



Troubleshooting the Trumpet Section

# SOUND SOLUTIONS

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SECTION 1

# SOUND

# Common Problems



Tight, Pinched sound



Airy, fuzzy tone



Dull, or excessively bright sound



Improperly formed embouchure



# Solutions: Tight, Pinched Sound

Minimize tension. Relax. Stop the squeeze

Breathing exercises to promote proper air use and less tension

Don't control the air with the lips

Consider occasional buzzing on trombone mouthpiece



# Solutions: Airy, Fuzzy Tone

Flatten Chin

Less Cheek Puffing

Mouthpiece buzzing with piano or drone

Focus on centering the pitch



## **Solutions: Dull, or Excessively Bright Sound**

Evaluate tension

Relax as increase volume. Tension causes the brittle, blatty sound.

Focus on proper use of air



# Signs of an Improperly Formed Embouchure

The upper lip not staying inside the mouthpiece cup/rim

Too much upper or lower lip inside mouthpiece – the ratio is off

The corners moving or creating a “smile.” The corners should remain set and in place.

Curling in of lower lip

Rolling the chin – or bunching the chin



# Proper Embouchure Formation

Coffee straw to help  
set embouchure.

Maintain firm, set  
corners

A fixed, flat chin that  
points downward from  
the corners

Proper ratio of upper  
and lower lip (60/40 or  
50/50 is ideal)

The pink part of the lip  
should be inside the cup  
of the mouthpiece and  
as reasonably close to  
the center as possible





# Important Points



NEXT TO PLAYING WITH  
MUSICAL EXPRESSION,  
**SOUND** IS THE MOST  
IMPORTANT ASPECT OF  
PLAYING THE TRUMPET (OR  
OF ANY INSTRUMENT FOR  
THAT MATTER).



MAKE GREAT **SOUND** THE  
FOCUS OF YOUR TEACHING.

## Keys to producing a beautiful trumpet sound

- Clear mental and aural concept of desired sound
- Proper embouchure formation
- Efficient and correct use of air



# Obtaining a proper mental and aural concept of sound



Find as many opportunities for students as possible to hear great trumpet playing. Some examples include visiting guest artists at local universities, regional or full-time orchestras, and invite university professors to work with your students.



Play quality recordings of the best professionals (Phil Smith, Allison Balsom, Tine Thing Helseth, Selina Ott, Christopher Martin, Håkan Hardenberger, Wynton Marsalis, and Sean Jones are some of many)



Encourage students to identify what adjectives describe their ideal sound (brilliant, rich, warm, sweet, vibrant, dark, resonant, thick, etc.). Then ask them to create that sound on their trumpet. It should be the preeminent goal in their music making.



Students have to hear it to be able to emulate it – they need good models



# SOUND

Dr. Keith Johnson (Emeritus Regents Professor of Trumpet, University of North Texas) observed:

- *“to attempt to play without a good sense of how one wishes to sound is akin to attempting to learn to speak a language without having heard the language. The principal reason so many young players sound poorly is that most of them have only heard each other.”*



SECTION 2

**AIR**

# Common Problems



Wah



Weak air flow



Insufficient  
inhalation



Shallow, tension  
filled breaths

# Solutions: Wah

Pervasive problem.

Note shapes matter. Think brick, not egg.

Longer phrases instead of musical individual notes

Sustain notes and forward direction to the line.



# Solutions: Weak airflow

Air flow should mirror phrasing. Song and Wind.

Practice air flow patterns

Horizontal instead of vertical direction

Focus air on a distant point





# Solutions: Insufficient Inhalation

Breathing exercises

Breathe in time and connected to the music

Teach accurate details about how body functions

Create healthy and proper breathing situations



# Important Points

Deep, relaxing breaths are essential. Strive to create the breath one takes while visiting a doctor.



Air flow should always be pervasive and flowing



Focus on air connecting each note. Direction



Relaxed throat



Section 3

# ARTICULATION

# Common Problems

Tongue stopping the air.

Improper tongue placement

“Huffing”

Difficulty with multiple tonguing



# Solutions



Ask for more length to the notes. More music!



Hoo-Doo articulation exercises



Play on leadpipe only



Understand proper tongue placement. “tu”

# Important Points



ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO  
MODEL THE ARTICULATION OF  
GREAT PLAYERS (SIMILAR TO  
SOUND)



GOOD ARTICULATION IS  
DIRECTLY RELATED TO PROPER  
AIRFLOW



IN GENERAL, THE TONGUE  
SHOULD TOUCH AT THE TOP OF  
THE MOUTH WHERE THE TEETH  
AND GUMS MEET. THE USE OF A  
“TU” SYLLABLE WILL HELP  
ACHIEVE THIS.

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