

BRASS BASICS

Words of Wisdom

- H.A. Vandercook: **“Keep it simple.”**
- “If you can sing it, you can play it.”**
- Arnold Jacobs: **“I sing the notes in my head while playing. It doesn’t matter how my lips feel or how I feel.”**
- “Go for the product.”**
- Adolph Herseth: **“Get the sound you want in your head first, then play it.”**
- “It is amazing what chops can do when you get the head out of the way”**
- “Paralysis by analysis.”**
- Zen: **“If you wish to paint bamboo, study bamboo.”**
- Andrew Miller: **“Think pitch and play loud.”**
- Roger Rocco: **“Simplify and transfer.”**
- “Sing, Buzz, Play”**
- Chris O’Hara: **“If you can sing it, you can buzz it. If you can buzz it, you can play it!”**
- “Practice makes permanent. If you always practice well, you will always perform well.”**

Getting Started

Stretching

Playing an instrument, especially a brass instrument, is not only a mental but also a physical activity. Since it is a physical activity we must prepare for it as a physical activity and do some stretching.

Tension and Release!

This exercise will help to show the difference between a state of tension and a state of relaxation. Tension will destroy a beautiful sound just as easily as buzzing the wrong note!

Begin by breathing in and tensing up every muscle in your body. Get as tight as you possibly can. Hold that tension for a moment and then explode all of that tension out while you exhale. Blow out the tension!

IMPORTANT TIP! While doing the remaining stretches, make sure you are taking huge breaths! Keep your mouth in an “OH” shape while breathing.

Trunk Twists

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart.

Raise your hands to about shoulder height.

Gently twist back and forth from the waist.

* To stretch other muscles, raise your hands above your head, and lower them below your waist

Reach for the Sky

Reach your hands above your head trying to reach as high as you can.

At the same time push down with your heels, driving to drive them into the ground.

Then slowly let your upper body bend down at the waist – Keep Breathing Deeply!

* If you are breathing correctly, you should feel your torso rise with each inhalation!

Elbow grabs

Place your left elbow behind your head and grab it with your right hand.

Gently pull and lean to the right. Keep Breathing!
Try to pull a little further with each exhale.

Repeat with the other side.

Interlocking Fingers

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart.

Interlock your fingers behind your back, with your knees bent.

With each inhalation pull your hands back and stand up on your toes.

With each exhalation return your body to the relaxed state.

Breathing

The first step towards a successful sound on any wind instrument is breathing. Whether your vibrations come from your lips, or your reed they all start with air.

First things first! We are all experts at breathing. If you weren't, you would not be alive today! Your body knows how to breathe, but our minds sometimes get in the way. Many times in TRYING to take a huge breath we end up getting in our own way.

Keep it simple! Study the perfect natural breath, the yawn.

Yawning is your body's natural response to not having enough air. Notice that when you yawn you DO NOT raise your shoulders, you stay CALM and RELAXED, and you completely FILL UP with air.

IMPORTANT TIP! After each exercise take a cleansing breath, or sigh to relax.

Vacuum Pops

Start by exhaling and then before you can inhale again, create a vacuum with the back of your hand.

By pulling your hand away you will create a "popping" as air rushes in. Keep your mouth in the "OH" or "WHOA" shape.

This exercise creates a kind of artificial yawn! Now that we have established a good breath, let's work to control it.

Relaxed Breathing 6 - 8 - 10

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart.

Slowly breathe in for six counts. As you inhale slowly raise your arms out at your sides. Use your arms as a monitoring system. When your arms are at your sides you should be empty of air. When your arms are parallel with the ground you should be half full, and then completely full when your arms are straight up in the air.

Slowly breathe out for 6 counts. Keep using your arms as a monitoring system.

Repeat the exercise with 8 counts and again with 10.

Shortened Breath

Breathe in for 4 counts. Hold your bladed hand perpendicular to your lips as you breathe in as a monitoring system. You should hear a deep resonant sound created by the air rushing past your hand. If the sound is weak and tight, so is your breath! If the sound is interrupted and choppy, so is your breath!

Breathe out for four counts. Again use your hand to monitor your exhale by holding it palm towards your face. As you exhale, feel the air hitting your hand. You are still going for a smooth flow of air. Do not let your exhale be choppy.

Repeat this exercise with the monitoring system for 3 counts, then 2, and then 1.

