

# Straw Oboe

**Make a musical duck call from a drinking straw.**

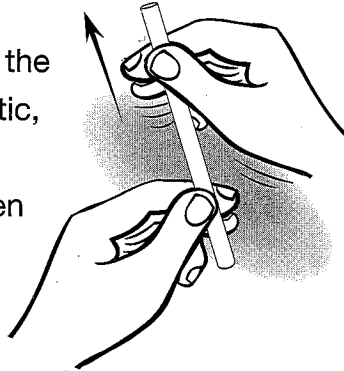
## What Do I Need?

- a few plastic drinking straws
- scissors
- a little patience

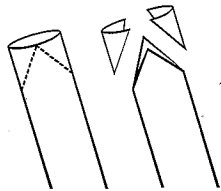


## What Do I Do?

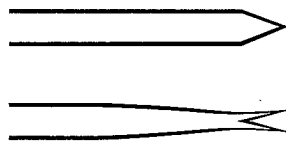
**1** With your fingers, flatten one end of the straw. If it's tough plastic, it won't stay flat easily. You can slide it between your front teeth to make a sharp crease in the plastic.



**2** With the scissors, cut the flattened end of the straw so that it looks like this:



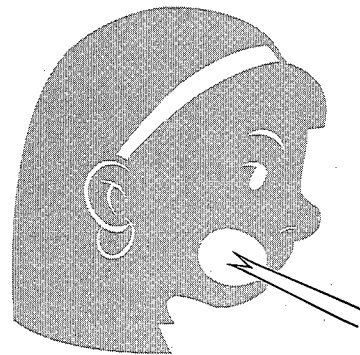
**3** Put the end that you cut into your mouth and blow. If you're lucky, you'll get a sound right away.



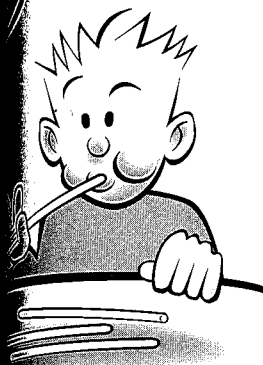
Playing an oboe made from a drinking straw isn't always easy. You may need a grown-up's help.



**4** If you don't get a sound, try pinching the straw between your teeth as you blow. (Don't pinch so hard you close off the straw, just flatten it a little.) You can also use your fingers to squeeze the straw flat at your lips. If you still don't get a sound, try blowing a little harder—or maybe a little softer.



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pinching the  
as you blow.  
off the straw,  
so use your  
at your lips.  
blowing a  
offer.

**5** Sometimes a Straw Oboe will work on your first try. Sometimes you have to start over with a new straw. It's tricky, but keep trying and sooner or later you'll get a buzzing, humming sound, like a musical duck call.

**6** Once you've made a Straw Oboe, you can experiment to change the sound it makes. Try cutting off the end of the straw. Does the length of the oboe change the note it plays? Snip little holes in a long oboe. If you use your fingers to cover and uncover the holes as you play, you can make different notes.

**7** Ken Finn, who works at the Exploratorium, made a Straw Trombone using a straw with a slightly bigger diameter than his Straw Oboe. He slid the second straw over the Straw Oboe and changed its pitch by sliding the second straw to make the tube longer or shorter.

Can you come up with any other ways to change the sound your Straw Oboe makes?

## What's Going On?

**Where does the buzzing sound come from?**

Touch your hand to the front of your throat and say something. You'll not only hear the sound of your voice—you'll also feel it in your fingers. Sound—whether it's the sound of your own voice, the buzzing of the Straw Oboe, or the ringing of a bell—begins with a vibration.

In the Straw Oboe, you can feel the vibrations against your lips. Two parts of the straw are vibrating like the reeds in an oboe. As you build the musical instruments in this chapter, you may want to try to figure out what's vibrating to make each sound.



People often describe sounds as high-pitched or low-pitched. The screech of a whistling teakettle or the jingling of a tiny bell is high-pitched. The rumble of a bass drum or the ringing of the big bell in a clock tower is low-pitched.

Short Straw Oboes play high-pitched notes, and longer Straw Oboes play low-pitched notes. By changing the length of the instrument, you can change the pitch of the note it plays.