

# Teach Alternate Fingerings Earlier

By Nestor Herszbaum

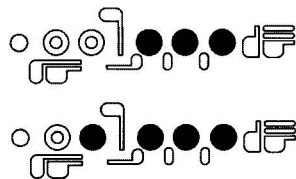
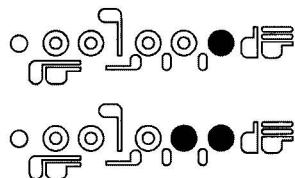
Although professional flutists use alternate fingerings on a regular basis, many teachers fail to teach them to young players. They think students should be more advanced before learning them to avoid confusion between alternates and regular fingerings. This is a mistake because these extra fingerings often make difficult passages easier and provide additional tone colors.

Students will learn alternates easily when teachers introduce them after teaching all basic fingerings from low C through fourth-octave C or D. Young players should practice scales and arpeggios with basic fingerings. Next I introduce trills as they arise in solo repertoire and then offer students a few of the more important alternatives, such as second-octave C#.

Students should learn when to use an alternate and how to choose the best fingering for a specific passage. Trill fingerings are a good example of when to use alternate fingerings. Flutists would never play an E-F# trill with regular fingerings, yet they perform the same finger pattern in a fast passage without using an alternate fingering. Another example is using the right-hand middle finger for low and middle F#. This is a good choice in fast passages but not desirable at phrase endings or in slow tempos because the pitch is flat.

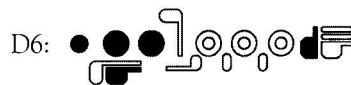
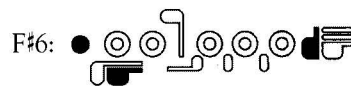
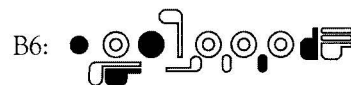
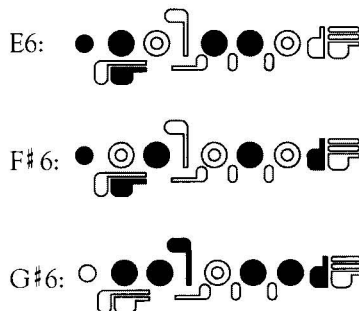
Harmonic fingerings are easily learned from exercises in Robert Dick's *Tone Development Through Extended Techniques* and Trevor Wye's *Practice Book for the Flute*. These books acquaint students with various tone colors while strengthening embouchure muscles.

Perhaps the most notorious note on the flute is middle C#, which is quite sharp and has a different tone color than the neighboring notes. Players can improve it, however, by directing the air lower into the flute and by using alternate fingerings. Suggested alternatives are:



These fingerings have the additional benefit of allowing players to switch rapidly from C# to middle D or D# because fewer fingers have to move. While the basic C# fingering includes the right-hand pinky finger, the alternates work equally well with or without the pinky. I use the pinky when C# precedes a D# and omit the pinky when C# precedes a D.

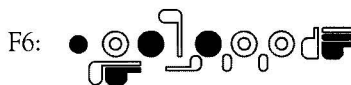
Substitute fingerings for third-octave E, F#, and G# lower the pitch for these generally sharp notes, while improving tone quality and creating smooth note connections.



Specific musical passages from solo and orchestral literature that might benefit from other fingerings include the end of the first movement from Prokofiev's Sonata.



Third-octave Bb is quite low on most flutes, and this passage is marked *pianissimo* in many editions. Try these fingerings to raise the pitch without struggling to play softly.



Awkward passages, such as this one from the fourth movement of the *Classical Symphony* by Sergei Prokofiev are much easier when alternate fingerings are used.



Many performers use harmonic fingerings on the F# and D and a substitute fingering for the A because of the extreme tempo marking,  $\text{♩} = 152$ .

To experiment with other alternatives, modify basic and harmonic fingerings by covering or uncovering keys, covering a portion of a hole, or depressing the ring without covering the hole.



Flutist Nestor Herszbaum has taught in the preparatory department of the University of Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and Creighton

University. He frequently performs avant-garde, popular, and Baroque music on period instruments, and he is the author of *Alternative Fingerings for the Flute*.