

Flute Selection Guide

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The Material

At the beginner level, a **SILVER-PLATED** instrument is perfectly sufficient. In fact, it's preferable - the silver usually covers nickel, a more durable material. For young students, it's important to make sure that you don't invest a ton of money into an instrument that will be dropped, banged on stands, and passed around. Even for adult beginners, accidents are hard to avoid until you really get used to the feel of the flute in your hands.

Once a student has been playing for a few years and shows a long-term interest, you may want to upgrade. In this case, you can choose a **SOLID SILVER** instrument or, if you're really on a budget, choose an instrument with a **SOLID SILVER HEADJOINT**. In either case, you may choose an instrument with silver-plated keys. This does not affect the sound of the instrument, and is fine in a step-up instrument for an intermediate player.

At both the beginner and intermediate level, you may encounter the option to have a **GOLD-PLATED LIP PLATE**. The lip-plate is the part of the flute that touches the chin. While gold-plating on the lip-plate does not affect the sound, it is a good option for students who may have an allergy to silver. But be careful - gold-plating can wear off over time, so if you're just getting it for cosmetic reasons, you're probably better off without it.

At the professional level, flutists will often choose to incorporate other metals, such as **GOLD** or **PLATINUM**. Flutes can be purchased with gold or platinum in just the riser (the part of the lip-plate over which the air splits), lip-plate, headjoint, body tubing, or all over, including keys. At this level, subtle differences can be heard between the metals. For instance, gold is often said to have a warm, dark, round sound, while platinum is a bit brighter and projects more. I personally play a flute with a solid silver body and a gold headjoint. I prefer the warmth of the gold in the headjoint, but I like to maintain the projection of the silver in the body.

Open or Closed Hole?

Young flutists often wonder whether open-hole or **FRENCH MODEL** are really that much better.

In short, no. Flutists at the beginner level do not need open-hole flutes. Closed-hole, or **PLATEAU** model flutes are perfectly fine, and easier to play.

The difference has to do with minute variations in the pitch. Open-hole flutes are better vented when the keys are not depressed. But this is a very impractical reason to buy an open-hole flute - the differences are so small that they are practically undetectable.

A much better reason to buy an open-hole flute is because of extended techniques! As flutists advance, they will start to use certain techniques outside of the standard flute sound. Some of these require non-standard use of the keys, such as "half-holes" or depressing just the ring of the key without closing the hole.

For this reason, once it's time to upgrade, it's probably smart to get an open-hole flute, but that's mostly to plan ahead.

Other Options

Here is a list of all the options you might run into on your search for a new flute. Items that I consider to be essential have an asterisk (*).

***B FOOT:** This is an extension of the flute joint that allows the flute to play a low B, one note lower than the standard C. This note is being called for more and more in music, so I recommend this option for intermediate level and higher.

OFFSET G: Slightly lowers the G key, the one used by the left hand ring finger. This is a more ergonomic hand position, although it requires an extra rod which makes the flute slightly heavier. This is standard on beginner flutes and becomes an option at the intermediate level. My flute does have an offset G. A flute without this option would be referred to as **INLINE G**.

SPLIT E: This is an extra mechanism that allows 2 keys that usually operate together to function separately. This makes it easier to play a high E without cracking, which any flutist knows is a challenge. I choose not to have a split E on my flute because it interferes with certain very advanced extended techniques, but I know many flutists who swear by it.

***GIZMO:** This option is only available with B-foot flutes. Also known as the **High C Facilitator Key**, this key allows the B key to close by itself, which can help with notes in the extreme high register. It almost always comes on B-foot flutes, but it's best to double check and make sure.

***C# TRILL KEY:** Allows for an easier fingering for B to C# trills, high G to A trills, and many other tricky fingerings. At the advanced, college, and pre-professional level, I feel that this key is an essential addition.

D# ROLLER KEY: A tiny roller placed between the D# and C# keys, allowing the right hand pinky to slide between them more easily. Helpful in some circumstances, but not essential.

POINTED ARMS: Also called Y-arms. Technically, these are meant to extend from the mechanism and depress the key from the center. Realistically, they make very little difference and are mostly cosmetic. However, they're usually found on higher-end flutes. They probably shouldn't be a deciding factor in your purchase.