* Make sure that you are taking in the same amount of air when breathing in for 1 count as when breathing for 4 counts.

Dynamic Breathing

Use the following images and motions to simulate the kind of air needed for different dynamics.

Bow and Arrow – Fortissimo Air

The motion of a bow and arrow is a very powerful one, both in drawing the bow and release of the arrow. Make your breath just as powerful!

Darts – Mezzo Forte Air

This motion is less powerful, you don't have to use as much force to throw the dart and the dart does not move with the same force as the arrow. Adjust your breath to match.

Paper Airplane – Pianissimo Air

If you use too much force throwing a paper airplane, the airplane shoots straight down. Make your air move as gently as if you are throwing a paper airplane.

Pushing the Limits

This next exercise will really push your breathing apparatus. When you do this exercise, especially for the first time, stand with your back against a wall.

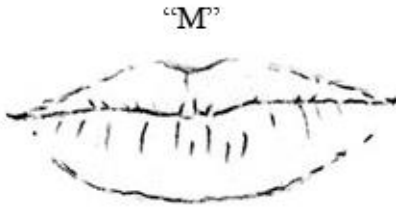
Breathe for the following counts. Keep the counts to around 60 bpm.

Whole Note:	In 4 – Out 4 (4x)
Dotted-Half Note:	In 3 – Out 3 (4x)
Half Note:	In 2 – Out 2 (4x)
Quarter Note:	In 1 – Out 1 (4x)
Eighth Note:	In $\frac{1}{2}$ - Out $\frac{1}{2}$ (8x)
Quarter Note:	In 1 – Out 1 (4x)
Half Note:	In 2 – Out 2 (4x)
Dotted-Half Note:	In 3 – Out 3 (4x)
Whole Note:	In 4 – Out 4 (4x)

IMPORTANT TIP! Now since we have stressed the system, repeat the Relaxed Breathing exercise to calm down again.

Mouthpiece Getting Started

To get started, say the letter “M” and hold your lips in that position. This is the best way to form your embouchure, or the positioning of your facial muscles. Now place your mouthpiece gently in the center of your lips, holding it lightly with the index finger, middle finger, and thumb of your left hand.



Now all you need is air! As long as your lips are touching they will vibrate or “buzz” when you blow air through them.

Buzzing

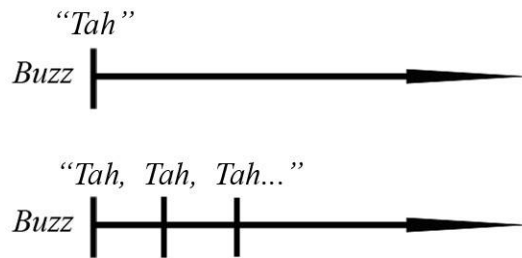
Buzzing is the key to successfully playing the trumpet. Trumpet playing is somewhat similar to playing an electric guitar in that with electric guitar you have the guitar itself and then an amplifier. Without the amplifier the guitar can still play all of the same notes, they just sound different. The amplifier simply makes the guitar sound a little better and louder. The trumpet and mouthpiece have the same relationship. The mouthpiece serves as our “electric guitar” while the trumpet plays the role of amplifier. Anything that you want the trumpet to be able to do, you must first be able to do on the mouthpiece. If your mouthpiece buzzing is done well and accurately, then playing the trumpet is easy.

Start by buzzing a long steady note on the mouthpiece. The actual pitch that you play doesn't matter, only that you hold that initial pitch as steady as you can. If you keep the air blowing steady, the pitch will be steady as well. Do not try to put too much physical effort into producing the buzz. Let the air do the work for you; it will if you let it!



Basic Articulation “Tonguing”

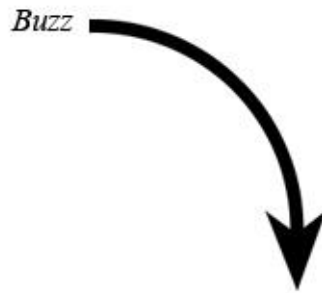
To help separate notes, or articulate them, we will use several different syllables. The most common syllable is “Tah.” Say this sound a few times to get used to it. Make sure you get a crisp “T” sound and a big open “ahh” sound. Then try saying it while buzzing. Also try these other syllables: Kah, Dah, Gah, Toh, Tu, Doh, Du, Goh, Gu, etc. The more syllable sounds can clearly make while buzzing, the more options you will have for making music. When you can buzz with these syllables, apply them to the trumpet. Try doing several in one breath, keeping the air steady.



