

A Step-by-Step Process for Learning to Double Tongue

Adapted from an article by **BRIAN REICHENBACH**

Double and triple tonguing can seem like very difficult circus tricks. How can I make my tongue go that fast??? But it's easier than you might think if you approach it like developing any skill. It takes little bits of intentional practice built up over days, weeks, months, and even years.

Double Tonguing on flute and instruments of the brass family is produced by a "TA-KA." tongue motion. Here are two, three-step processes that I use to teach my students:

A. Say it-Blow it-Play it



Double Tonguing Rhythm

1. **Say It** – It's a tongue twister, for sure. So begin by simply saying it slowly and steadily. "TaKaTaKa-Ta" for brass and flutes.
2. **Blow It** – Now tongue the same pattern while blowing the air, like you're blowing through a straw.
3. **Play It** – Finally, put it together on one long tone through the instrument. Don't try to change pitches yet. If you have trouble getting it going, start making a sound simply by playing a whole note and then add the tonguing combination.

Once you have the basic habit of the syllables without stopping your air or buzz, this next process involves honing the syllables. The key is listening closely so that the "T" and "K" syllables are indistinguishable from one another and they are evenly spaced in time.

B. All T's-All K's-Multiple Tongue

1. **Play all "Ta's"** – This is simply single tonguing like you've always played. This should be your model of clarity and control.
2. **Play all "Ka's"** – The key to multiple tonguing, of course, is the syllable "Ka." Develop the confidence and fluidity to execute this with as much clarity as the "Ta."
3. **Multiple Tongue** – Now put it together ("TaKaTaKa"). Slow is good for now. Listen for evenness, making sure that neither the "Ta" or "Ka" sticks out in volume or jumps ahead in time.

Double Tonguing Process B

Additional challenge:

In the second process, between steps 2 and 3 add inverted multiple tonguing that begins with the “K.” For double tonguing it will be “KaTaKaTa.” It seems crazy and will certainly throw you for a loop at first, but it 1) forces the “K” to be as strong as the “T” and 2) makes the final step seem like a piece of cake!

Inverted Double Tonguing Pattern

Tips:

- Start with a note in the middle register. Later, you can develop tonguing in the lower and upper parts of your range.
- If you’re just learning to multiple tongue, start with the first process and then go onto the second one. But don’t hesitate to go back to the first process even if you’ve been double and triple tonguing for a long time.
- The essential challenge for all of us is making sure the air moves past the tongue to reach the lips and instrument. Oftentimes, when we focus so much on our tongue, the air goes on vacation. No air=no vibration=no sound!
- Go slowly and steadily, listening for evenness every step of the way. Play long on each note. (I know, it seems counterintuitive.) If it sounds like it is galloping or one syllable is louder than another, slow it down further until it’s all in control.
- Never use “tut.” This actually doubles your effort by starting AND stopping each note with your tongue. The end of one syllable is actually the beginning of the next.
- Keep the “K” forward. Don’t let it get stuck in the back of your throat. Instead, it should be as forward as possible, just behind the “T” using the front-middle of your tongue.
- Try less explosive consonants like “D” and “G,” especially as you speed up. Stay firm with these consonants, though.