal?

Alto - Rubber ONLY!
Not interchangeable!

What would a mouthpiece cost?

Depending on what you're looking at, mouthpieces can run anywhere from \$50 through to \$600. Budget \$150 to \$300 for a good quality jazz mouthpiece - any less and you'll likely want to replace it shortly as it won't do the trick.

Cheap mouthpieces are poor in their construction and design and won't be worth the investment. A stock mouthpiece that comes with your sax is likely in this price range. They are fine, but not worth buying if you've already got one.

Beyond the \$300 or so price, be sure you really hear and feel a worthwhile difference. The cost for exotic materials such as Ebony or Gold is not worth it as a young musician. You will find as your musical tastes and technique develop, you may

choose to replace your mouthpiece so start with something “middle of the road” rather than buying something “extreme” that doesn’t last for you.

How long should it take?

Think of the amount of money you’re going to spend and that mouthpiece helps define your tone, which is part of your voice as a musician. You might find the right one first (more on that later) but expect to spend at least 1 to 2 hours trying a variety if you’re going to get the right one for you.

What to bring

Bring some music you’re comfortable with. There’s nothing worse than trying to hear the sound you’re getting without any ideas to play. Bring some band music with fast and slow passages that cover the range of your horn. A method book isn’t a bad idea either.

If you own a tuner, bring it. Last thing you want to do is buy a mouthpiece you can’t control. To keep from chirping on my first jazz mouthpiece, I needed to use so much pressure that I was regularly 30-40 cents sharp no matter what I did. If you don’t have one, borrow one from your school that you can play with a bit first so you don’t waste time at the store learning how to use a tuner.

Softer reeds are a must. Go 1/2 to 1 strength down from what you play on your concert mouthpiece. If you’ve got more than 2 years experience, you should be playing a #2.5 or #3 Rico Royale in concert band - Nothing softer!!!

What is the process to go through

Long Tones

Music You Know

Tuning

Set

Blind Check

<http://www.jjbabbitt.com/ottolink.htm>

<http://www.jjbabbitt.com/meyer.htm>

<http://www.runyonproducts.com/mpc.html>

<http://www.dukoff.com/>

<http://www.claudelaakey.com/>

<http://www.berglarsen.com>