



TROMBONE PEDAGOGY FROM DAY ONE

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BEFORE THE FIRST SOUNDS ARE MADE

THE INSTRUMENT ITSELF

- There's not much that can go wrong with a trombone, but when things do it creates huge problems for the player. Nothing is more frustrating to any musician than dealing with an instrument that isn't functioning properly. For the young trombonist, a poorly functioning slide leads to the student developing poor habits, or worse, becoming so frustrated that they quit.
- The mouthpiece: Any mouthpiece in which the plating is worn or has chipping or nicks around the rim should be replaced. Use a mouthpiece truing tool to fix any dents in the mouthpiece shank, particularly those that would affect the seal with the leadpipe creating tone and pitch issues.
- The slide: Any dents in the outer slide, or misalignment of the inner slide should be repaired immediately. The water key must completely seal. A working slide lock is also a must and will save the slide from accidental damage.
- The valve: If the trombone has an f-attachment it should be well oiled and responsive. Check the valve guides under the valve rotor cap to ensure it is properly aligned.
- If the trombone needs to be set down, never allow your students to lean it against their chair. It should be placed gently on the ground "upside down" resting on the mouthpiece, bell, and tuning slide.

BODY POSITION/BALANCE/POSTURE

- Students should sit towards the front of the chair balanced on their rounded "sit bones," not their leg bones.
- Feet flat on the floor ONLY if the knees remain below the hips. **Please trust me on this or test is out for yourself.** If the knees are above the hips, it's impossible to take a full breath. If this is the case, lower the knees by using a taller chair or bring the feet back (Patrick Sheridan suggests crossing them under the chair).
- "Sit up straight" may look alright, and it's certainly an easy phrase to address poor posture, but it creates tension. I'd also argue that it's probably not how you sit when you are playing. The balanced skeleton should hold up the body, not muscles.

- The weight of the trombone is carried by the left hand and resting the instrument against the neck. Watch that the shoulders stay relaxed and the elbows are a comfortable distance from the body (not too close, not too far).
- Trombones need space. In front of them, of course, but also side to side so their music stand can be placed properly slightly to their right. Every student should have their own music stand.

LEFT-HAND POSITION

- Since it holds the weight of the horn, the left hand is an easy place where tension can creep in and spread to the whole arm if we're not observant.
- The wrist should remain straight.
- For kids with smaller hands, we'll temporarily reduce the slide and bell angle slightly or allow the index finger to drop under the leadpipe.
- When not playing the left-hand pinky should wrap around the outer slide brace to provide additional protection in the event the student forgets to lock their slide.

RIGHT-HAND POSITION

- The slide moves through coordination between the fingers, wrist, elbow, and to a lesser extent, shoulder. Poor right-hand position restricts the use of the fingers and wrist hampering technique and makes it more difficult to make precise intonation adjustments with the slide.
- The slide should be held with the tips of the first two fingers and the thumb at the bottom of the slide brace. The ring finger and pinky are extended beneath the outer slide providing additional support and protection against accidentally dropping the slide.
- The wrist remains relaxed, but fairly neutral/straight when the slide is not in motion. In first position, the palm faces the player with the hand naturally opening up while extending to the lower positions.

PRODUCING THE FIRST SOUNDS

While I'm a huge advocate of using mouthpiece buzzing as a pedagogical tool for my brass students (Rex Martin would say "Buzzing connects the music to your brain"). I've found - anecdotally - that my students play with a fuller sound faster if we don't start on the mouthpiece but start with the air and add the resistance of the instrument to create the buzz.

AIR

- Tone is the most important aspect of our students playing and air is the most important ingredient to creating a beautiful sound.
- In our students' first year, we focus our breathing exercises on air flow between *comfortably full* and *comfortably empty* and pacing the inhale and exhale between those two states.
- Please, please, please, please, please don't say "open your throat" to your students. **They are succeeding in spite of that statement, not because of it.** At best that

phrase will create tension. At worst, the student will do all kinds of harmful manipulation to the inside of the mouth/neck trying to do something that is not possible.

EMBOUCHURE

- The lips start together. Say “emmmm.” Teeth apart.
Watch for: Rolling the lips in. Stretching/smiling of the corners, puckering.
- Breathe in through the nose. This is temporary, but ensures the students maintain their embouchure shape on their first exhales which should bring the feeling of the word “pooh” as the air creates the aperture. *Watch for: Tension/tightness, wide apertures, puckering*
- Flat chin, firm corners. Muscles around the lips will be engaged but not strained.
Watch for: Too relaxed around the lips, puffing cheeks
- Provide a model or use photos for students to emulate in a mirror.
- Endurance is almost always an issue of maintaining form and not of strength!

