

HOLDING THE CHANTER

Brett Tidswell, National Principal of Piping.

One of the most important lessons someone will learn when they begin piping is how to hold the chanter correctly. Their hand position will have significant consequences during their entire piping career and may inhibit later progress if bad habits are learnt early.

The hands should be very relaxed when holding the chanter. The fingers should not be bent at the joints, nor should they be straight and rigid. The chanter should be held lightly, ensuring the fingers are able to move up and down very rapidly.

To demonstrate how to hold the chanter, let your hands hang naturally relaxed by your side as shown.



Shake any tension out of the hands and then place them on the chanter, without significant alteration of finger position.

The fingers of your top (left) hand should rest with the holes beneath your end pads. The hand should be angled downwards and the top fingers may be positioned closer to the joint than the bottom or E finger. The bottom (right) hand should use the end pad of your little finger and the middle pads on the remaining three. It is worth looking at photographs of top players as they all have correct hand positions. It is rare to see a top player whose hands look buckled and awkward.



The thumb of the bottom hand should be placed on the chanter between the index and middle finger. This gives strength and balance to the bottom hand. Too high and you weaken the bottom fingers, too low and you risk tension and cramping in the hand. (See the image below).



The thumb of the top hand should be placed on the high A hole and will be angled slightly with the hole closer to the top of the pad, as shown above.

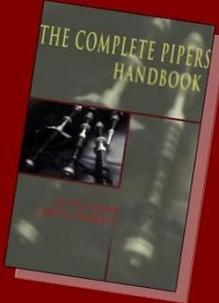
The wrists should not be significantly bent so the arms form a relaxed arc to the hands.

I have taught all pipers to play with the left hand on top be they right or left handed. The left hand is dominant in piping and therefore every left handed player I have taught has found that they have a distinct advantage having their dominant hand on top. This is a matter of personal choice, but does save a lot of problems in the future with band playing and bag purchases etc. I would not use this as a strict rule however as some learners may find this very difficult, although I am yet to find one.

Students should regularly look at their hands in a mirror and ensure that they maintain a good posture and hand position whilst playing on the chanter and also when progressing to the Bagpipe.



The most comprehensive guide available today for the set up, maintenance and refinement of the Bagpipe is “The Complete Pipers Handbook”. Sales of this publication help fund the freely available school of piping website. Copies can be purchased here: <http://www.schoolofpiping.com/handbook.html>



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