

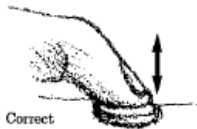
# Flashy Fingers

Developing good hand and finger positions can bring many positive benefits to your playing. Apart from the ability to play quickly and evenly, it's worth remembering that you need to have smooth finger technique in order for your sound to be legato and even. Nothing in flute playing is isolated so clunky fingers translate into uneven sound and conversely slick, efficient fingers help to make your sound beautifully legato.

Each finger has three knuckles separating the three phalanges, the thumb has two, and when your hand is relaxed your fingers will naturally curve slightly at each of these knuckles. Therefore the first part of call is to ensure that you curve your fingers without any knuckles hyper extending by popping through.



Soldan & Mellersh, 1993



Soldan & Mellersh, 1993

Strive to place each finger accurately onto the flute keys. No hangovers with fingers dangling off the edge or overshooting the keys.

Optimally when you hold your flute with a lovely three-point balance, your fingers will be curved, relaxed and sitting just a millimetre or two above the keys. When you engage a particular finger it will depress the key and return to the original rest position without flicking up and then back down to that rest position. Your aim is to eradicate any excess finger movement. Make a visual recording of your hands while playing some scales and see how you are fairing.



Soldan & Mellersh, 1993

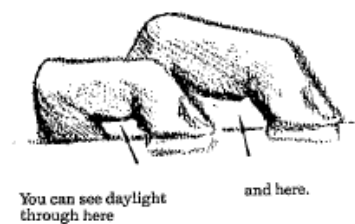
Lets have a look at each hand in turn, starting with the right hand. Allow your right hand to hang floppily down beside your body. Now without changing the shape of your hand, rest it on a table. Notice a few important points about your hand:

- When your hand is relaxed your fingers are gently curved
- Your finger nails are almost perpendicular to your thumb nail
- Your thumb is shorter than your fingers
- Note where your thumb is in relation to your pointer finger

If you wiggle your fingers they will feel quite free. Now deliberately protrude your thumb forward, making it poke out, longer than your fingers. Wiggle your fingers again. Are your fingers as free as before or rather gluey? Relax your hand down beside you again and then bring it onto the flute. Notice how the thumb naturally sits back a little, behind the flute. This really helps to free up those fingers. Also notice that your fingernails are predominantly horizontal while your thumbnail is almost at a right angle to your fingernails and has more of a vertical inclination.

Take note of where your thumb is in relation to your pointer finger. Is that relationship the same as when your hand was relaxed or has your thumb slipped down towards the foot joint, causing your knuckles to tilt downwards to the left?

Keep the knuckles up creating a nice tunnel under your fingers. I've nicknamed the shape created by your thumb and first finger *the mouse hole*. Always leave room for the mouse to return home. It looks like a backward letter *C* and definitely don't have any fingers resting on the mechanism.



Soldan & Mellersh, 1993

Try to avoid what I call the *Bermuda Triangle* of right hand positions. This is where pressure is exerted through the thumb and the little finger causing the Bermuda Triangle of tension bordered by the thumb, little finger and body of the flute. It's the *Bermuda Triangle* because a lot of notes get lost, never to be seen again, with such a tense hand position.

To obtain a good right hand positioning hold the note *G* with your left hand and rest the head joint on your left shoulder. Now let your right hand hang freely beside your body and then swing it up onto the flute without changing the position too much; just a bit of spreading to place your fingers accurately onto the keys. Also be sure that your hand is in direct alignment with your arm. Avoid a sagging wrist and any left or right ulnar deviation. As the ring finger is the weakest finger of the right hand, it can be very beneficial to place the ring finger onto the flute first and then settle all the other fingers around it.

Turning our attention to the left hand, be sure that all the fingers are gently curved and placed precisely onto the keys. Very commonly the *G* finger doesn't quite reach the key and the *G#* little finger sags or points off in a whole manner of directions, including up to the roof for some players!

To help reach these keys try releasing the wrist and allowing the palm of the hand to move down slightly in the direction of the foot joint. Move it just enough so that the ring *G* and *G#* fingers sit nicely onto their keys. You can also bring the flute forward with your right hand so that the distance from your left shoulder to the flute is not quite so far. The left hand thumb is at a right angle to the flute and gently curved.



Soldan & Mellersh, 1993

Developing good hand positions takes time and thoughtful work but it is definitely well worth the effort. Using a mirror and the ability to video yourself for some biofeedback is extremely beneficial. You could even create an album of your recordings over time to see the improvement. I find the scales exercises in Trevor Wye's *Technique*, volume 2 of *Practice Book For The Flute* (Novello) very useful as you can work on a single finger or a couple of fingers at a time. *Illustrated Flute Playing* by Robin Soldan and Jeanie Mellersh has plenty of attractive sketches to inspire great hand positions. A good approach is to work on one element at a time. Rather than attempting to improve everything all at once just choose one aspect to improve. Once that's on the way move on to the next thing and before long you'll have fabulous finger technique that is even, relaxed and whizzing along.

Soldan, R., & Mellersh, J. (1993) *Illustrated Flute Playing*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition. London: Minstead Publications

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