

# Brassed On

A Guide to Expressive  
Brass Playing

2011 Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic  
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# The Athlete and the Artist

Playing brass instruments requires physical skill built with discipline and consistency over time. Conditioning through targeted technical exercises is vital to achieving the ability to play with endurance, suitable range, and control of the tone. It is very important, however to keep in mind that the purpose of this physical and technical development is to musically express a greater range of emotions. Development in the area of musical expression also requires consistent attention and can be enhanced by using imagery, connecting feelings to sounds, and other creative exercises that inspire and engage students. The linking of technique to expression is critical and must be reinforced daily. In the end, we can only play what we have internalized and “hear” in our head. Technical development should be a process of simply finding the best way for the instrument to create those sounds we already hear. As what we hear is inherently expressive, our technical practice must also grow from musical roots. Ultimately, we want our instrument to be a comfortable extension of our thoughts, as natural as our voice and equally able to relay emotion.

## It's All in the Sound

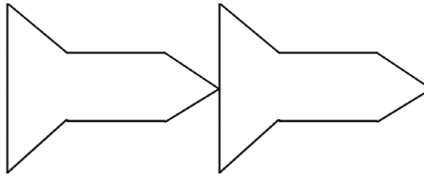
A beautiful, controlled sound is essential to success in any style of playing. The highest levels of performance are distinguished not by technique but rather by the richness and range of colors in the sound. Students must be constantly exposed to great sounds via recordings and live demonstrations. Good tone is actually contagious and “tonal bathing” is very worthwhile. When it sounds good, you are doing it right and this is the ultimate determining factor so be sure to “turn on” your ears every time you play. Even when we create unsuitable tone, careful listening can guide us towards clues to potential remedies. Brass instruments, by design, can make bright and punctuated sounds easily. Therefore we must spend quality time on lyrical playing and creating darker sounds to increase our expressive capabilities.

## Use Modeling on All Levels

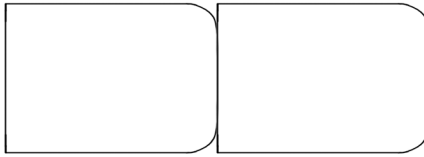
Start with one great sounding note and then apply those standards to everything you play. If you sound best in the middle register, expect the same sound in the low and high ranges as well. If you can articulate on one pitch well, use that as a model for moving pitches. Build your expectations on the very best you can create and your playing will be special. Invent new exercises to compare well-established passages with those environments that are not yet developed.

## Visual Representations of Articulation\*

### “T” attack/ sustained length with some decay

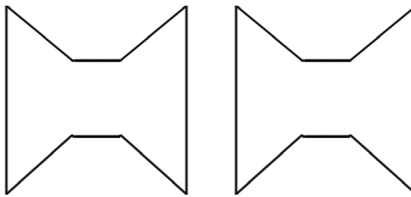


### “D” attack with maximum sustained length and no decay



### “T” attack with some sustain and “T” release

*(Notice the space in illustration denoting lack of connected sound)*



\*From the teaching of Leonard Candelaria

## Definition/Characteristics of Quality Brass Sound

For me, great sound is not a static ideal but more like a living organism that is constantly writhing, undulating, and has an internal pulse. I also think of great sound as if it were “great chocolate”. It is rich, creamy, and consistent as it flows over and around intervals and through articulations. We can also be more specific with regard to tone and use targeted exercises to hear its characteristics. Work hard on a daily basis to examine the basic technique of tone production and how it can express music.

- Work for efficient, open, full, centered, and vibrant sounds.
- Establish relaxed breathing and blowing habits.
- Plan breaths based on phrase length and expressive need.
- Explain to students the difference between hard versus soft sounds.  
Blend capability / Projection / Spin the sound  
Room ring-releases are like attacks / Volume and power
- Stress flexibility for control and freedom in sound.
- Utilize vibrato and vibrancy for the best sound.
- Establish the concept of a base or steady state of sound.