MOUTHPIECE WITH BOBA STRAW

- After developing consistency with the embouchure and air through repetition, add the mouthpiece with boba straw
- Step One: to combat students’ initial natural tendency to manipulate their embouchure once something new is introduced, repeat the air exercise blowing across the rim of the mouthpiece. (mouthpiece attached to boba straw, rim touching the face under the lower lip, mouthpiece pointed down with rim parallel to floor and perpendicular to the face)
- Step Two: same as step one, but on count three students rotate the mouthpiece up to playing position. The straw should provide enough resistance that the buzz should start naturally.
- For most students we’ll start the mouthpiece fairly centered on the embouchure (top to bottom and left to right.)

FIRST NOTES

- The trombone provides enough resistance that if the embouchure is correct a buzz will start without the students feeling like they need to press their lips together in order to get a sound.
- At the first lesson, focus on quality of sound above the actual pitch being produced.
- Without music, we’ll start in first position:
Out - 2 - In - 2 | Play - 2 - 3 -4 | Off - 2 - In - 2 | Play - 2 - 3 -4 | Off (repeating several times)
- Most students will naturally play an F or low Bb
- We’ll repeat this exercise, teaching the positions along the way in this order: First, Third (no fingers on bell!), Second, Fourth (no thumb on bell!), Sixth (watch that students don’t manipulate or move the mouthpiece placement or angle). We’ll just mention that Seventh position exists.
- The first note that we try to intentionally play is an F. With a model (or drone), go down the row a couple times: I play, they play, “Too high, too low, or just right?” Then

we'll do it again without the modeling using the Bandmate Chromatic Tuner (like they'll have to do at home).

- Once everyone is hitting the F fairly consistently, we repeat the exercise walking down the major scale to Bb.
- We'll repeat the exercise, with notation, using the Bandmate Chromatic Tuner

ARTICULATION

- Except for a handful of woodwind instruments, we don't typically teach articulation during the students' first lesson.
- It can be easy to give students too much information when introducing tonguing. Give them only what they need to be successful. Model for the students, have them listen for the "t" in your attack.
- "Too" or "Doo" attack. You should *hear* the tongue hit, and students should *feel* their tongue touch behind their teeth where their teeth and gums meet. Touching quarter notes to start.
- Air is an essential component of quality articulation. For those initial attacks, students should strive to have the air stream mirror that of playing a whole note. "Fast air, quick tongue." "Air speed drives articulation."
- It is easy to miss a student doing air attacks during full group instruction. Any time listening to students articulate individually with and without the instrument will save 10x that amount of time correcting bad habits down the road.
- Slurring: Since we start students so young, we don't dwell on slurs too much during the first year (focusing instead on the general quality of their articulation). The difference between a tenuto touching articulation and slur is very subtle in the timing of the slide and tongue (see attached exercises). At least for me, the tongue feels more like a "flick" while slurring.

RECOMMENDED METHOD BOOKS AND PRINT MATERIALS FOR BEGINNERS

The method books published by the major publishing companies work quite well in the beginner band setting. They are all similar and it's mostly a matter of choosing the right one based on personal taste of design, sequence and pacing for your situation. We supplement the method book with other materials to reinforce concepts and get more repetition for students.

- *Musical Mastery for Band* by Asa Burk, Alicia DeSoto, Kathy Johnson, Chris Meredith and Dominic Talanca (<https://mrnsmusic.com/>) is a tremendous resource for the first couple years of instruction.
- McCracken Middle School Band Supplemental Exercises (trombone attached)
- *Teaching Rhythm Logically* by Darcy Vogt Williams (<https://teachingrhythmlogically.com/>)
- *The Embouchure Project for Beginning Band* (<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Band-Directors-Talk-Shop>)

- *A Band Director's Guide to Everything Trombone* by Andrew Hitz (<https://www.banddirectorsguide.com/>)
- *The Breathing Gym* and *The Brass Gym* by Patrick Sheridan and Sam Pilafian (<https://www.focus-on-music.com/>)

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT FOR BEGINNERS

- Bach 6.5AL mouthpiece (for small bore or large bore), Schilke 51D mouthpiece for large bore, or equivalents (not the 12C that typically comes with student line instruments)
- BERP for Trombone (#4 for small bore, #5 for large bore)
- Recommended supplies for maintenance: mouthpiece brush, cleaning snake, slide lubricant (Do not use the oil that typically comes with the instrument! Yamaha Trombone Slide Lubricant, Slide-o-Mix, Trombotine), rotor oil (Ultra-Pure), water spray bottle.



