

# A Complete Approach to Overtones

Vivid Sound and Extended Range



by Ben Britton

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# Introduction

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One of the most efficient ways to improve saxophone sound or tone is through overtone practice. Just a minute or two of proper overtone practice immediately increases the clarity and richness of your tone and increases your ability to maintain a great sound while playing technically difficult music. Regularly practicing overtones will lead to consistently achieving those ends and extending your range into the altissimo register. Mastering overtones can result in a near four-octave range with a consistent and beautiful sound throughout.

The materials in this book address a wide range of player experience. Beginners will find the aids they need to achieve their first overtones, and players who can already play a wide range of overtones will find exercises that improve and expand their abilities as well. The exercises included in this text will help players of every level progress in their mastery of the overtone series and the saxophone.

## How to Use This Book

The various exercises presented in this method provide diverse approaches to practicing overtones. Each chapter categorizes a type of exercise and progresses in difficulty from exercise to exercise. You are encouraged to work on multiple chapters in tandem in order to get the most out of your overtone practice.

Generally, each exercise advances through its entire reasonable range. As a result, you may often find that you cannot complete every iteration of an exercise. Work on the portions of each exercise that you are able to execute, and feel free to move ahead when you reach iterations that go beyond your current range. You should only expect to perfect an exercise up to the highest overtone you can consistently play. Over time, your range will increase, and you can and should revisit these exercises to work on previously impossible iterations.

Novice players should start at the beginning of the book, but they should immediately follow the principles outlined above. Even the exercises in the opening chapters of the book allow for both beginners and advanced players to benefit, so practice each exercise up through the range that you are able to achieve. Then, move ahead to the next exercise.

Intermediate and advanced players can turn to any chapter of the book. Each chapter has its own approach and benefits, and you will find varied challenges throughout. All players should consider including a regiment of long overtones in their daily practice. This is the most consistent way to maintain your tone technique and ensure you consistently achieve a good tone.

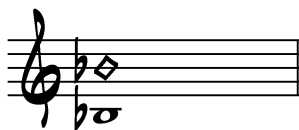
Sound clips have been provided for the exercises in the section 'Slurring Up the Overtone Series', which can be found at <http://www.benbrittonjazz.com/completeapproach>.

# Understanding the Notation

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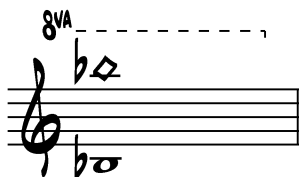
## Overtone

The hollow diamond note head represents the intended sounding pitch of the overtone, and the lower note, with the traditional note head, represents the actual or fundamental fingering used.



## Overtone with 8va or 15ma

The 8va bracket indicates that the pitches underneath should be played an octave higher, and the 15ma bracket indicates two octaves higher. When used above overtone notation, the 8va or 15ma only applies to the sounding pitch indicated by the diamond shaped note head. It does not apply to the fundamental fingering indicated by the lower traditional note head.



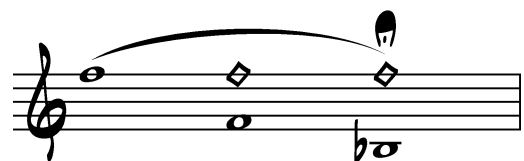
## Rhythmically Specific Notation

Some of the exercises suggest exact rhythms. The lower note heads, which indicate the actual fingerings, also give the rhythmic information. In addition, play traditional notation, like the first quarter note below, just as you typically would.



## Rhythmically Free Notation

Other exercises do not indicate exact rhythmic values for each note. Instead, they consist of a chain of whole notes within a single measure. Play these taking as much time as you need to play each note clearly and comfortably.

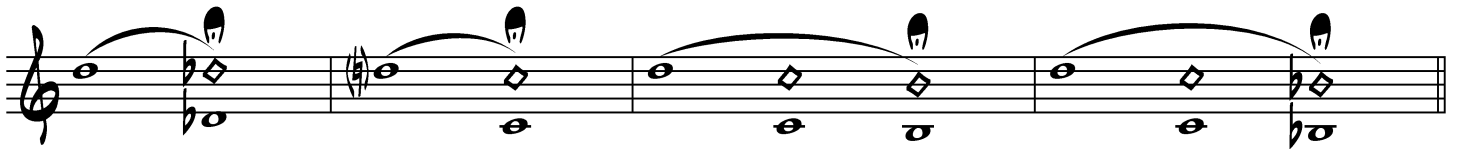


# Overtone Training Wheels

The following techniques give you options for easing into an overtone when you are not able to hit it straight on. You might find that you have to use these techniques for long periods before you are able to produce a given overtone without any aids.

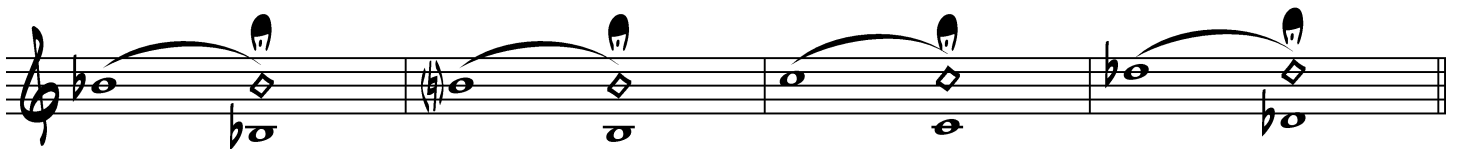
## Easy Descent: 1st Overtone

Some players find it difficult to begin on the first overtone above low B-flat, B, C and D-flat. The technique notated below allows you to slur down from the D in the middle of the staff, which is an easy starting place.



