

# **SOME TIPS AND ADVICE FOR ADJUSTING YOUR CHANTER REED.**

by

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Your environment has a huge impact. Too damp, too dry, too hot, too cold, it will cause your reed to change. Sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. So, if you want to be able to enjoy your piping at its best, in all weathers, it is important that you should learn to adjust your reed and know how to 'quick fix' yourself into a happier place!

There are many ways to correct problems with a chanter reed. Some are temporary, some are permanent. Always act with care when deciding on a plan of action. I have broken them into three categories, 'Non-destructive', 'Destructive' and 'Intrusive'.

All 'destructive' methods should only be approached as a final solution, or, if your experience tells you that it is the best remedy for that particular ailment.

It is difficult to describe how much to scrape, or how much to close or open a bridle, so take it easy, try a small amount at a time, constantly checking the effect it has. Unfortunately, there are no dark secrets kept close to the chest by reedmakers. The only way to be proficient with your reeds is to learn and to practice. Everyone who makes a reed will break a reed. Anyone who never has to adjust or replace a reed is either very lucky, or is not engaged in good piping.

None of these tips require permanent alteration to your chanter. If you are in any doubt regarding your chanter, please refer to the maker.

**Good luck!!**

Disclaimer:

The following information is a guide to help you achieve your desired result. On occasion, for no apparent reason, it may not work. If the reed or chanter is of an unusual design or poor quality, again, you may not see the outcome you might hope for. I cannot be held responsible for any mishaps you may encounter, physically, mentally or spiritually, while using any of the information contained here. The most 'obvious' fix is not always the most suitable!! To correct a problem, you may have to cross-reference and apply more than one action to get there!!

Reeds are quare yokes.....

## The non-destructive techniques.

Action	Effects
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Closing the Bridle.*</b></p> <p>*you must not see any great visible change in the lip aperture. This is how reeds get broken. If the bridle needs excessive force to open or close the lips, the reeds construction is likely to be at fault.</p>	<p>Raises the Pitch</p> <p>Flattens Back D in relation to overall pitch.</p> <p>Eases Playability (less air pressure required to sound the reed).</p> <p>Flattens or 'narrows' the 2nd 8ve in relation to the 1st. (can have a more noticeable effect on high a and b)</p> <p>Can weaken back D, cause it to 'sink' under pressure.</p> <p>Can cause loss of Hard D or introduce 'autocran'</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Opening the Bridle.*</b></p> <p>*you must not see any great visible change in the lip aperture. This is how reeds get broken. If the bridle needs excessive force to open or close the lips, the reeds construction is likely to be at fault.</p>	<p>Drops the pitch.</p> <p>Sharpens Back D in relation to the overall pitch.</p> <p>Stiffens blades (requiring more air pressure to sound)</p> <p>Sharpens or 'widens' the 2nd 8ve in relation to the 1st 8ve.</p> <p>May cure some problems with E's (but may sharpen them).</p> <p>May improve Hard D.</p> <p>Can 'brighten' the tone.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Withdrawing the reed from the chanter.</b></p>	<p>Drops the pitch.</p> <p>Flattens Back D in relation to overall pitch.</p> <p>Sharpens or 'widens' the 2nd 8ve in relation to the 1st 8ve.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Inserting the reed deeper into the chanter.</b></p>	<p>Raises the pitch.</p> <p>Sharpens Back D in relation to the overall pitch.</p> <p>Flattens or 'narrows' the 2nd 8ve in relation to the 1st.</p> <p>Can improve/brighten tone.</p>

## The 'destructive' techniques.

This table looks at the effects on a reed that is already finished and set to play. These processes are also used in constructing a reed and have many profound effects on tuning not mentioned here but should not have any bearing on maintaining a reed that is already considered 'working'. You will need to take a lot of care here!! Obviously, there is a point of 'no return', where your reed may become unplayable. This, I believe, is only learnt through trial and error.

Action	Effects
<b>Scrape the bark at the sides of the 'V'.</b>	Eases the playability of the reed. Drops the overall pitch.
<b>Scrape the bottom of the 'V'.</b>	Eases playability, particularly the 1st 8ve. Can improve Hard D response and tone. Can lower pitch and flatten Back D in relation to overall pitch.
<b>Scrape/sand the lips (approx., the top 3 - 5mm of the blades).</b>	Can ease playability and add some 'zest' to the reed tone. May 'free up' a problematic 2nd 8ve E.
<b>Trimming the lips.</b>	Raises pitch. Sharpens back D in relation to overall pitch. Can stiffen the reed and may add a little 'zest' back into a 'tired' reed. Can cure 'breaking/croaking/crackling' back D. Improves the 'staccato' response of the reed.
<b>Trimming the corners of the lips.</b>	Some say this eases the reed a little. It is useful if the reed corners have been scraped/sanded a little too thin and are damaged. Can improve the 'staccato' response of the reed.
<b>Sanding or sanding the whole 'V'.</b>	<i>For effects, please refer to scraping lips and bottom of 'V'.</i> This is a very sensitive area. It is very easy to lose a reed here. BE CAREFUL! This should usually be approached as a last resort, but may be necessary after trimming the lips of the reed to reintroduce the original playability.
<b>Shortening the staple by cutting back at the base.</b>	Raises pitch. Will 'narrow' both 8ves. The shorter you make the staple, the greater the effect.

### 'Intrusive' techniques.

It is important to experiment with the following to achieve satisfactory results. A longer Rush, more Blu-Tak etc.,

<b>Action</b>	<b>Effects</b>
<b>Taping individual note holes</b>	Flattens note.
<b>Inserting Rush* into Chanter bore.</b> <b>*Generic term for anything inserted into staples or chanter bores to reduce the internal volume.</b>	Generally affects the length of the chanter that the 'rush' is inserted. The rush has the effect of flattening the pitch as a whole, but also has the effect of sharpening the 2nd 8ve (or flattening the 1st 8ve, depending how you look at it), the thickness of the 'rush' dictates the degree of alteration in tuning (thicker = flatter etc.,). The rush can be altered anywhere along the length by addition of adding some binding or blue-tak at/above/below a particular note hole to have a lesser or greater effect on that note.
<b>Roll of card inserted between E &amp; F hole. (This effectively reduces the bore diameter at the point it is inserted).</b>	Flattens E. Can cure 'autocran'.
<b>Roll of card inserted into Chanter Bell End.</b>	Flattens D. Can improve Hard D response and cure autocran.  Can lose Hard D and introduce 'autocran'.

This is by no means exhaustive or definitive. When applying these 'tweaks' you may notice other changes not mentioned here, remember them for later!! If you have any questions comments or otherwise, please contact me through my website [www.reedshaman.co.uk](http://www.reedshaman.co.uk) Good Luck!