## Exercises

- Start with one great sounding note and then demand the same sound character on everything. You can use scales, arpeggios, two octave Clarke studies, and other basic patterns.
- Use mouthpiece buzzing for imitation and focus on centered tone without excessive pressure.
- Sing like a brass player using consonant and vowel sounds as when playing the instrument.
- Integrate long tones into your playing with attention on sound quality in different registers and dynamics.
- Stress lip flexibility as a central element in playing ability.  
Always demand on-time movement / Consistent sound and dynamics / No “huff” accents  
Vibrato exercises  
Lip bends
- Breathing exercises are needed to prepare physically and musically for playing.  
Breath in time like the upbeat of a conductor.  
Use a circle breath concept to achieve a full inhalation period.  
Breath appropriate to phrase length (especially for high brass).

## Articulation for Expression

Articulation is one of our major tools for musical expression and can offer a wide spectrum of colors developed through vocalization and careful listening. Attacks and releases are vital to creating emotional responses in music and we need to have a variety of sounds in this area. Think of a painter with several shades of blue and how this allows for more subtle expression in painting. How many kinds of attacks or releases can you make? Hearing it first can lead you to more possibilities.

- Develop different levels of percussiveness to offer more “color” choices (T, D, N, L).
- Use visual representations to portray and categorize sounds (see fig. 1).
- Understand how initial attacks are critical to control and clarity of tone.
- Establish how notes must be connected with air and avoid “huffing”.
- Use mouthpiece practice on articulation to help reveal and remedy problems.
- Use other instruments and singers to model attack strength and sound color ideas.
- Work for more lyrical playing while using the tongue for stability and reliability.

### Exercises

- Compare attacks utilizing different consonants and listening for possible applications.
- Practice passages on one pitch and compare to original with changing pitches.
- Develop even multiple tonguing by working to equalize the attacks with the back of the tongue.
- Accent “ku” or “gu” / start with slow, long notes / Use only “k” or “g”
- Perform exercises like drum rolls. Start slowly and speed up listening for sound changes.
- Utilize “Pu” attacks for development of soft response.
- Understand that initial attack issues are common even in more advanced players. Remedies include greater subdivision, inhalation work, tongue tapping, pre-blowing, and breath attacks.

## Intonation Impacts Sound

The physical nature of brass playing and the challenges represented by natural tuning versus equal temperament require early and constant attention. (See fig. 2)

- Vibrancy in the sound reduces focus on pitch discrepancy while lack of vibrancy does the opposite.
- Examine mechanical versus physical manipulation and their impact on sound.
- Remember that lipping excessively deadens tone, reduces endurance, and restricts expression.
- Consistent use of a vibrant tone helps pitch matching and color blending while maximizing expressive capabilities.
- Establish a concept of pitch that is flexible and work to help students understand and prepare for different conditions.

### Exercises

- Match fixed pitches and melodies to sustained pitches on a piano, tuner, or with another player.
- Establish the best uses for your tuner for initial pitch understanding and new situations. Remember that pitch is heard not seen!
- Create the perfect unison by understanding that it does not mean equal volume.
- Know the characteristics of the instrument and tendencies in terms of intonation.
- Listen to detect harmonic forces and prepare for them such as thirds of chords.
- Practice “honest” playing and experiment with mechanical changes.
- Start students with the ability to identify in and out of tune and build upon that ability.
- Take the time for students to hear the interaction of pitches; especially unisons and octaves, at a slower tempo then gradually speed up, as they understand pitch listening relationships.
- Tune octaves and fifths, then thirds and sevenths in each section.
- Balance is critical to intonation so establish a hierarchy of listening.

## Injecting Expression into Brass Playing

If we do not continually link technical development and instrumental mastery to greater goal of emotional stimulation, we miss the whole point! It is vital to be reminded that music has the power to move us and this why we play and teach. Expressive playing should reflect the living, breathing being that creates it. It should have an existence that is constantly moving with intrinsic energy. Our manner of playing and conducting must communicate this at all times to our students and audiences.

