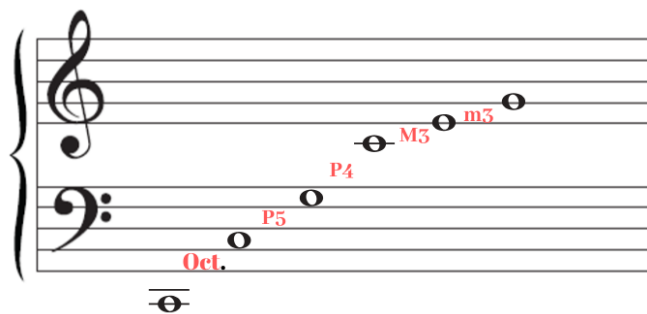


An Alternate Approach the Saxophone's Third Octave

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Before one can play in the saxophone's third octave, you must understand what it is that you are actually trying to play. Altissimo is basically just playing on high sets of overtones.

What are overtones? Overtones are essentially pitches inside of pitches. Inside any given pitch there are an infinite number of higher pitches. There is a very specific order of overtones determined by ratios. Below is a chart with the first six overtones. After the first six, the overtones start to become too out of tune to use our standard Western intervals to label.



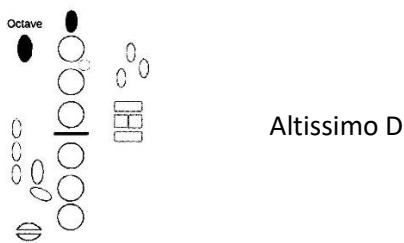
The different concentration of these overtones are what give tone its color! I could talk about this for pages, but let's move on.

We can actually produce the individual overtones on our instruments. Try holding out a low C on your saxophone. Without changing fingerings, try to produce a middle C. This is the first overtone. Can you play a G above that? That is the second overtone. These overtones can be played all the way up into the third and fourth octaves of the instrument. Unfortunately, simply using our basic fingerings overblown is not the most effective way to play altissimo. Overtones, however, can be a great place to start the

altissimo process. I believe overtones can help achieve flexibility with our voicing but is not always a 100% sure way to access altissimo. I do not intend to lay out overtone exercises in this article, I refer you to Donald Sinta's book *Voicing: An Approach to the Saxophone's Third Register*. I believe this to be the best resource for mastering overtones!

Some students can start playing the lowest altissimo notes after working through overtone exercises. I, like many developing musicians, never had success with this approach. The following is a series of steps to access this range. Keep in mind that you will likely find the most success working one-on-one with a private saxophone teacher! Also keep in mind that while you can read through this guide in about ten minutes, this is weeks of work. It will likely be a frustrating process so remember to be patient.

The lowest altissimo notes are the most unstable and, in my opinion, difficult to produce. I find the easiest note to produce is actually a D, one octave above our high D. Always start by getting a reference pitch, in this case a high (palm) D, then play an altissimo D with the fingering below.

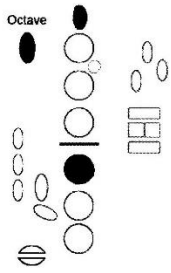


It is imperative that you neither slur nor tongue the altissimo note. Rather, you should air huff so that the voicing and embouchure stay constant.

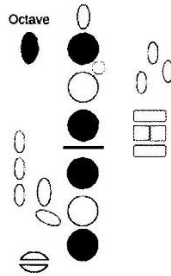
Did you have success on your first try? Likely not. Try thinning out your bottom lip with less of it over your teeth, this will give you more direct control over pressure on the reed. Now you need to raise your voicing. Playing in this register will require EE voicing. Say "EEEEEEEEEEEE." Feel your tongue raising and curling up in the back of your mouth. Try exhaling and saying "HEEEEEEEEEEE." Place your hand just under chin. You should be able to feel your air focus into a small point on your hand. Make sure it is not your lips or teeth doing the funneling, keep them wide open. All concentration of air should be done by the tongue. Now, try that D again. It may take a few tries, but you should have success.

