

The Intermediate Bassoonist

Bassoon Clinic with Janet Polk

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The Intermediate Bassoon Player

Your beginning bassoonist has been playing for several years and has a range of B-Flat below the staff in bass clef to at least G above the staff in bass clef.

If all is going well, the student will be playing with a full sound, have a good sense of pitch, and be able to tongue and finger passages with an ever increasing amount of facility. If this is the case, the next steps are to increase the range up a fourth and to begin the use of vibrato if it is not already in place (see section on developing a vibrato).

Chances are that one or more areas may need some help. This guide will attempt to identify the potential problems and suggest some solutions.

Tone/Sound Production

Problems: tone may be small or weak, unfocused, too tight, too “buzzy”

Solutions:

1. Embouchure
 - a. The lips should be around the reed. Say the words such as spoon or loon or prune with lips in exaggerated “o” position. The outside of the lips are firm but the inside of the lips have flexibility (“spongy”).
 - b. The lips should be showing a portion of red when the embouchure is formed. The lips do not roll totally over the lips. The lips will be supported by the teeth but minimally.
 - c. The teeth are pulled apart as far as is comfortable. The tongue is relaxed and on the bottom of the mouth.
 - d. The reed goes into the mouth almost to the first wire. If not enough reed is in the mouth, a thin buzzy tone is produced.
 - e. Find the crow point on the reed—this is a multiphonic rasp with highs, lows, and middles in the sound. This is perhaps the most important element to achieve. It is through allowing the reed to vibrate at its maximum that a full, focused, flexible tone is produced.
 - f. Lips are looser for low notes, firmer for high notes.
2. Position of the bassoon/posture
 - a. Seat strap goes across the front of the chair
 - b. The bassoon goes across the body
 - c. The head, neck and spine are aligned and shoulders and fingers relaxed. Feet flat on floor.
 - d. Wrists should be straight on both arms when playing
3. Breathing/Blowing
 - a. Since the opening to the reed is small, many students do not use enough support from the vertical abdominal muscles to produce a full sound. Have them give a bit more “oomph.” This is especially true to produce the higher notes—the higher the note, the more support (and vice versa)
 - b. Air is separate from support. For bassoon for most passages, the lungs need to be filled only a third of the way from the bottom. The remaining space in the lungs creates flexibility for pitch adjustment and vibrato.
 - c. Shoulders and chest remain down and relaxed.
4. Reeds

At this stage of development, students should be using cane reeds. However, that presents some interesting challenges as one needs to find a source for reliable reeds. This means reeds that play easily, have a good crow and have a stable pitch center. The best source for cane reeds is a local professional bassoonist. If there is a music school or conservatory nearby, an advanced student would

probably be eager to make a few bucks. If this is not possible, the listing at the end of this booklet give addresses for reliable sources for reeds. It may take a bit of trial and error for the student to find a source that is perfect for him/her.

5. Bocals

- a. A good bocal can make an inferior instrument sound much better and a bad bocal can make the best instrument sound terrible. Check for dents or cracks. These should be repaired as even small imperfections can sometimes lead to big tone and pitch problems. If things look o.k. but if you are unsure, have a professional try it out. (see list at end for purchase of new bocals).
- b. Bocals should be cleaned every 2 weeks or so with warm water and once a month with water and pipe cleaners or bocal swab or bocal brush.

6. Bassoons

If all else fails, an assessment of the bassoon is in order. Have a professional play it and give an opinion of the instrument and its capabilities. (see lists at end for bassoon brands and where to purchase bassoons)

Pitch

Problems: Pitch is constantly sharp or constantly flat. Pitch problems occur on certain notes. Pitch is all over the map!

Solutions: pitch is constantly sharp

1. Bocals

- a. Bocals come in sizes 0 to 4 with the most common being 1, 2, and 3. The smaller the number, the shorter the bocal and sharper in pitch. The larger the number, the longer the bocal and flatter in pitch. Try a longer bocal. The bocal goes all the way in and should not be pulled out or pushed in to adjust pitch. All it does is throw off the scale.

2. Embouchure/placement of tongue

- a. Lips should be away from teeth
- b. Teeth pulled apart as far as is comfortable
- c. TONGUE SHOULD BE RELAXED AND AT BOTTOM OF MOUTH. THE BACK OF THE ORAL CAVITY IS AS OPEN AS POSSIBLE.
- d. Lips remain firmly in a circle around the reed.

