

Developing Advanced Performance Techniques for Trumpet/High Brass

Tim Andersen

I am a proponent of mouthpiece buzzing and lip vibrating/buzzing or free buzzing as an avenue to develop higher-level skills in high school players. Develop the mouthpiece buzzing technique first. It is imperative that students be closely monitored so they don't develop a tight or unnatural embouchure when working with these techniques. Keep the face looking natural. Students shouldn't look different than their normal face when attempting to lip buzz or mouthpiece buzz. Trumpet and horn players should start buzzing lower pitches. F3-Bb3 is a good place to start. Teachers should model the buzz for the student. The buzz needs to be full and resonant. The use of a tuner that provides a pitch is a necessity. Tonal Energy Tuner is my preferred practice partner.

Note Bending

Many young players have issues with playing above the center of the pitch. Note bending exercises are a wonderful way for the student to center a pitch in the resonant spot. This exercise can be further developed to create a beautiful vibrato.

1. Starting on concert F, play the descending half step to concert E and back up. This is done for pitch memory.

2. Buzz the interval on the mouthpiece while working with a tuner to maintain accurate pitch. The buzz should not be loud. Mezzo piano–mezzo forte is desirable when buzzing the mouthpiece.

3. On the instrument, bend the F down to the E and back up. It is necessary to keep the muscle memory and oral shape from the mouthpiece buzz, and apply it to the note bend on the instrument. Listen critically for the resonant center of the tone on the concert F. Bend the note slowly down to the concert E. As you do, listen for the resonant spot on the F in case you started above center. Bend the pitch slowly up to the F, listening for the resonant center of the pitch. Don't go past that point.

4. Play the interval on the instrument using correct fingerings. Remember the “feel” of bending the note and repeat that when playing the interval on the instrument.

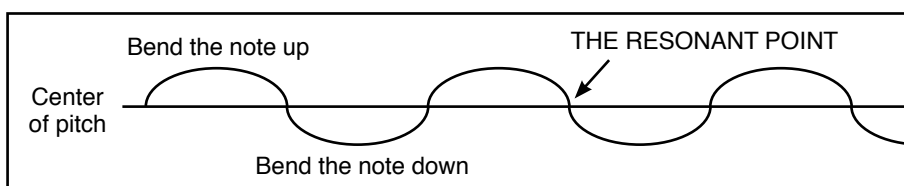
5. Continue the exercise down chromatically. E-Eb-E, Eb-D-Eb, etc.

Once the minor second is developed, continue the exercise to the major second and minor third. Strive for the best tone quality on each tone when bending. With practice, the bent notes can be played with a sound that is very similar to the sound of the correctly fingered pitch.*

After the note bending exercise is developed, the student can bend pitches above and below the center, listening for the point when the note resonates and sounds louder. *See graphic below.*

Vibrato

The note-bending technique is an incredibly useful exercise for developing not only tone but lip vibrato as well. The exercise maximizes the lip manipulation. Students can retain the muscle memory as they strive to minimize the lip movement and increase the speed of the manipulation as they move toward a successful, musical vibrato.*



*Access the handout for this exercise at www.texasbandmasters.org. Select Resources/Publication Archives and then select Convention Handouts in the upper left corner. Scroll down to the 2013 handout by Tim Andersen.

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Start each line at mm=80

Important: *The lower pitch is not to be played a half step below the starting pitch. I have written the exercise as a way for me to show you the rhythm. You should start with a wide/exaggerated pitch variation/vibrato. As the student progresses in their development, narrow the width of the vibrato as the speed of the vibrato increases.*

Practice each line slightly faster every few days to develop the feel for vibrato. Always focus on a continuous, fast air stream.

When the half notes are at mm=160, move to line 2 and start at mm=80. Continue this process through the rest of the lines.

Articulation

- Lips need to be wet and touching when producing a tone. The first sound should be the lips parting creating a “p” sound at the front of the note.

- Alternate tongue starts with “air starts” when practicing articulations. When air starting notes, strive for an immediate sound similar to a tongue start. Lips need to be soft in the center of the mouthpiece so they will vibrate feely when the air passes between them. Too little compression will create air before the note begins. Too much compression will create a tight, pinched tone and will likely have extraneous sound at the front of the note.

- Students can pull the lips apart when breathing, creating air in front of the note because they aren’t touching the lips back together after the breath. Without creating undo pressure, the mouthpiece can help hold the lips together when breathing, making it easier to start the note with immediate sound.