There is a good chance that your altissimo D will be a little bit flat, do not be too alarmed. Try to get it in tune, but if it is not possible, we can still move on.

Next, move down chromatically to C# and C using the following fingerings. Be sure to start with your high D reference pitch, then altissimo D, then down to C# and C. Do not move down from C# to C until the tone is resonant and full.

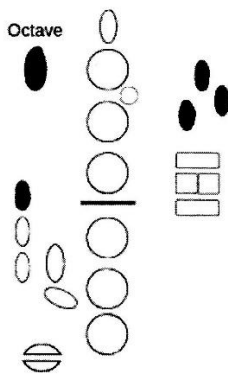


Altissimo C#



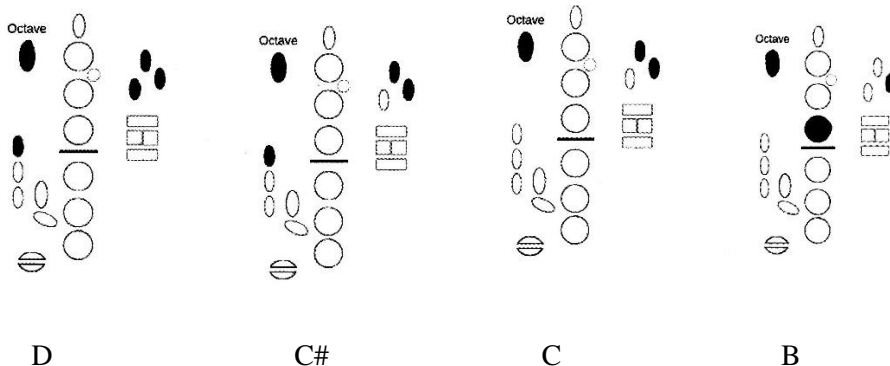
Altissimo C

The fingerings used so far are great and fairly in tune. But, as you will find, you need several different fingerings for each not depending on the technical context of the music. Let's move into a different set of fingerings. First, we need a different altissimo D fingering shown below. I recommend that you first play your reference high D, then air huff the first altissimo D fingerings, then slur to the new one.



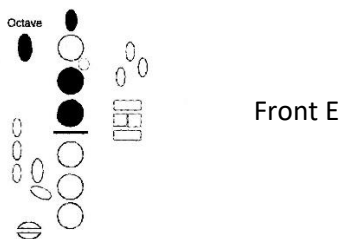
Altissimo D - Alternate

Make sure that you have a full, resonant sound on this new fingering by slurring slowly back and forth between the two. Next, move down chromatically down to B using the following fingerings.

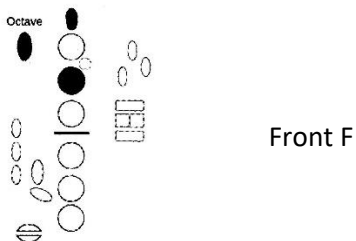


From here, it is time to take a pause from advancing to new pitches and truly familiarize yourself with the ones covered. Go through each pitch and try to play them on their own. I recommend playing a reference pitch one octave below and then air huffing the altissimo notes. Make sure you can do this on all fingerings provided thus far.

The next step is to master what we call “front fingerings” for the notes leading into the altissimo register. Start with playing a high E using the standard palm key fingering. No slur between that fingering and the front fingering shown below. Do your best to keep the pitch and tone color consistent between the two fingerings.

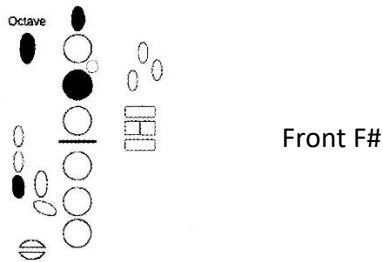


Do the same exercise between a regular high F fingering and the front fingering shown below. Again, do your best to match pitch and tone color!



Check that you can now play both the front E and F starting right on them, not slurring from palm fingerings.

