

Cane Drone Reed Instructions

A note about drone reeds:

All reeds are basically just a tongue and a body. The tongue vibrates and the body is stable. The thing to remember with cane reeds is that, even though the reed has been made for you by the maker, *you are the one in control of the final and most important adjustment*, that of the tongue. You, as the player, must set the tongue to work for you! **Do not worry!** I will teach you what to do. It's easy and when you get it, you've got it, and you will never have to be frustrated with your reeds again!

Here we go!

FIRST:

Keep your current reeds in your pipes! You want to add ONE REED AT A TIME. It's usually best to start with the bass drone reed since it will give you the least problems and the best results to your bagpipe's tone.

Right now, chances are, the tongues of your drone reeds have flattened down and are lying very close to the body of the reed (in the "reed bed") and they will not sound when you blow through them, THIS IS NORMAL, so you will have to do two things.

1. Introduce some moisture to the reed.
 - a. Put the reed in your mouth and gently try to blow through it.
 - b. Even if it does not make a sound, continue to blow through it for about 10 seconds.
 - c. If it makes no sound at all, blow through the open end to get some moisture to the cane fibers inside the reed.
2. Bend the tongue.
 - a. To do this, you will gently lift up the tongue from off of the reed bed.
 - i. Lift up the tongue about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of an inch and then release it; this is known as "flicking" the tongue.
 - b. ***Be careful not to lift the tongue too high!*** If you go too high too fast this will ruin the reed and you will need another one (be gentle, the tongues are fragile).

If at this point the reed is sounding, **GREAT!** You're almost there, put the reed in the drone and blow through it. You want the reed to sound and double tone. It should sound with a little pressure and then drop into its main tone with more pressure. With even more pressure it should shut off.

If this is the case at this point, try it in your pipes. If it's still shutting off too easily give the reed a couple more flicks until it's stronger, then try it in the pipes. Over the first couple of days it's common for reeds to shut off now and then, a gentle flick will sort this out until your reeds are trained and then they will not shut off any more.

Once it's going well just play it for a while. This will give the reed the moisture it needs. All cane reeds need moisture. This is true for drone reeds just like it is for your chanter reed. If your drone reeds get too dry they will shut off. This is why it is very important to play your cane drone reeds on a consistent basis, so that they keep a little moisture in them. If you play every day for just 15 minutes, this will be sufficient. If you live in a very dry climate you will want to play more often or get a bag that keeps more moisture in it. If you're using a moisture control system you will want to modify/remove it so as to let more moisture through to the reeds.

I would recommend that you give the bass reed three or four days of playing before you move on to the tenor reeds. This way you will know how the reed acts and it will have a chance to stabilize, thus reducing your frustration.

Chances are very good that on day two, when you go to play, your cane bass will shut off on you. **DO NOT PANIC!** Simply take the drone out of it's stock and blow through it to introduce some moisture. It should open right up. If it doesn't, give it a little flick and then play.

THE TENOR REEDS:

Now that the bass is working fine, we'll move on to the tenors.

Start with the center tenor. Leave your current reed in the outside tenor. We are going to use your current outside tenor reed as your benchmark. We will want your new cane tenor to match the pitch and strength of your current reed in the outside tenor. Doing it this way will make the process very easy and reduce frustration.

Follow the steps above, just as you did with the cane bass, until the tenor reed is at the right pressure and is working in your pipes. It is important to play the reed in the pipes for about 10 minutes before making any pitch adjustments as cane reeds will change pitch quite a bit as they take on moisture. After about 10 minutes the reed will have stabilized and the pitch should not change. Now you can make any fine adjustments to the pitch so that it will match your benchmark reed in the outside tenor.

TO ADJUST THE PITCH

The first step in adjusting the pitch is to add or remove hemp from the bottom of the reed and change the depth of the reed in the reed seat. See below for specifics.

If seating the reed deeper or shallower in the reed seat does not change the pitch enough to match your chanter the next step is to adjust the bridle. Again see below for specifics.

Too flat:

If your drone is too flat and it's tuning too low on the pin you will need to sharpen the reed. First try removing some hemp from the bottom of the reed and seating it deeper in the reed seat. If this does not sharpen the reed enough you can shorten the tongue. To do this, simply move the bridle up towards the red waxed end of the reed. Give it a try in the pipes and retune your center tenor to match the outside tenor. Keep doing this until the center matches the outside. You should not have to move the bridle too much to get results. I recommend moving the bridle in 1/2 mm increments. If you're having trouble moving the bridle you can tie a new bridle on **AFTER** the other bridle, I recommend using waxed yellow hemp for this. Or alternatively you

can use a small dental rubber band as a bridle to adjust the pitch.

Too sharp:

If the drone is too sharp and it's tuning too high on the pin you will need to flatten the reed. First try adding some hemp to the bottom of the reed and seating it shallower in the reed seat. If this does not flatten the reed enough you can make the tongue longer. Move the bridle down towards the reed seat end of the reed. Try it in the pipes and retune your center tenor to match the outside. Again, keep doing this until the center matches the outside. Another way to make the reed flatter is to make the tongue heavier. This will flatten the pitch considerably. Get some wax, real beeswax works best, and roll it into a little pill and then flatten it on top of the tongue near the red waxed end of the reed. DO NOT get any wax on the edges of the tongue as this could cause the tongue to stick and not vibrate. A little glob of wax will flatten the reed quite a bit, so start small and use a little bit more if necessary. If you don't want to use wax you can also try some small strips of black electrical tape. Just cut off some thin strips and layer them on top of each other until the reed is flat enough. This method is less messy and works well.

Once your center tenor is set where the strength is good and the pitch matches your current tenor reed, simply play it for a few days, as you did with the bass, to give it a chance to settle and stabilize. After 2 or 3 days you can set up the outside tenor cane reed. Use the same method as described above and match the new cane reed to your current center tenor cane reed.

At this point your bagpipe should be completely set up with your cane reeds and the only thing you will need to do is to play them. If you play them regularly they will be quite trouble free. If you do not play them regularly and they dry out too much this will give you some trouble. So PLAY regularly!

If you miss a few days and your reeds are dry and not working:

The first thing you want to try is to take each drone out one by one and blow through the reed by mouth to try and get some moisture back into it. Usually if you've only missed a few days (ie. less than a week) this will be sufficient to

bring your reeds back to life. If it's been a week or more you will probably have to go back and start over repeating all the steps as described above. This is why it's so important to **PLAY YOUR CANE REEDS REGULARLY**. That can not be stressed enough. If you want trouble free cane reeds, that is the secret. Play regularly!

That's it! Enjoy the tone that your bagpipe was originally designed to produce! Nothing sounds like cane, and nothing ever will!