3. Reeds

Reeds have different pitch centers. Have student work with several to see if this makes a difference.

4. Work with tuner and play solos with an in-tune piano.

5. Have the bassoon evaluated

Solutions: Pitch is constantly flat

1. Bocals
Try a shorter one
2. Embouchure
Lips should be firmly around reed so that no air is escaping and so enough support is given.
3. Air
Firm support should be given from the vertical abdominal muscles. More “oomph”!
4. Reeds
Try several to see which ones may bring up the pitch.
5. Work with a tuner
6. Have the bassoon evaluated for quality but also for potential repair problems.
Leaks can account for a lowered pitch.

Solutions: Pitch problems occur on certain notes

1. Inherent nature of the instrument
Notes on the bassoon come from the factory with some deliberately tuned flat and some sharp to balance overall acoustics and tone quality. As a general rule, the worst is fourth space G. Adding a key (see fingering chart) may help but mostly it is a matter of hearing it and bringing it down by control of the embouchure and air column. Third space E-flat can be very sharp. This is usually a reed problem but there are some alternate fingerings (see chart) that will stabilize this as well.
2. Fingerings
Get a good, reliable chart and make sure that the student is using correct fingering.
3. Bassoon/Bocal
Another bocal may help problem notes. Have bassoon checked by professional and repair person.

Solutions: Pitch is all over the map!

All of the above suggestions should be tried first. If none of the above help, it is time to work on the student’s sense of pitch through singing pitches, playing intervals with another instrument, working with a tuner and/or playing an in-tune piano. It is a life-long struggle for all bassoonists, professional and amateur.

Tonguing

Problems: Tongue is not very fast.

Solutions:

1. Relax the tongue. Practice letting it fall to bottom of the mouth.
2. Start notes with tongue lightly placed on reed. Blow, then release the tongue from the reed.
3. “Tip to tip.” The tip (or as close as possible) of the tongue should touch directly the tip or opening of the reed. Not on the bottom of the reed or on the top. This “tip to tip” provides a clear articulation and can achieve the lightest tongue.
4. The lightest possible touch on the reed is the goal. A good way for students to achieve this is to use only the reed. Begin by holding the reed and tonguing rapid notes. Then remove the hand from the reed. The object is to tongue the reed so that it doesn’t fly out of the mouth and has little or no motion when tongued. Put back on bassoon and try with the same technique.
5. Use plenty of air. The secret to fast tonguing is air. The tongue should just ride the supported air column.
6. Try a lighter syllable. Instead of “Too” try “doo” or even “loo” if the tongue is very heavy.
7. Use just the very front of the tongue. Keep the back of the tongue still.
8. Practice tonguing exercises such as the following. The tongue is set of muscles that need to be strengthened.

a. Do on reed only first and then on one note on bassoon

b. Set starting metronome tempo of ♩ = 60 or lower

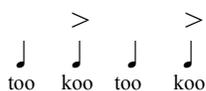


c. Increase metronome gradually

d. Keep a chart of progress from day-to-day

9. Start work on double-tonguing. Some people just do not have a fast single tongue and never will. The following exercises should be done on the reed first and then on the bassoon.

a. Use “too-koo” or “doo-goo”



b. Accent the “koo” to achieve evenness of articulation

- c. Keep the air stream constant
- d. Use metronome—gradually speed up
- e. Use “William Tell Overture” theme to practice short, quick, bursts.



Fingers

Problem: fingers are just not moving quickly

Solutions:

1. Make sure that finger pressure on keys and on holes is as light as possible. Wrists should be straight. Fingers slightly curved.
2. Determine if it is a problem only with tongue. Practice scales and etudes slowly listening for the timing of the start of the tongue and movement of the fingers. Gradually speed up.
3. If fingers are not moving well in general, work on scales SLOWLY, aiming for fingers that move evenly and smoothly from one note to the next. Slurring all notes will eliminate any problems with the tongue. Make sure all fingers that need to move to obtain a certain note do so at precisely the same time. Use of the metronome is important as this will keep track for the student how she/he is doing. Move the metronome up gradually. Set speed goals and keep a daily record.
4. Work on etudes especially those that deal with finer patterns (see Etude list. Slama and Kopprasch especially helpful).

Chamber Music

One of the most important things you can do for your intermediate bassoonist is to place him/her in a chamber ensemble. The bassoonist can really shine in a small group. For one thing, the bassoon can be heard! For those students only in band, this can be a problem. If the student perceives that he/she is not being heard, the incentive to improve the above problems is not there. When the student becomes one of three or four or five, suddenly there is a reason to get better in a hurry! (see repertoire list for chamber music listings).

