Bassoon Embouchure

The bassoon embouchure need not be a contortion of the jaw that one sometimes observes. A “minimal” embouchure often serves the purpose very well. The less tension, the better!

Have the student begin by whistling, if they are able. (If not, have them say “Oooo” as if very surprised.) This configuration of the face is the perfect bassoon embouchure: it opens the mouth to create distance between upper and lower teeth, and at the same time brings the corners of the mouth in. The more pressure from side to side, the less pressure there will be from top to bottom, and this is what we want. Whistling also creates a slight overbite, which is helpful in bassoon embouchure.

Have the student sit in a chair with the instrument in hand (hooked up to a seat strap), and a mirror placed so that the student can see his/her mouth. A hand mirror on a music stand works well for this purpose. Have the student whistle and really take a good look at the shape of the mouth. Then whistle again and slide the reed into the opening, not changing its shape. Be sure to stress that only enough pressure should be applied to keep air from leaking around the reed.

Have the student “crow” the reed, that is, blow as if playing, but only on the reed (not attached to the instrument). The reed should produce several pitches, not just one; it makes a rattling sound. If only one pitch is produced, the student is probably applying too much pressure with the teeth, although a very closed, hard, or dry reed will produce the same result.

After a few successful crows while preserving the rounded embouchure, the student may try putting the reed on the instrument and repeating the process. Going through this process for a few minutes of every practice period, and perhaps at several points during the practice period, will in a short time establish a nice round embouchure that allows the reed to vibrate freely and produce a nice, rich bassoon sound.