Imagine the air as water flowing from a faucet. The articulation is like brushing your finger through the water stream. Your finger doesn’t stop the water, it just separates it. Likewise, our sound/air isn’t stopped by the tongue, it is only separated but the sound remains constant.

Going Down

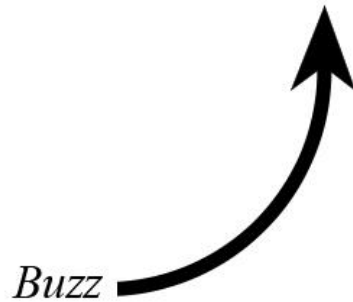
Once you have a clear and steady sounding buzz start to try and move the pitch around. To make the pitch go lower you will need to relax your lips and jaw and blow the air slower. This “slow” air is sometimes referred to as “warm” air. To help understand this concept imagine being in a car on a cold day and trying to fog up the windows. The way you would blow to fog the windows is our slow/warm air. Start with the note that you first buzzed and gradually relax your lips and slow the air down. This will make cause the sound to go lower.



As the sound gets lower try to keep the sound steady by keeping the volume or quantity of air constant even as the speed of the air slows down. When doing this exercise try to go as low as you possibly can. Every time you do this, try to go lower than you did the last time. It will take more to play low than it does to play in the middle register, so make sure that you take a big breath and don't waste all of your air at the beginning.

Going up

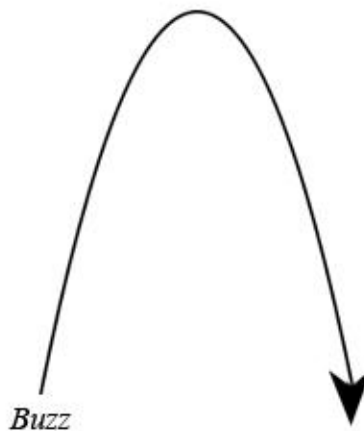
Next try to make the pitch go higher. To do this you will need to blow faster air. Imagine blowing out a candle and keeps getting further away. As the air gets faster, focus your lips in and forward like saying the sound “oooooo.”



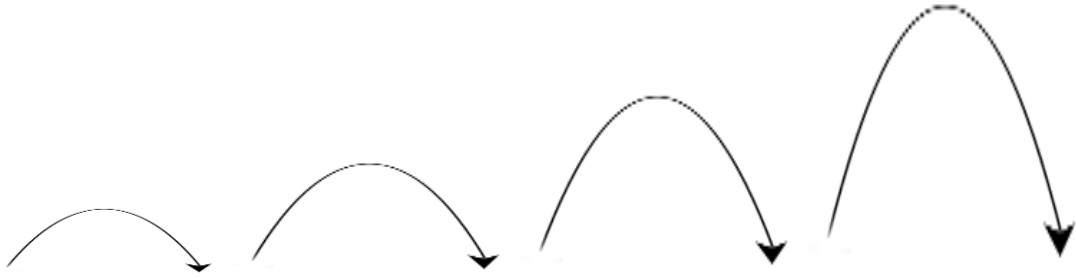
Stay as relaxed as you can. Again, keep the sound steady and even as you ascend in pitch by keeping the volume of air constant. Just like the last exercise, try to go as high as you possibly can while staying relaxed and every time try to go higher than before.