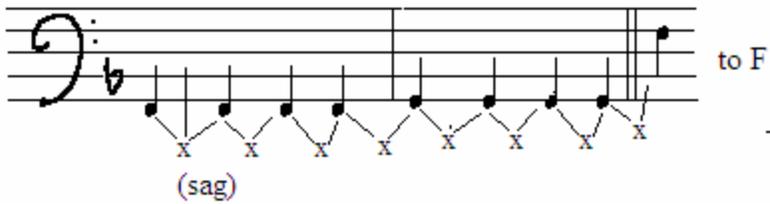
Tenor Clef

Although they will try to avoid it at all costs, students at this level need to know tenor clef. The Rubank methods (Elementary and Intermediate) have several pages that will ease a student into this territory.

Vibrato

Some students just naturally begin a vibrato. This is especially true for those who sing. For those that don't produce vibrato on their own need, help is needed to train the muscles. The following are some suggested ways to get things going. The process from start to finish may take as little as 2 months or as much as 2 years. The object is to have patience and to do a little bit of training every day.

- a. Begin note. Relax abdominal muscles so that pitch sags almost a half step. Return to original note by firming muscles.



- b. Practice at any slow tempo until confident of the ability to drop the pitch.
- c. Set Metronome at = 50 or below. Do above exercises with metronome.
- d. Gradually increase tempo
- e. As muscles become stronger, pitch will go above the pitch as well as below.



- f. Final goal  at $\text{♩} = 144$



BEYOND BASICS!

RESOURCE BOOKS

- Fox, Hugo. Let's Play Bassoon.
Fox Products Corp., South Whitley, Indiana
- Popkin, Mark, and Glickman, Loren. Bassoon Reed Making.
The Instrumentalist Publishing Co., Northfield, Illinois, 1987
- Pence, Homer. Teacher's Guide to the Bassoon.
Selmer, Inc., Elkhart, Indiana, 1963
- Snitkin, Harvey R. Practicing for Young Musicians.
HMS Publications, Inc., Niantic, Conn., 1983
- Spencer, William. The Art of Bassoon Playing.
Summy-Bichard Co., Evanston, Illinois, 1969
- Weait, Christopher. Bassoon Reed-making: A Basic Technique.
McGinnis & Marx Music Publishers, New York, 1970

REPERTOIRE FOR THE INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

Etude Books:

Voxman Intermediate and Advanced Method, vol.1 Rubank

Standard etude books. Provides good, solid foundation. Has recognizable pieces so appeals to some students more than Weissenborn (see listing below).

Weissenborn Practical Method Fischer or Cundy-Bettoney

The standard since the 1800's. The front of the book is for beginners through intermediates. Back of the book (Advanced Studies) is for intermediate and up.

Slama 66 Studies International

Studies in all keys. Starts with no sharps or flats, goes to one flat and works through all the keys. Good practice for finger patterns.

Kopprasch 60 Studies, Vol. 1 International

Technical etudes good for learning patterns

Ozi 42 Caprices International

Mozart era etudes about a half page in length. Charming.

Milde 25 Studies in Scales and Chords International

For the more advanced intermediate. Has extended range.

SOLOS

In order of difficulty:

Duport Romanze Spratt

Senaille Allegro Spiritoso Andraud

Cohen Danse Grottesque Belwin

Rathaus Polichinelle Belwin

Schoenbach Solos for the Bassoon Player Schirmer

Starkadomsky Four Pieces International

Mozart	<u>Two Sonatas</u>	Belwin
Eccles	<u>Sonata in G Minor</u>	International
Hindemith	<u>Sonata</u> (First movement for intermediate level)	Schott
Mozart	<u>Concerto in B flat K191</u> (2 nd and 3 rd movements for intermediate level)	International
Telemann	<u>Sonata in F Minor</u>	International
Vivaldi	<u>Sonata in A Minor</u>	International
Vivaldi	<u>Ten Bassoon Concertos</u> (edited by Schoenbach)	Schirmer
Gliere	<u>Impromptu</u> <u>Humoresque</u>	International International

