

## Six Breathing Exercises for Flute Players

*To deepen your tone, breath control, and expressive playing*

### Introduction

Through years of experience, I'm convinced that flute playing is rooted in **breathing**. The depth of the breath, how we take it, how we release it — all influence the quality of our sound. The word "breath" (息, *iki*) even shares the character for "heart/mind" (心) in Japanese — a beautiful symbol of how personal and expressive breath truly is.

Here are six breathing exercises I recommend for flute players of all levels.

### 1. Resistance Breathing – The Pipe Exercise

Flutes lack the resistance of reed instruments. That's why we must *create* a certain resistance to produce a focused and rich tone.

Using a simple toy called a "pipe blower" (or a modified version with aluminum foil to add weight), try to keep the ball or object floating steadily. This helps build **breath pressure control** and is especially useful for piccolo players as well.

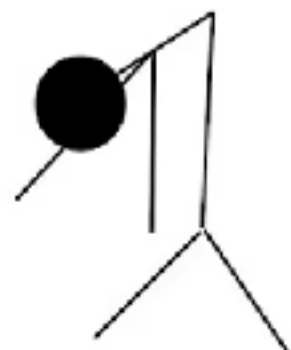


**Goal:** Hold the object at a stable level, not too high or too low, for as long as possible.

### 2. Natural Abdominal Breathing – “Dog Panting”

This playful exercise mimics the way dogs pant after running. Lean forward slightly or get on all fours to encourage **natural abdominal breathing**.

Keep your mouth relaxed and open as if saying "ha," and focus on short, rhythmic exhalations using your belly — no effort on the inhale.



**Rhythm:** Use a metronome at 120 bpm and aim for 2 short puffs per beat (like 8th notes). It's a fun, effective way to engage the diaphragm gently.

### 3. Bellows Breathing – Awareness & Intensity

Inspired by yoga, this powerful breath exercise mimics a blacksmith's bellows. Sit down. Exhale sharply through the **nose** while pulling in the stomach. Then inhale by releasing the belly.

Repeat 10 times, and on the 10th **inhale**, take a full deep breath and **hold** it for as long as comfortable.

**Tip:** Let your belly move like an infinity sign ( $\infty$ ) — fluid and continuous. This builds lung capacity and body awareness.

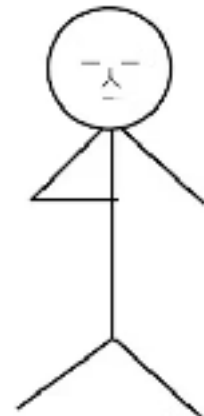
### 4. Elevator Breathing – Inner Imagery for Calmness

A gentle and relaxing breath imagery practice. Inhale deeply through your **nose**. Then exhale slowly through your **mouth**, imagining an elevator gently descending from the center of your throat, through your chest, abdomen, and out between your legs.

Follow this descent with your **mind and hands**, moving your palm downward slowly.

Close your eyes for better concentration.

**Do this 10 times**, using slow, smooth breathing. It's especially effective for managing performance anxiety and developing tone color in high registers.



### 5. 1:4:2 Ratio Breathing – Control & Endurance

A classical yoga method used to increase **lung capacity and breath control**. Breathe through your nose in a **1:4:2 ratio**:

- Inhale for 5 seconds
- Hold for 20 seconds
- Exhale for 10 seconds

That's one set. Repeat **5 times**.

As you improve, increase the inhale time gradually (e.g., 6-24-12).  
Stay seated, relaxed, and still. Avoid any muscle tension.

## 6. Himalayan Walking Breath – Rhythm & Aerobic Training

This meditative breathing technique is done while walking. Begin with **breathing out**. Match your footsteps to your breath:

- 4 steps: exhale–exhale–exhale–exhale
- 4 steps: inhale–inhale–inhale–inhale  
Repeat twice (4 bars)

Then move to 5 steps, then 6, and so on.  
If it becomes difficult, pause and restart from 4 steps.

This method strengthens your **cardio-respiratory endurance** and gives a *tactile awareness* of the breath's texture — a key to expressive tone control.

# Three Relaxation Exercises for Flute Players

*Free your body, expand your tone*

## Introduction

At a summer music academy, I once took a seminar on body mechanics. The exercises were fun and practical — and when I returned to lessons, my teacher immediately said, “*Your sound has improved dramatically!*”

Playing music isn't only about technique and analysis — it's also physical. Many musicians carry hidden tension. Just a small posture correction can make the sound travel 3 to 4 times further!

Understanding how to release tension and use the body efficiently is an essential part of instrumental practice.

## 1. Balancing on One Leg – Finding Natural Alignment

Inspired by yoga and used to develop concentration, this simple exercise reveals your natural balance:

**Stand on one leg with your eyes closed.**  
Use your arms for balance if needed.

At first, it may be difficult — especially if your mind is busy. But closing the eyes helps reduce distractions and lets the body search for *natural stability*. Over time, you'll feel your **center of gravity lower** and your stance become more grounded.

Note for women: some may find they stand with an arched lower back and the pelvis tilted forward (the “duck tail” posture). This compresses the lower lungs and makes balancing harder.

Try imagining your internal organs gently settling within the pelvic bowl — it helps straighten and align your body naturally.



With a stable lower body, the upper body feels freer — and that reflects in your **posture and sound**.

## 2. Shoulder Release – Arm Circles & Scapula Awareness

Tension in the shoulders affects everything: breath, neck, sound projection. Here's a solo exercise to release it:

- Gently rotate your arms in **slow circles** — forward, backward, side to side.
- Focus not on the hands, but on the **base of the arm**, near the shoulder blades.

Avoid fast, jerky movements or forcing range. The goal is to become aware of the **scapula's motion**.

You can stand near a wall or place a hand gently on your shoulder blades to feel their movement. After several minutes, drop your arms — you may feel a shift, as if your arms are **re-attached** to your body with new awareness.

When we truly feel our arms as separate extensions (like a coat hanger attached to the torso), we avoid lifting from the shoulders. Instead, we support the flute from **below**, with more freedom.

For older players: all movement becomes more demanding with age — so be kind to your body. Move within your own safe range.

## 3. Upper Body Expansion – Space & Perspective

This duo exercise helps you reclaim **physical space** — especially useful when we're stuck in small movements, staring at scores or screens.

**How to do it** (with a partner):

- One person sits on a chair, the other stands beside them.
- The seated person stretches one arm toward their partner, who supports the wrist.
- The seated person places their other hand on the base of their neck (near the collarbones).
- Slowly turn your head toward your extended arm, making **eye contact** with your partner. Then slowly turn the head in the opposite direction.
- Feel how far your vision goes. Sense the spine, shoulders, and head turning.



This expands awareness of your **surrounding space**. Many realize how narrowly they were focusing before — and how much room they have to breathe and move.

After this, students often hold their instruments more fluidly, with gestures that feel open and expressive.

Try it, and discover the power of space and body awareness in music.