

Drone Calibration

Drone Reed Calibration

Here is how I suggest you calibrate your drone reeds.

Step 1

- First, cork off your bass and a tenor.
- Play Low A on your chanter with one drone going. Your drone reed should shut off when you blow too hard on your chanter.
- Gradually increase your blowing pressure until you know you are blowing too hard.

Does the reed shut off?

It should, and here is why. If your drone reed shuts off when you blow too hard on your chanter, you know it's taking the minimum amount of air necessary when you're blowing normally. This is essential in trying to achieve an efficient bagpipe!

If your drone doesn't shut off, adjust the bridle on the drone reed down, towards the end of the tongue. Most synthetic reeds will only need the slightest adjustment (too much and the reed won't sound at all). If, by chance, your reed is shutting off too soon, adjust the bridle away from the tip of the tongue.

Note: if you aren't sure how to do this, be sure to have a teacher show you a couple of times. Reeds are expensive, so you need to be careful not to damage them in the process of adjusting the bridals. It's not hard, but it's worth being shown how.

Step 2

Ok, now that the first reed is calibrated, our objective is going to be to calibrate the other two drone reeds to the same strength of the first.

I would cork off the chanter, and then open up a second drone. Now, we'll gradually increase the pressure in the bag, in hopes that the two drones will shut off at exactly the same pressure.

Do they? If the "new" (recently opened) drone shuts off later than the first, you'll need to close it down a bit, by moving the bridle towards the tip of the tongue. If it shuts off too early, move the bridle away from the tip of the tongue. When they shut off at exactly the same pressure, then move on to the third drone and perform the same task.

The reason we want them to shut off at the same time is this: Obviously, the principle from above still applies - if all the drone reeds shut off when you blow too hard, that means when you blow normally, the reeds are taking the minimum amount of air. Now, we add in the extra step - if the drone reeds are all taking the SAME amount of air, that means they will all react the SAME to changes in blowing. They'll be steadier, stay in tune, and take on the same amount of moisture. Try it! It really works!

After this process, your pipes are guaranteed to be as efficient as possible. Cover your bases with good maintenance as well, and you'll have a bagpipe as stable and efficient as the pros!