CHAMBER MUSIC

Any Baroque Trio Sonatas

	<u>Chamber Music for Three Woodwinds</u> (fl., cl., bsn.)	Rubank
	<u>Ensemble Repertoire for Woodwind Quintet</u>	Rubank
Andraud	<u>22 Woodwind Quintets</u>	Southern
Vivaldi	<u>Concerto in G Minor for fl. ob. bsn.</u>	Musica Rara
Vivaldi	<u>Sonata a due for fl. bsn. and basso continuo</u>	Peters
Zachow	<u>Trio for fl. bsn. and basso continuo</u>	Belwin
Mozart	<u>Divertimenti for 2 cls. and bsn.</u> <u>or ob. cl. bsn.</u>	various publishers

BASSOON RECORDINGS

Stefano Canuti	Stradivarius Fone Crystal	Bassoon Images Fantasie Di Bravura 25 th Anniversary International Double Reed Society
Bernard Garfield	Columbia	Mozart – The Four Concertos for WW's
Jurgen Gode	Antes Edition	The Bassoon
Paul Hanson (jazz bassoon)	Tonga	Oaktown Irawo Funky Cubonics
Laslo Hara, Jr.	Hungaraton	The Classical and Baroque Bassoon
Judith LeClair	Sony	The Five Sacred Trees
John Miller	Pro-Arte Cambridge	Concertos for Bassoon
Frank Morelli	Deutsche Grammophon	Mozart Bassoon Concerto
Leonard Sharrow	Crystal	Leonard Sharrow Plays Works for Bsn.
Robert Thompson	Chandos Records	Vivaldi – 4 Bassoon Concertos
Klaus Thuneman	Philips	Vivaldi – 6 Bassoon Concertos
Milan Turkovic	Teldec Koch	Mozart – Concertos for Winds United Sounds of Bassoons
Kim Walker	Edgetone Classics	Mozart Concertos
Christopher Weait	d'note Lyrichord	Telemann for bsn. Four Centuries of Music for Bsn.

VIDEO

Janet Polk

Warner Bros. Pub.

Belwin 21st Century Band
Method, vol. 1

BASSOON REEDS

The condensed guide to quick fixes.

For those music educators who feel comfortable or interested in adjusting purchased reeds, the following is a guide to the basic tools needed and to trouble-shooting the most common problems.

BASIC TOOLS NEEDED:

1. mandrel or the equivalent for holding the reed
2. reamer or round file for taking material from the inside of the reed for better fit on bocal
3. plaque or guitar pick for placement between blades of the reed
4. reed knife or jackknife
5. needle nose pliers
6. scissors
7. #22 soft brass wire or equivalent for a broken wire

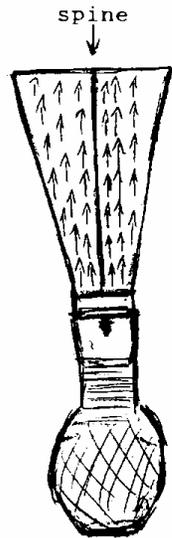
THE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS AND THEIR SOLUTIONS

The reed should be wet for all reed adjustments

1. The reed is too hard to blow.
 - a. Check tip opening. This should be $1/16^{\text{th}}$ of an inch.
 - b. If too open, close at first wire with pliers.
 - c. If too open, open at first wire with pliers.
 - d. If tip opening is o.k., put reed on mandrel, put plaque between blades and take off cane on both sides of the reed with a knife or sandpaper.
2. Third space E sags/goes flat
 - a. Clip the smallest amount possible off the tip (which makes the reed slightly shorter). Test and clip until the E is stable.
3. Third space E-flat is sharp/unstable.
 - a. Put reed on mandrel and plaque between blades. Scrape the channels (see diagram next page).
4. Low notes are hard to get out
 - a. Reed on mandrel, plaque between blades. Scrape tip and back with knife (see diagram next page).

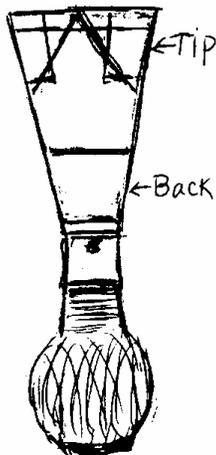
For every scrape on one side of the reed, do the same scrape on the other side.

Channels



The channels are the areas on each side of the spine. Scrape in direction of the arrows.