SKOKIE SCHOOL DISTRICT 73.5 BANDS **FIRST TROMBONE LESSON**

Find somewhere quiet and well lit where you can practice. Always sit correctly!

BREATHING EXERCISES

- a) Make sure you are sitting correctly (Feet Flat, Fanny Front!)
- b) Put your hands on your head (I know it looks silly, but it's important...it helps you take bigger breaths).
- c) Practice as we did in band. Pat your foot slowly and evenly.

- Breathe in for 8 counts, out for 8 counts (4 times)
- Breathe in for 4 counts, out for 4 counts (4 times)
- Breathe in for 2 counts, out for 2 counts (4 times)
- Breathe in for 1 count, out for 1 count (4 times)

take a mini-break, then...

SIZZLE EXERCISES

Do these exercises twice, once with your hands on your head and once with them not on your head.

- Breathe in for 1 count, sizzle out for 7 counts (4 times)
- Breathe in for 1 count, sizzle out for 15 counts (2 times)

PUT THE TROMBONE TOGETHER

- a) On the floor!
- b) Carefully lay the case flat on the floor with the handle facing you and the instrument label facing up
- c) Slowly unlatch and open the case.
- d) Remove the bell section from the case, laying it on the floor in the same direction that it was in the case (bell on the left!)
- e) Attach the slide at a right angle to the bell section.
- f) Twist the mouthpiece in (so it doesn't get stuck)

YOUR FIRST NOTES

- a) Play with a good sound always!
- b) Are you sitting correctly?

1st Position (all the way in)

play 4 counts – rest 4 counts – play 4 counts – rest 4 counts (2 times)

3rd Position (lined up with bell - don't touch!)

play 4 counts – rest 4 counts – play 4 counts – rest 4 counts (2 times)

2nd Position

play 4 counts – rest 4 counts – play 4 counts – rest 4 counts (2 times)

4th Position (end of slide lined up with bell - don't touch!)

play 4 counts – rest 4 counts – play 4 counts – rest 4 counts (2 times)

6th Position (as far as you can reach)

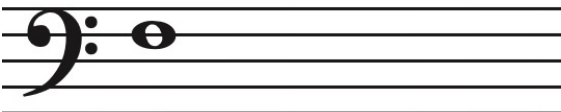
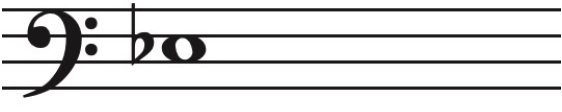
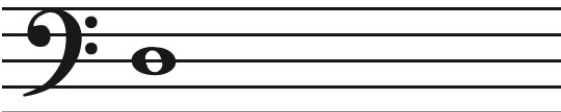
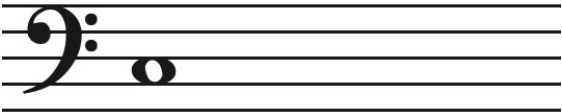
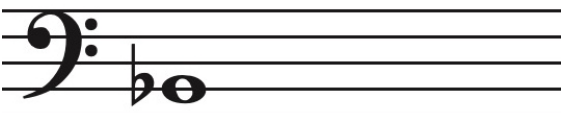
play 4 counts – rest 4 counts – play 4 counts – rest 4 counts (2 times)

5th Position

play 4 counts – rest 4 counts – play 4 counts – rest 4 counts (2 times)

USING BANDMATE TUNER (<https://www.bandmatetuner.com/>)

- a) Double check that the instrument is set to trombone
- b) Try to match these notes. Hold it out!

F		E^b	
	<i>1st position</i>		<i>3rd position</i>
D		C	
	<i>4th position</i>		<i>6th position</i>
B^b			
	<i>1st position</i>		

TROMBONE

Slur Exercises

1. Slur Timing

glissando intentially mistimed timed together

lip slur

2. Slide Training for Legato

Slide Training for Legato

3. Slide Training for Technique

Slide Training for Technique