



## Dojo Digest: Do I need a second set of pipes?

I hear this question often: "Do you need a second set of bagpipes that are set up for solo competition?"

It's natural to wonder if you need a specialized setup to stand out and impress the judges. Many pipers use easier reeds in a solo setup, and may prefer different drone reeds or tone for their own pipes compared to what their pipe band might play.

But before you dive into upgrades and extra gear, let's talk about what really matters when building a setup for solo performances.

### Do You Really Need a Second Set of Pipes?

While a second set of bagpipes it might sound like a good idea – and after all, as enthusiasts it can be tempting to want to "collect" instruments – managing two sets of pipes is a lot of work. It can also cut into the time you spend practicing with your primary set, which is the one you're going to be most familiar with.

Instead of doubling up, think about fine-tuning your current setup. Small adjustments, like using a separate chanter or reeds for solos, can make a big difference. This way, you're optimizing what you already have without the added hassle or expense.

### Keep It Simple, Avoid the Hype

With so many gadgets and accessories on the market, it's easy to feel like you need every cutting-edge tool out there. Moisture control systems, high-tech reeds, or fancy pipe bags might sound appealing, especially if top players are using them. But more gear often means more maintenance... and more headaches.

A straightforward setup, well-maintained and carefully tuned, is often all you need. Strip away unnecessary extras and focus on the fundamentals of great playing. Sometimes, simplicity delivers the best results.

### Bore Size: Should You Care?

This is another question that pipers bring up a lot – does the size of your drones' bores make any different to your sound?

While some pipers may swear by certain sizes, I guarantee you that most top players don't even consider this when they're setting up their instrument. Bore size may have the tiniest impact on your tone, but so does the combination of drones, bag, moisture system (if you have one), and so many other variables... bore size is certainly not a game-changer.

Rather than getting hung up on the intricacies of the technical details, I'd suggest a better use of your time and energy would be to focus on honing your practical skills. Judges will be looking for clean, precise playing far more than subtle tweaks in your instrument.

### Building Your Solo Setup: Start Small

The best solo bagpipe setups aren't built overnight – they evolve over time, through trial and error based on your own personal experience, preferences, and what works for you.

Start with what you already know and trust: a reliable bag, well-matched reeds, and your current pipes are more than enough to begin.

As you gain experience, you can make adjustments based on real feedback from your playing.

Focus on clarity, resonance, and control, and let those guide any upgrades you make. Most importantly, changes should support your growth, not distract from it.

### Practice: The Ultimate Secret Weapon

Want to stand out? It's not about the fanciest setup—it's about how you play. The best way to "slay" in competitions is to practice with intention. Work on perfecting your fingerwork, eliminating crossing noises, and nailing the rhythm.

Judges care more about a musical, technically flawless performance than they do about the brand of your pipes or the complexity of your setup.

### Most Important of All: Enjoy the Journey!

At the end of the day, solo competitions are about showcasing your talent and love for the music. You don't need to overhaul your setup or chase the latest trends. Instead, focus on refining what you have, practicing with purpose, and letting your playing speak for itself.

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