

Ordering Reed Making Supplies: What Do I Need?

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Below are **entry-level items** for a basic tool kit. Most can be purchased at Midwest Musical Imports (www.mmimports.com) or any other company that sells reed making supplies.

The Knife and Sharpening Stone

The most important item in any oboist's tool kit is the knife. A good reed knife is one that keeps its edge with a reasonable amount of sharpening. Many oboists use at least two different knives: one to do the heavy scraping (i.e. removing bark and rough scraping the reed) and one to do detailed finishing work (i.e. thinning the delicate tip). Every professional oboist has an opinion regarding a reed making knife, so make sure you check with your private teacher (if you have one) before buying one.

In my experience, I have found the following knives to be an excellent value, particularly for beginning or intermediate reed makers:

Rough Scraping & Balancing

- [Chiarugi Double Hollow Ground Reed Knife](#) (Midwest Musical Imports, \$48)

Finishing Work & Precision Scraping

- **MCW Deluxe Razor Knife** (\$57, Mark Chudnow Woodwinds, 800-780-4340)

Learning how to properly sharpen your knife is extremely important. There are many different ways to sharpen a knife and it is a skill that is best taught through the guidance of a teacher. I will briefly explain my three-step process in the *Sharpening the Knife* handout.

If using a stone, I prefer the:

- [Norton India Fine Sharpening Stone](#) at least 6" in length.

You will need a **wooden cutting block** at least 1.5" for clipping the tip.

The **mandrel** should snugly fit your staples flush to the end of the staple. If just starting out as a reed maker, I recommend ordering the mandrel with a new set of 47 mm staples that fit it.

- [Chiarugi #2 Mandrel](#)

Oboe staples

Fig. 1: Oboe staples



The second most important item in reed making is the oboe staple. Oboe staples come in different lengths. They also have different sizes and shapes at the top of the staple (the top of the non-cork part). You may be tempted to reuse staples from old manufactured reeds when first starting out as a reed maker. Unfortunately, this may cause more problems for you as these staples may not be of the same length, have a consistent opening size, or fit your new mandrel properly. The staple is the one part of reed making that can be consistent for you, so it is very important that you use staples that are of the same length and opening size at the top of the staple. **It is also extremely important that the staple fit snugly and flush with the end of your mandrel!** Investing in a good set of 10-12 staples will pay off in the long run and ultimately help lessen your frustration with reed making.

I prefer oboe staples that are 47 mm in length and have a narrow oval shape at the top of the staple (see Fig. 2). I recommend investing in a set of good, properly shaped oboe staples that will perfectly fit your mandrel. **Therefore, when buying a mandrel, ask the supplier to recommend the staple that is sized specifically for that mandrel.**



Fig. 2: Opening of F. Loreé oboe staple, \$5 each (www.mmimports.com)

The length of the staple affects your overall level of intonation. If you find your oboe's intonation is consistently pitched flat (no matter what reed you are using), you may want to try 46 mm staples. American oboists, if called to play in Europe where the tuning of the orchestra is at A=442 instead of A=440, often switch to 45mm staples so that they have an easier time playing at the higher pitch level.

The shape at the top of the staple can sometimes be referred to as "small, medium, or large." (see Fig. 2). A small opening usually means a small tip opening in the reed. This usually tends to make the crow "sit-up" in pitch, which will likely make your overall intonation sharp when playing, particularly in the second octave. A large, rounded staple opening usually means the tip opening of your finished reed will be rather large. This means the overall crow may tend to be flat, you will feel like you have to bite your second octave notes up to pitch, and the overall response of the reed may be lacking. A large staple opening may also mean you will have trouble getting the sides of the cane to seal when tying at your usual length. A medium staple opening which is more of a flat oval or football shape (see Fig. 2, p. 7) is generally the best way to go until you better understand the relationship between crow, staple, and cane.

I prefer to use **Chiarugi Traditional #2 staples** (\$4.50, www.mmimports.com). While they are pricey, they are consistent and yield great results.

Oboe Cane

The biggest challenge you will face as a reed maker will be finding a good quality cane source. Unfortunately, it is impossible to recommend a specific source as the quality of cane can vary depending on a multitude of different factors such as where it was grown, when it was harvested, how long it was aged, etc. As a beginning reed maker, you will be ordering **gouged, shaped, and folded oboe cane**. Oboe cane is highly preferential and every oboist will have his or her own opinion regarding what cane, gouge, and shape is the best.

There are three things that are important to know about cane before you buy it.

1. The **diameter** of the tube from which the cane is taken. (I prefer **10-10.5** diameter cane.)
2. The **gouge** of the inside of the cane. (I like cane that is between **.58-60** in the middle.)
3. The **shape** of the cane. There are lots of different shapes out there and it can get very confusing! In general, I prefer a narrower shape. For beginning reed makers, I suggest looking for one that is between **7.0- 7.1** mm across the tip. Most shapes are known by name. Oboe shapes that I prefer are:
 - a. Caleb -1
 - b. Hubbard Z
 - c. Gilbert -1
 - d. Gilbert -1N
 - e. Brannen X
 - f. Pfeiffer/Mack

Ideally, you should order what your teacher recommends. They will have a preference and be comfortable with one particular shape. On average, you will spend between \$3-\$4 a piece for high quality oboe cane.

Most importantly, no matter where you order your cane, **always order the same diameter, gouge, and shape** until you feel confident in your reed making skills. Believe it or not, small variances in the above can completely change the sound of the crow and the way the reed sounds in your oboe. This can make it difficult for you to adjust your scraping unless you have a good understanding of how the crow works and great knife technique.

I recommend ordering from companies or reed makers in which you can specify diameter, gouge, and shape. Companies or reed makers who advertise those options generally exercise more quality control over the cane they sell. It will tend to be a more consistent product. My students have had good experiences when ordering from the following places:

- <http://doublereedgirl.com>
- <https://www.rdgwoodwinds.com>
- <https://www.mmimports.com/>
- <https://hodgeproductsinc.com>
- [etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com) (search for “shaped oboe cane”)

Other Essential Items

The **plaque** is used when scraping on the tip and heart. I prefer a metal plaque.

- [Oboe Pointed Plaque](#)

FF thread for tying.

- FF strength nylon thread

6 inch Ruler with millimeters

- Six inch steel ruler with metric on one side and inches on the other

Beeswax is used to coat the thread and make it less slippery when tying. Check your local farmer’s market for the cheapest price.

A **C-clamp** (3”-6”) is used as an anchor point when tying. Make sure you purchase a size large enough to clamp onto your desk. They can be purchased at your local hardware store, Home Depot, Menard’s, etc.