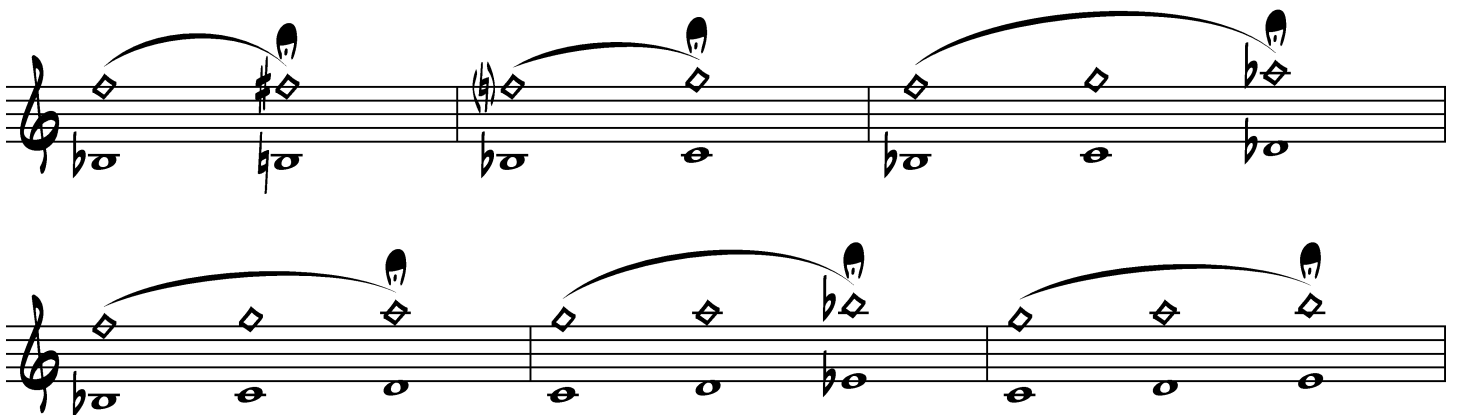
## Slurring from the Normal Fingering: 1st Overtone

An alternate way and slightly harder way to approach these first overtones would be to start the note on the normal fingering and then slur to the overtone fingering. Work on perfecting this technique as well as the previous one. The two approaches will benefit your technique in different ways.



## Slurring up by Step: 2nd Overtone

Once you are able to produce a given overtone, it is often easy to slur up by step to achieve the same partial in the adjacent series. The starting point below is the second overtone over B-flat, which most players find relatively easy to achieve. If that is not true for you, then skip ahead to the next exercise, "Slurring from the Normal Fingering: 2nd Overtone", to first gain the ability to play the second overtone over Bb.





# Major Scales in Thirds, Fourths, and Triads

## Major Scales in Thirds

The image displays six rows of musical notation, each representing a major scale in thirds. Each row consists of two measures of music, with a treble clef on the left and a bass clef on the right. The scales are written in a sequence of intervals: a major third, a minor third, a major third, and a minor third. The scales are: 1) C major (C4-D4-E4-F4-G4-A4-B4-C5), 2) D major (D4-E4-F#4-G4-A4-B4-C5), 3) E major (E4-F#4-G4-A4-B4-C5), 4) F# major (F#4-G4-A4-B4-C5), 5) G major (G4-A4-B4-C5), and 6) A major (A4-B4-C5). The notation includes accidentals (sharps and naturals) and a double bar line at the end of each measure.

# Slurring into an Overtone from a Lower Overtone

In this set of exercises you will practice slurring up to an overtone from a lower overtone, which is either from a series with a higher fundamental fingering than that of the goal overtone or, at the extreme, from the same series as the goal overtone.

## Up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Overtone

Exercise 1: Slurring up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> overtone. The top staff shows a sequence of notes: B $\flat$ , D, E, G, A, B, C, D, E, G, A. The bottom staff shows a sequence of notes: B $\flat$ , D, E, G, A, B, C, D, E, G, A. A slur is placed over the top staff, indicating the slurring up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> overtone.

Exercise 2: Slurring up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> overtone. The top staff shows a sequence of notes: B $\flat$ , D, E, G, A, B, C, D, E, G, A. The bottom staff shows a sequence of notes: B $\flat$ , D, E, G, A, B, C, D, E, G, A. A slur is placed over the top staff, indicating the slurring up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> overtone.

Exercise 3: Slurring up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> overtone. The top staff shows a sequence of notes: B $\flat$ , D, E, G, A, B, C, D, E, G, A. The bottom staff shows a sequence of notes: B $\flat$ , D, E, G, A, B, C, D, E, G, A. A slur is placed over the top staff, indicating the slurring up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> overtone.

Exercise 4: Slurring up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> overtone. The top staff shows a sequence of notes: B $\flat$ , D, E, G, A, B, C, D, E, G, A. The bottom staff shows a sequence of notes: B $\flat$ , D, E, G, A, B, C, D, E, G, A. A slur is placed over the top staff, indicating the slurring up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> overtone.

## Up to the 4<sup>th</sup> Overtone

Exercise 5: Slurring up to the 4<sup>th</sup> overtone. The top staff shows a sequence of notes: B $\flat$ , D, E, G, A, B, C, D, E, G, A. The bottom staff shows a sequence of notes: B $\flat$ , D, E, G, A, B, C, D, E, G, A. A slur is placed over the top staff, indicating the slurring up to the 4<sup>th</sup> overtone.