- Dynamics, tempo, and style of attack are extensions of our emotions so vary them!
- Climaxes and highpoints are the result of combinations of expressive techniques that our brain connects through practice and modeling.
- The flow of time is rarely metronomic on all levels in most music though we must first understand time and rhythm in a consistent framework before we can adapt it expressively. Earn the right to make musical adjustments by first playing it precisely.
- Breaths should be planned as part of natural phrasing. Plan them carefully and practice them until they are comfortable.
- Conduct in a manner that helps brass sections use techniques that will transmit emotion to the audience.
- Share your musical concepts with students and show it in your face by feeling it first.

### Exercises

- Improvise on one emotional term like “anger”, “desolate”, or “agitated”.
- Invent lyrics for instrumental melodies using words that reflect the feeling you want to evoke in listeners.
- Create imaginary movie scenes and characters. Consider opera as a model.
- Be prepared to overact! Start by creating the proper emotional mindset.
- Remember that notes need to “lean” to pull the listener with you.
- Identify linking notes to enlarge the phrase and the expressive capability of melody.
- Use target notes in melodic lines to create motion and emotion.
- Use memorization and improvisation to aid in developing expression.

**Figure 1. Compromise System of Valves** (measurements in inches)

Valve Used	Slide Length	Actual Total Length	Correct Total Length	Total Length Error	Tuning Discrepancy (semitone)
0	-	100	100	0	0
2	6.25	106.25	105.95	+0.30	-0.05
1	12.57	112.57	112.25	+0.32	-0.05
3	20.35	120.35	118.92	+1.43	-0.21
12	18.82	118.82	118.92	-0.10	+0.01
23	26.60	126.60	125.99	+0.61	-0.08
13	32.92	132.92	133.48	-0.56	+0.07
123	39.17	139.17	141.42	-2.25	+0.28

**Musical Example 1**

With strength and vigor ♩ = about 126

*f* *p* (A)

**Musical Example 2**

*Giacoso*

*mf* *p* *mf*

**Musical Example 3**

*p* *mf* *f* *sf* *cresc.* *ritard.*

**Gregory Jones**

**G**regory Jones is the trumpet professor and conductor of the Brass Choir at Truman State University. He holds music degrees from The Florida State University, The University of North Texas, and a Doctorate in Music Performance and Literature from The Eastman School of Music. He has performed with a wide variety of artists including the Kansas City Symphony, the Moscow Radio Orchestra, the Rochester Philharmonic, the Eastman Wind Ensemble, the Texas Baroque Ensemble, the Grand Teton Orchestra, Wynton Marsalis, Joshua Bell, Allen Vizzutti, Chris Martin, Al Jarreau, Audra McDonald, Bill Conti, Walt Disney World Brass Band, the Dallas Cowboys Band, and many others. Dr. Jones has recorded for National Public Radio and performs often as a soloist or as a member of the Truman Brass or the Truman Chamber Ensemble.

Dr. Jones has been an “Artist-In-Residence” in Greece, a Senior Fulbright Grant from the United States Information Agency and the Council for International Exchange of Scholars and has also served on the Senior Fulbright Selection Panel in Washington, DC. Recent foreign performances include the Melos Brass Ionian Academy on the Greek Island of Corfu and extensive work in the Balkans including Kosovo, Macedonia, and Albania where he taught and performed as part of an ongoing program aided by the U.S. Embassy in Tirana. He has also recently completed a third tour of China that included performing the opening concert of the first conference of the newly formed China Trumpet Guild.

Students of Dr. Jones have won awards from the International Trumpet Guild, the Music National Teachers Association, and recent trumpet graduates have held teaching assistantships at the Eastman School of Music, Florida State University, Western Michigan University, and the University of New Mexico. Former students are successful high school

music teachers including winners in the Greater St. Louis Marching Festival and Bands of America Grand Champions. Dr. Jones began his musical life in the public school program in Winter Park, Florida and also taught public school as a band director in the schools of Texas.

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