CURVED HEADJOINT This option is for very small flutists whose arms are not long enough to reach a standard flute. If you can reach a standard flute comfortably, I recommend avoiding this option.

Recommended Brands

I have taught many flutists and played many flutes. Some brands just play better than others! Some brands also hold up better than others. In the case of a flute, it's usually worth it to pay for a respected brand. Below are my recommendations based on my experiences. Once you get past the beginning level, it's always best if you can try several flutes side-by-side to see what works best for you, since everyone is different and will sound different on each instrument. They're listed according to price-range.

Under \$700 (Beginner):

- **Yamaha**
- **Jupiter**
- **Di Zhao**
- **Pearl**
- **Gemeinhardt**

\$1000-\$2000 (Early Intermediate):

- **Avanti by Brannen (I can't recommend this brand enough!)**
- **Yamaha**
- **Jupiter**
- **Pearl**

\$2500-\$5000 (Intermediate):

- **Avanti (Lower price, but absolutely comparable)**
- **Resona by Burkart**
- **Muramatsu**
- **Pearl**
- **Prima Sankyo**

\$5000-\$10,000 (Advanced, Semi-Professional):

- **Brannen (Millenium)**
- **Muramatsu**
- **Miyazawa**
- **Altus**
- **Pearl**
- **Burkart & Phelan**

\$10,000 and up (Professional):

At this level, it really comes down to player preference. These are my favorites.

- **Brannen**
- **Arista**
- **Nagahara**
- **Muramatsu**
- **Emmanuel**
- **Burkart**
- **Powell**

Used Flutes

Believe it or not, buying used becomes a better option as you become more advanced. Here's why:

1) You can try it out yourself. Once you can play enough to test out your potential flute, you can check for leaks and other mechanical problems yourself. If you buy used before you can play proficiently, you may get a flute that doesn't work well and not find out for several months or even years!

2) Advanced flutes are generally well-cared for. Beginners have lots of accidents. Flutists with higher level flutes tend to take better care of them, and therefore are more likely to pass on an instrument that has been well-cared for.

3) More reputable companies sell advanced used flutes. It's a good idea to buy a used instrument through a reputable dealer. They will usually offer some sort of guarantee if there is a problem, and it's safer than sending your money to an individual you don't know. The trouble is, most reputable dealers don't sell used flutes at the beginner level.

However, that's not to say that you can't buy a good used instrument at any level. Here are a few ground rules:

1) Test the instrument. Or if you can't test it yourself, hire someone to do it. If you're studying privately, you can ask your teacher for help. If you're not, find a local teacher to consult with you. You can usually get someone to help you for the cost of one lesson. If the person/company you're buying from doesn't allow a trial period, DON'T BUY IT. Look somewhere else.

2) If you can, buy from a reputable dealer such as Flute World, J.L. Smith & Co., or The Flute Center of New York. These places will usually either fix up the flute before you buy it or offer a warranty (or both). If you experience problems, they will usually work with you, whereas if you buy from an individual, you're probably on your own.

3) Get an estimate for any necessary repairs if you do end up buying from an individual. Sometimes small problems can be costly to fix, and conversely, sometimes big problems can be quite simple. It's important to know how much you're going to have to invest in repairs in order to add that onto the cost of the flute.

4) If you want to buy on ebay just make sure to keep the previous rules in mind. Check on things like trial periods, repair policies, guarantees and warranties, and return policies. If these things aren't satisfactory, you may end up with a really good price on a flute that won't work - and that's no good!

Other Places to Find a Deal

If you don't want to risk buying used...

One other option is to buy "scratch and dent" instruments from dealers. These instruments are usually like-new except for some cosmetic damage, which is often barely noticeable. Woodwind & Brasswind usually offers a good selection of these instruments.

You can also watch for sales or check music stores for "demo" instruments. These are used for trials and eventually retired and sold at a discount.

Resources

Flute World

www.fluteworld.com

Woodwind & Brasswind

www.wwbw.com

Flute Specialists

www.flutespecialists.com

Carolyn Nussbaum Music

www.flute4u.com

J.L. Smith and Company

www.flutesmith.com

Flute Center of New York

<http://www.flutes4sale.com/>