Siren

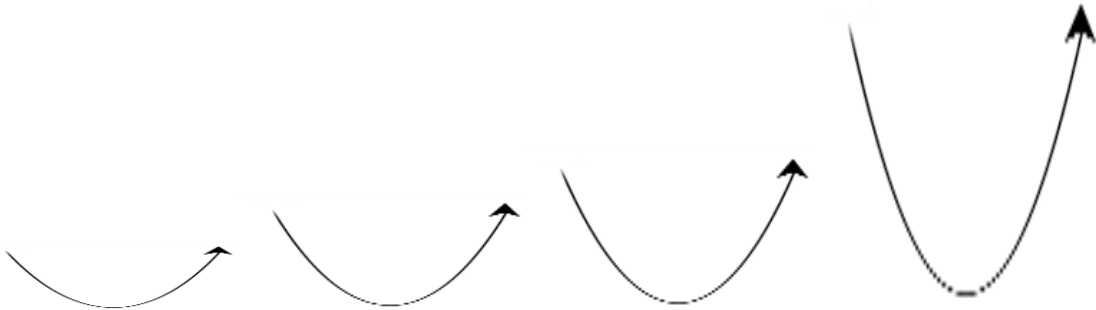
Once you feel confident with making the pitch go lower and higher, lets put those two ideas together. Start low (lots of slow air with relaxed lips and jaw, like saying “ahhh”) and make the pitch go higher and then come back to your original pitch. Make sure that you do this in one breath. If you do it right it will sound like a siren. Always keep the sound even and smooth without any hitches or bumps.



At first, don't worry about play very high or very low, just get the shape smooth. Then gradually push out in each direction.



Also try doing a reverse siren by starting higher and making the pitch go lower and back up.



Name That Tune

Once you master these basic shapes (steady, going down, going up, siren, and reverse siren) you will have learned the fundamentals of all the music you will ever encounter. Music will always be able to be reduced to one of these simple shapes.

The next step is to try arranging these shapes into familiar tunes. Pick a song that you know very well; so well that you could sing it, or at least “hear” it very clearly in your mind. It is recommended that you start with simple melodies like “Mary Had a Little Lamb.”



Sing this tune in your head a few times to make sure that the song is clear in your mind. Then try to buzz the tune while singing it in your head. (It doesn't matter what note you start on, as long as the tune sounds right!)

Try to keep the notes you are buzzing lined up with the tune in your head. When you feel confident buzzing these tunes try playing them for friends, family, or teachers. If they can easily guess the name of the tune you are buzzing then you are well on your way! As you master simple tunes try harder melodies like “Happy Birthday,” etc. The better you get at this process, the easier playing the trumpet will be. If you can sing it, you can buzz it!

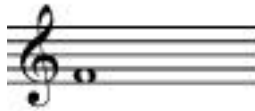
Being Specific

From this point you will want to be picky with what notes you are buzzing. To help with this you will need a drone (a device that can make a steady pitch that you can adjust, many tuners have this option) or a piano. Have your drone play a B-flat 3 (A-sharp 3).



Sing this pitch in your head. When you have the sound clearly in your head, take a big breath and buzz the sound. If the note you buzz is not the same as the pitch from the drone, adjust your sound by moving up or down until the two sounds match. Then try again!

Also try this with F 4.



Try doing a siren between the two pitches (B-flat 3 and f 4).



Try B-flat 4 (A-sharp 4).



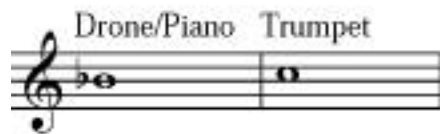
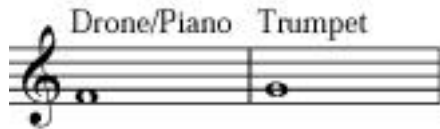
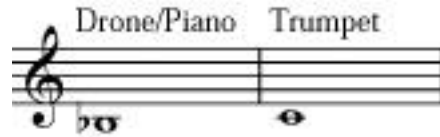
Play a siren between the two B-flats (B-flat 3, 4).



Try playing random notes with your drone, always sing the note in your heard before you buzz it. Make sure that you hit each note exactly without having to adjust the pitch once you've started. If you aren't focused on the pitch, you might miss it.

When you feel confident with this process it is time to move on to the trumpet. Have the drone play B-flat 3 (A-sharp 3). Sing it in your head, and then buzz it. Keep the sound in

your head and put the mouthpiece into the trumpet. Buzz the same pitch into the trumpet exactly as you have done with the mouthpiece (don't press any of the valves) and will be playing a "C" on the trumpet.



*This may seem strange that you are buzzing a B-flat, but playing a C. The drone or piano will play at "Concert Pitch" while the trumpet is in the key of B-flat. This means the trumpet needs to play a full step above Concert Pitch to make the same sound.

Make sure that you do everything exactly the same on the trumpet as you would on the mouthpiece. From this point all you need to know is what valves to press. If you can sing it, you can buzz it. If you can buzz it, you can play it!