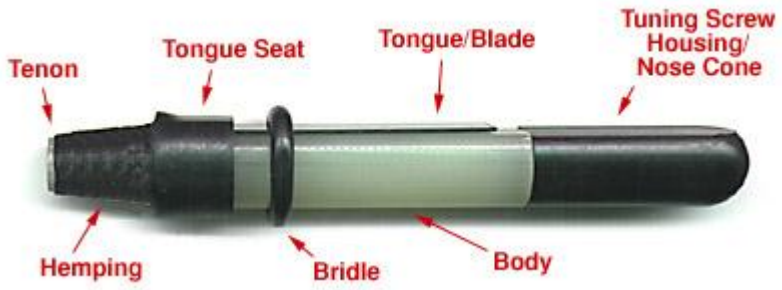
Drone Reeds

How do I set up synthetic drone reeds?

The simplest answer is…don't try, let one of us help you. But you need to know how to adjust your drone reeds.

Let me preface by saying that not all drone reeds are "ideal" with all drones. Some drones tune **way** too high with some brands of reeds. Some drones sound "rough" with some brands of reeds. Talk to your instructor and other band members if you are considering a change in drone reeds.



First off, you need to first adjust your new reeds to the air needs of your pipes. For most modern brands, you'll only need to adjust the bridle to set the air consumption. You should just be able to "blow out" a drone reed by blowing really hard - don't give yourself a hernia! - but it should "shut down" at very high pressure. If not, it's too open and you're wasting energy that you could put into playing.

Remember that most reeds will become more pliable with temperature, so play for a minute or two to warm up the reed. Then set the reed so that it will just barely shut off when you blow really hard by adjusting the bridle up or down in millimeter increments. If you get tired in this process, you may have to tweak it again tomorrow, but make very small adjustments.

Once the air flow is right for your drone/reed combination, then move the screw/plug to get the drone to tune to the right spot on the hemp for your chanter.

At this point, you are done.

Why do my drone reeds squeal?

If you are, first and foremost, sure that your reeds are properly adjusted, it's a matter of learning how to deliver what is needed by your combination of pipes/reeds. The bottom line is that you'll need to adjust your strike-in technique to meet the needs of your drone/reed combinations - so that they don't squeal.

Squealing is the drone reed vibrating at the wrong harmonic - usually two or four times the intended frequency. Depending on the air flow characteristics of the pipes, your reeds may start vibrating at the wrong harmonic if the air pressure comes up too quickly or too slowly - or if it goes back down and back up again!

Some drones squeal if struck in a given way with some kinds of reeds. I know that a very common brand of reed in a certain highly regarded brand of bass drone will commonly squeal upon a normal strike in, but a very gentle strike will do just fine. Some reed/drone combinations "like" a strike-in right under the bass drone - or not! - or with a certain strength. This sounds odd, but it's all true. Experiment and you'll find the right way for YOUR pipes.

The most common cause of squealing is that piper who actually hits the bag, bounces off a little and then pushes again. This causes the pressure to spike up, fall off and then come back up. I see this most commonly amongst inexperienced pipers that are trying to strike in and get both hands to the chanter in two beats!

A controlled squeeze - faster or slower - from the right initial pressure - not too high or low - is what you want. Once you start the pressure going up, keep it going up - never allow it to back off - and you'll do very well.

Experiment by starting out without striking in at all, blow up your pipes by mouth bringing up the pressure slowly from a low initial point and see what happens. From here you can add in a gentle strike. Learn what your pipes need and learn to deliver it.

For additional information on drone reed adjustments, check out Andrew Linz's web page: http://www.bagpipejourney.com/articles/dronereedadjust.shtml