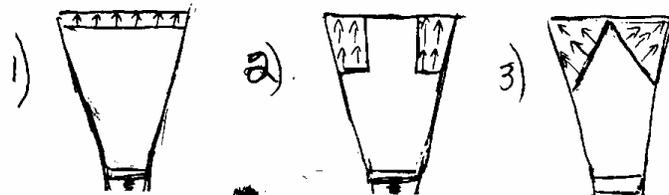
Tip and back



The tip consists of three geometric shapes which should be scraped in this order:

- 1) straight line across --scrape toward the tip starting 1/16th of an inch below tip of reed.
- 2) rectangles -- scrape toward tip starting about 1/4 of the way down the reed.
- 3) triangles -- these connect the other two shapes. The only scrape that goes against the grain.

The back consists of 1/4 of the area nearest the wires. Scrape entire area.



BASSOON REED-MAKING TOOLS

The following list is for a student or teacher who might be interested in pursuing reed making.

ITEMS THAT MAY BE OBTAINED FROM LOCAL STORES

6 inch ruler
jackknife
emery boards or flat file
exacto knife or scalpel
needle nose pliers
diagonal clippers
wooden drawer knob
guitar picks
wet/dry sandpaper 240 & 400
Duco cement
crochet thread or button & carpet thread
sharp scissors
single-edged razor blades
nail set
round file
paraffin wax or a candle

SPECIALIZED TOOLS TO ORDER

mandrel (replaces nail set)
reamer (replaces round file)
plaque (replaces guitar pick)
reed knife (replaces jackknife)
drying rack
cutting block (replaces wooden drawer knob)
#22 soft brass wire

gouged, shaped, and profiled bassoon cane

FOR BASSOON REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE

screwdriver
cloth tape
moleskin
spring hook or crochet hook
pipe cleaners

Reed-making Outline—Janet Polk method

1. soak gouged, shaped, and profiled cane for 3 hours or more
2. bevel underside edges with sandpaper
3. measure center and fold
4. put 1st wire on at 1 inch from butt end, 2nd wire 11/16ths
5. make five to seven scores in butt end with razor blade
6. make more scores with exacto knife or razor blade from 2nd wire down between the five to seven scores
7. 3rd wire on at 3/16ths inch from butt end
8. form with mandrel
9. tighten wires, DRY OVERNIGHT
10. re-tighten wires, pull 3rd wire over to side, clip, push down
11. Duco reed from 2nd wire down
12. wrap with string
13. Duco string, LET DRY AT LEAST 24 HOURS
14. ream reed to fit on bocal 8 mm
15. clip 1st and 2nd wires to 4 twists, push down
16. soak reed for about 3 minutes
17. measure from butt end to tip 2 and 3/16ths inches
18. clip with scissors
19. open reed with pliers so that tip is open 1/16th inch
20. scrape reed (see “Starting a student -- ” or “The Intermediate Bassoonist” for guide)

BASSOON REEDS (r) and TOOLS (t)

Fox Products (r & t)
6110 S. SR 5, P.O. Box 347
South Whitley, IN 46787

Phone: (260) 723-4888

Charles Double Reed Co. (r & t)
30 Pleasant St., P.O. Box 2610
Conway, NH 03818-2610

Phone: 1-800-REEDTIP (orders only)
(603) 447-1110

Vigder's Bassoon Supplies (r)
11746 Goshen Ave., Apt. 3
Los Angeles, CA 90049-6113

Phone: (310) 231-0220

Jones Double-Reed Products (r & t)
P.O. Box 3888
Spokane, WA 99220-3888

Phone: (509) 747-1224

Mark Chudnow Woodwinds (r & t)
5 Manchester Court
Napa, CA 94558

Phone: 1-800-780-4340
(707) 254-7388

Forrest's (r & t)
1849 Univ. Ave.
Berkeley, CA 94703

Phone: 1-800-322-6263

Mark Popkin (t)
740 Arbor Rd.
Winston-Salem, NC 27104-2210

Phone: (336) 725-5681

Jack Spratt Woodwind Shop (t)
11 Park Ave.
P.O. Box 277
Old Greenwich, CT 06870

Phone: (203) 637-1176

Frederic H. Weiner, Musical Instruments Sales and Service (t)
216 East Jericho Turnpike
Mineola, NY 11501

Phone: 1-800-622-CORK (orders only)
(516) 747-5004

Arundo Reeds and Cane (r)
18082 NW Dixie Mt. Rd.
Hillsboro, OR 97124

revised 1/99

BASSOONS AND BOCALS

Bassoon Brands

This is a list of the most common brands of bassoons that you will encounter.

