

*Trumpet Topics Relaxation “One, Two, Ready Tense-up”*

*by Bryan Goff, Florida State University*

Wait a minute, shouldn't that be “One, Two, Ready, Play!”? One of the most common playing problems that I have observed in my teaching is excessive tension, and the most prevalent tension problem is usually excessive embouchure tension on the first note. It is obvious that if we start out playing with too much tension, it will only get worse as we progress.

Imagine, for a moment, that you and your friend are taking a long, sleepy afternoon drive. You glance over and notice that your passenger is asleep - you know he's asleep because his lower jaw is hanging open. This is a state of total relaxation, and of course you couldn't form a decent trumpet embouchure with this total absence of tension - you have to at least close your lips! Now, imagine that your lips are closed, you have no hint of a smile, and your facial appearance is very somber and relaxed. Breath in through your nose and then blow - notice, there will be no lip vibration if you are totally relaxed; the air will simply blow your lips open without vibrating and producing a tone.

Now, as a tension awareness exercise, start with that same somber facial expression and start adding tension ever-so-gradually, until you have just enough “embouchure focus” (which equates to a slight amount of embouchure tension) to produce a pianissimo tone. By practicing this exercise regularly, you will hopefully find it easier to monitor the amount of tension that is present in your embouchure, and thereby increase your ability to decrease the amount of embouchure tension at the beginning of your performance and also to monitor and correct the amount of tension throughout the course of your performance.

In order to start with a relaxed embouchure, I offer another suggestion: take a long, slow, deep breath before playing your first note. For example, in 4/4 time rather than inhaling during a quarter rest prior to your entrance, try inhaling over a half rest or even 4 full beats. I think that in this long, slow breath you will find that you are much more capable of maintaining a relaxed initial embouchure than if you were to take in a quick breath.

*Bryan Goff is the Coordinator of the Winds and Percussion division of the School of Music, and is Professor of Trumpet, having served on faculty of Florida State University since 1974. He has appeared as a soloist and clinician throughout the U.S. and Europe, both on modern trumpet and Baroque trumpet. Professor Goff plays Principal Trumpet in the FSU Chamber Orchestra, the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, and the Florida State Brass Quintet. He served for 16 years as the Treasurer of the International Trumpet Guild and is a Past-president of the National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors.*

*Bryan Goff may be contacted at:*

*Professor Bryan Goff*

*School of Music*

*Florida State University*

*Tallahassee, FL 32306-2098*