

Trumpet Topics Practice Techniques Slow vs. Fast - Part 2
Tongued Passages
by Bryan Goff

In another one of my Trumpet Topics, Slow vs. Fast, I addressed the advantages of increased efficiency when you practice short fragments up to tempo, rather than starting slowly and gradually increasing the tempo.

I would now like to offer the suggestion that tongued passages, both single-tongued and multiple-tongued passages, should be practiced at near the performance tempo almost from the outset. The reason for this premise is that in tongued passages, the coordination of fingers, tongue and airflow must be critically aligned. Because airflow is often much different at a fast tempo than it is at slower tempos, the “feel” of the coordination will generally be totally different at different speeds. Look, for example, at the following excerpt from the Arutunian Trumpet Concerto:



At a performance tempo of 144 (or even faster) the airstream should be very smooth and continuous for a clean execution and to avoid “pecky” tonguing. However, if one were to practice this figure at quarter note = 108, it would be extremely awkward to double-tongue. To coordinate the fingers and tongue, the airstream would probably be separated - a style and feel of blowing which is totally different that it would be at the final performance tempo. In this case it would be much more effective to practice the passage fast, at the final performance tempo. The first 5 sixteenth notes should be practiced until mastered, then the second 5 notes practiced. Finally, the two groups (the first 9 notes) can be combined; all of this practicing done at the final performance tempo.

Many fast single-tongue passages also will benefit from practicing up to tempo, rather than starting slowly and gradually increasing the speed. Consider the following excerpt from the first movement of the Halsey Stevens trumpet sonata



The tempo is 116-120, and to single-tongue this many consecutive sixteenth notes requires an extremely smooth airstream, with a feel of the tongue bouncing or ricocheting off of the airstream. To practice this passage at a slower tempo is to practice it with a totally different feeling that the feel of the smooth air at the ultimate performance tempo.

It may appear that I advocate practicing only at fast tempos, however I acknowledge that there are many instances where slow practice is absolutely necessary. We must all have numerous practice techniques and when we see that one technique is not producing forward progress, we must be able to change to a different, fresh approach. I hope that some of my suggestions will be helpful to improving the efficiency of YOUR practice.

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