

# Intonation in the Flute Section

*or, what can you do if everyone is playing a different pitch?*

Suggestions from Dr. Shelley Collins  
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1. Be willing to compromise.
  - a. If you're in tune with the tuner but not with your section, you're not in tune!
  - b. Don't take it personally. ☺
2. Memorize this:
  - a. The longer the flute, the lower the pitch.
  - b. The shorter the flute, the sharper the pitch!
3. Memorize this:
  - a. If you're sharp, pull out.
  - b. If you're flat, push in.
4. We can tolerate sharpness more easily than flatness.
  - a. If you start high, you might not realize that you are out of tune. Therefore, if you aren't sure if you're out of tune...
  - b. start **low** and slowly raise the pitch. You'll hear the sound "ring" when you are in tune.
5. Listen to the bottom of the chord. Don't just try to play in tune with the flutes; listen to the low brass and bassoons and match their pitch.
6. Two flutes playing the same pitch might *still* sound out of tune!
  - a. Match tone "color" by changing the vowel shape in your mouth (yawning helps). Think "ah" or "oh" instead of "ee."
  - b. Match vibrato speed/shape.
7. If in doubt...roll out!
8. Look at the music.
  - a. Does your *entire* section really need to play that high C? Consider asking your band director if most of the section should play down an octave or two.
  - b. Are you all trilling correctly? (**Rule of thumb: Always trill up to the next note in the scale.** Check the key signature to be sure.)
  - c. Check for correct fingerings, especially in the high register.
  - d. Add the fingers of the right hand to 2<sup>nd</sup> octave C# (usually the sharpest note on the flute)
9. Know your own pitch tendencies.
  - a. Do you know which notes are sharp or flat on your flute? Use a tuner and tune *every note* on your flute. Work with a friend so you can tune without looking at the tuner. Make a chart showing the pitch of each note, and practice playing them in tune with your tuner. (If you don't have a tuner, look for a smartphone app.)
  - b. Check that the cork in the headjoint is in the correct position.