

How to tune an accordion (video transcript)

Hi, my name is Ole and in this demonstration video, I would like to teach you how to spot tune your own accordion with our accordion doctor reed tuning tools. Before we start, please be aware that there is a slight risk you damage the accordion during your tuning attempts. I therefore advise to not make your first tuning attempt on your most precious and irreplaceable instrument.

This is an accordion reed. As you can see, it has metal tongues on both side of the plate that sound when the bellows are pushed or pulled, respectively. When tuning an accordion, the pitch of the reed is altered. To raise the pitch, some material at the tip of the reed is removed with a file. This will make the tongue swing faster, i.e. the pitch goes up. To lower the pitch, we remove some material at the foot of the reed tongue. This makes the reed swing slower and the pitch drops.

For raising the pitch, we use the precision file from the tuning kit. Insert the pinger below the reed to support it, and file away gently at the tip of the reed. Try to file alongside the direction of the reed to not bend or misplace it, and follow the rule "better to measure twice than taking off too much material". To lower the pitch, file at the bottom of the reed or use the scratcher as indicated. While filing at the foot of the reed bears a higher risk of misplacing the reed, it is useful to change the pitch in larger steps.

Inside the accordion, the reeds are mounted on a wooden reed block. On most accordions, these reed blocks can be removed, but not all. Some have been glued in permanently for optimal sound. For a proper tuning, it is important that the reed blocks are tuned in place, meaning that you should tune them inside the accordion. Tuning the reed blocks outside the instruments and placing them back in is very error-prone and results in many tuning cycles and eventually deteriorated reeds, just like this one here.

To raise the pitch of the inner lying reed during the tuning, use the reed hook as follows: Insert it below the neighboring reed and make a turning movement to lift the reed just above the reed plate where you can catch it with the pinger. Now you can file the tip as normal.

To sound the reeds inside your accordion, you either build yourself a tuning bellows or you just use the actual bellows of your accordion. For spot tuning, like in this demonstration, using the accordions own bellows works nicely.

Now we only need to get ourselves a good precision tuner, and we are ready to go. In our workshop, we are using a Peterson strobe tuner, which I find to deliver best results. Apart from their excellent devices, Peterson have also issued a cell phone app which only costs a few bucks and works very well, so in order for us to keep it simple, let's just use that one for now.

After locating the reeds by counting the buttons, isolate the reeds by using masking tape or thin cardboard. When removing the masking tape, don't rip it off, or you risk the valve coming off alongside with it. Now measure the reed and tune it.

In this case, the inner reed is too low by a couple of cents. So I'll use the reed hook to lift the reed and file it at the tip. You might need to do this several times.

The outside reed appears to be too high in pitch. So I will use the tuning file to tune it down. After the filing I check that the reed has not been bent shut and I also ping it to remove any debris.

So that's it for this video. If you are interested in accordion tuning and repairs, do check out our website for more accordion repair, tuning tools or the transcript of this video.