- Practice connected notes using a “tah”, “too” or “tee” syllable. Not “tut”. When attempting to articulate at faster tempos, some students tend to bring the tongue back up at the end of each note, creating a

“pecky” style and notes that have no resonance or tone. When developing a correct start, the tongue should only be used to start the note, not end it.

Aural monitoring

Teachers must monitor the development of the articulation by listening to the students say “tah”, “too” or “tee”. Listen for a crisp “t” on the front of the syllable.

Visual monitoring

It is very easy for teachers to see if the student is tonguing too low (tonguing between the teeth), or if the tongue is too high (on the ridges of the hard palette).

Having students gently place their index finger barely between the front teeth is another way to observe what the tongue is doing. Both teacher and student can realize if the jaw is moving and/or if the student is tonguing between the teeth.

Incentive Spirometer

A YouTube film has been created to show an Incentive Spirometer in use. The demonstration may be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lAkuBxnoVw.

The use of an Incentive Spirometer is a wonderful aide to visually “see” issues that arise. Students can “see” what their tongue and air are doing. Turning the device upside down and blowing out will move the ball to the top of the tube.

Start with long tones on a concert F. With the dial closed, the ball should move to the top of the tube quickly if the air is fast enough at the front of the note. Continue with connected half notes, then connected quarter notes and connected eighth notes. The ball will drop very little (approx. 1/4 inch) if performed correctly. If the tongue comes back up at the end of each note, the ball will drop too far. If the student

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stops the air between notes, the ball will drop too far. A teacher can also hear pitch changes at the beginning and end of the notes. This means too much of the tongue is moving, creating different vowel shapes.

Technique

There is no secret to developing technique provided the tone is centered and articulation is correct. Consistent daily practice is essential. Scale patterns, arpeggios and lip slurs are the best way to develop muscle memory for lasting technique. Begin with simple patterns and increase the difficulty of the exercise as you develop your skill level. Start slowly, gradually speeding up over a matter of weeks, months and even years.

Monitor for correct hand position. Hands should be in as natural a position as possible. Hold your arms at

your side and observe your hands. The hands will be curved slightly and fingers are not touching each other. When holding the trumpet, I think of the left hand as holding a glass of water and the right hand as drinking a glass of water.

Move the valves up and down as fast as possible without creating tension. This holds true whether playing whole notes or 32nd notes. Whether playing at mm=60 or mm=180. The valve stroke should never change speed.

Buzz patterns on the mouthpiece first. Slur then tongue. Again, use of the Tonal Energy Tuner is a great practice aide. Keep the buzz like a siren with lots of tone between the top and bottom of the siren. This helps the student keep the air steady and smooth when slurring on the instrument.*

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Tim Andersen is a Yamaha Performing Artist. He is in his 25th year of public school teaching. The last twelve of years he has taught in the Wylie Independent School District. Ten of those years he has been an Assistant Band Director at Wylie High School. He has taught all levels of instrumental music from 5th grade general music classes through high school.

Mr. Andersen received his undergraduate degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. While attending the University of Nebraska, he won the International Trumpet Guild Student Solo Competition in 1981 and 1982. He also won the Music Teacher's National Association National Brass Competition in 1981. He received his Master's degree from Indiana University as well as earning the coveted Performer's Certificate from that institution. After graduating from Indiana University, Tim performed for three years with the Dallas Brass. He was a featured soloist at the 2nd International Brass Congress in 1984 and was a guest artist at the 1988 International Trumpet Guild conference.

Mr. Andersen has combined a successful teaching career along with a successful performing career. He has performed with the Dallas Wind Symphony for 25 years and has held the position of Co-Principal Trumpet since 2007. He is a member of the Festival Brass Quintet. Tim performs, records and tours frequently with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, joining them on their European tour this spring and at the Bravo Vail Festival in Colorado in 2011 and 2013. Tim can be heard on over 20 recordings with the Dallas Brass, Dallas Wind Symphony and Dallas Symphony as well as the soon to be released video game, Banner Saga, with music written by Grammy Award winning composer, Austin Wintory. He is a faculty member at the Blast of Brass summer music camp. Tim is a member of Texas Music Educators Association, Texas Bandmasters Association, Phi Beta Mu and the International Trumpet Guild.