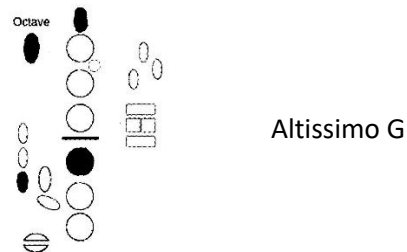
Now start with a front F and slur into the front F# fingering shown below. Note, that you will not slur between this fingering and a standard F# fingering even if you have the F# key!



The front F# is a tricky note to make speak. You may find that the note will speak but very weakly or it may just squeak. Both can be symptoms of too much pressure on the reed. When first learning the front fingerings for E, F, and F# and lower altissimo notes, we tend to put too much pressure on the reed and voice too high.

At this point, we only have four more altissimo notes to learn to close the gap. Be mindful that these are often the most difficult.

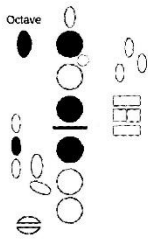
Slur between front F# and G using the fingering below



There is a good chance you will squeak on your first dozen attempts. Be flexible with your voicing and try to dial it in.

Once there is some level of success, play a G major arpeggio from the G on top of the staff to the altissimo G. Like before with our reference pitches, be sure to air huff. Do not try articulating and slurring.

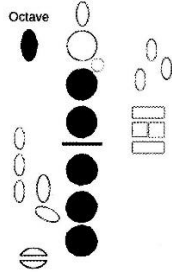
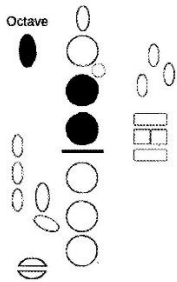
From G to G# is very tricky as there are a lot of finger shifts. Try to slur from G to G# with the following fingerings. There is a good chance this will not work, but see if you have success!



Altissimo G#

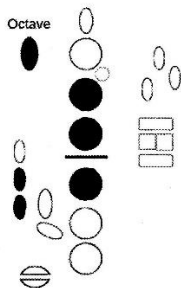
It is more likely that you will have success arpeggiating into the G# than moving chromatically. See if that provides success.

The same approach should be used for the A, chromatic motion is generally more difficult than arpeggiating. Below are two fingerings for the A. The first I find to be more in tune, but the second speaks easier. Notice how close the fingerings are. If you are having success with the second, try using it and slurring into the first!



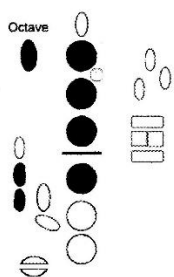
Altissimo A

To fill in the last note, we need to switch A fingerings. slur from the first fingering below to the second.



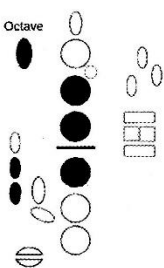
Altissimo A - Alternate

I find this new A to be incredibly stable but that is not the case on every make and model of saxophone. Work to stabilize the pitch and feel the open resonance of the note. Before we play the Bb, I recommend actually moving down to a new G# fingering listed below.

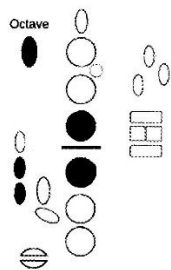


Altissimo G# - Alternate

Now move from the A fingering (listed below for clarity) to the Bb



Altissimo A



Altissimo Bb

Once the Bb is stable you should be able to slur up the B fingerings already discussed.

You should now be able to produce all altissimo notes up to D. Next, you should work on dialing in the intonation on each pitch and gaining control. While the initial grasp of the extended register is very difficult and frustrating, proficiency can be achieved! The question I am asked all the time is, “I can play the notes, but how do I make gain a level of pitch/timbre control and work on my technical skills in that range?” The answer is far more basic that you might think. How did you work on your timbre in the natural range of the instrument? Long tones, vibrato exercises, etc. How did you work on your intonation in the natural range of the instrument? Tuners, tuning drones, etc. How did you work on your technique in the natural range of the instrument? Scales, arpeggios, etudes, repertoire that emphasizes that range, etc. The same concepts apply to the extended register!

For a complete altissimo fingering chart, visit my website, www.neal-postma.com and click on the resources tab