Fox/Renard
Heckel
Puchner
Schreiber
Moenning
Polisi
Sonora/Adler
Yamaha
Conn
Bundy
Linton

To buy a new bassoon for a school system, the most reliable and consistent are the Fox/Renard. Even when new, other brands can run the gamut from good to bad. Have them checked out by a professional.

Used bassoons can also be wonderful instruments or real dogs. It is especially important to have a professional help out on the purchase.

Bocals

Bocals can make or break a bassoon. The bocal that is being considered for purchase should be played on the instrument for which it is intended. Criteria are:

1. General level of pitch and ability to play all notes in tune with a minimum of adjustment throughout range.
2. Evenness of tone throughout range
3. Full sound
4. Ability to play loud and soft
5. Pleasing quality

Bocals can be purchased from the same places as bassoons. Heckel bocals and Fox/Renard bocals are the best quality.

BUYING BASSOONS

The Woodwind/The Brasswind Phone: 1-800-348-5003
19880 State Line Rd.
South Bend, IN 46637

Washington Music Center Phone: (301) 946-8808
11151 Viers Mill Rd.
Wheaton, MD 20902

Wichita Band Instrument Co. Phone: 1-800-835-3006
2525 East Douglas
Wichita, KS 67211

Frederic Weiner, WW Musical Inst. Phone: (516) 747-5004 or
216 East Jericho Turnpike 1-800-622-CORK
Mineola, NY 11501

Forrest's Phone: 1-800-322-6263
1849 Univ. Ave.
Berkeley, CA 94703

American Bassoon Co., Inc. Phone: 1-800-ITS-A601
8642 Tower Dr.
Laurel, MD 20723

Rent to Own:

Louise Goni Phone: (781) 862-6323
57 Paul Revere Rd.
Lexington, MA 02173

To Purchase Music:

Eble Music Co. Phone: (319) 338-0313
P.O. Box 2570
Iowa City, IA 52244

Gail Warnaar Double Reed Shop Phone: (802) 633-4014
P.O. Box 150
Barnet, VT 05821

Fingerings

This is an area that can be confusing, I mean, look at all those keys! If one can look at the bassoon, stripping the image of all those shiny things away, what is left are just some holes that look a whole lot like a recorder. It just happens that this basic scale begins on fourth line F rather than C, but the woodwind principles of putting down one finger at a time still apply.

With a few rare exceptions, once students know the notes of a C major scale, any accidentals are based on this premise:

A note plus a key makes it a half step higher i.e. A plus a key gives you A sharp; G plus a key gives you G sharp.

The following fingering chart is excellent and can be given with confidence to any student.

B \flat	B	C	C \sharp - D \flat	D	D \sharp - E \flat	E	F	F \sharp - G \flat	G	G \sharp - A \flat

A	A \sharp - B \flat	B	C	C \sharp - D \flat	D	D \sharp - E \flat	E	F	F \sharp - G \flat	G

G#-Ab	A	A#-Bb	B	C	C#-Db	D	D#-Eb	E	F	F#-Gb

G	G#-Ab	A	A#-Bb	B	C	C#-Db	D	D#-Eb	E	F

F#-Gb	F#-Gb	G#-Ab	G#-Ab	D#-Eb	C#-Db	F#-Gb	F#-Gb	D#-Eb	E

alternate fingerings

FOX PRODUCTS CORPORATION
 6110 S. SR 5, P.O. BOX 347
 SOUTH WHITLEY, INDIANA 46787-0347 U.S.A.

Janet Polk, bassoon, earned her Bachelor's degree in music education at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst and her Master's in music history at the University of New Hampshire. After graduation from UMass, she taught K-6 classroom music in the Montague, Massachusetts public school system for five years. Currently, she is principal bassoonist of Portland (Maine) Symphony and Vermont Symphony. She has also performed with the Springfield (Massachusetts) Symphony, New Hampshire Symphony, New Hampshire Music Festival, and Indian Hill Symphony and traveled to Honduras through the Partners of the Americas. As a member of the Block Ensemble, she has won prizes in the International Concert Artists Guild competition and John Knowles Paine competition and performed at the prestigious Round Top Festival in Texas.

In addition to her performing career, Ms. Polk teaches bassoon at the University of New Hampshire, Dartmouth College, Concord Community Music School, and St. Paul's school. As a clinician for the Fox Products Corporation, she presents workshops for music educators throughout the country. She has just completed an instructional video for beginning bassoonists for the Warner Brothers publications.

