

# **Back to Basics for Trombone**

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Presented to;

Texas Bandmasters Association, Inc.

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James L. Ellis is from El Paso, Texas. He is a Certified Public Accountant and Controller of White's Music Box in Las Cruces, New Mexico and El Paso. Mr. Ellis graduated from New Mexico State University in 1975. While attending NMSU, he participated in various music organizations at the university.

Mr. Ellis has taught trombone privately in the El Paso and Las Cruces area and has conducted trombone and low brass clinics at middle and high schools in both Texas and New Mexico. Mr. Ellis is a past member of the El Paso Civic Orchestra and the Mesilla Valley Concert Band in Las Cruces, NM.

Mr. Ellis has recently written and published a trombone method book called "Back to Basics for Trombone" published by LS Publications. This book was originally written as a private lesson book for beginning students and a daily warm-up book for more advanced students. The book contains 57 pages of basic fundamental exercises to prepare the young trombone student for more advanced texts. Additional books using the same basic fundamental exercises are being published for Trumpet, Baritone, and Tuba.

## Basic Equipment Checklist

1. Students do not really understand there are two tuning slides on a standard trombone.
2. Take an active interest in students maintaining their trombone. Be sure to periodically check the main tuning and position slides for proper lubrication and operation. Proper operation of these slides should be as important as other instrument problems such as valves, pads and keys. There seems to be a different standard for maintaining the proper repair of the trombone. Either a few more dents are needed before repairs are performed or the trombone slide is repaired when it will no longer move.
  - a. The tuning slide should be cleaned and lubricated at least once a month. This slide should be easily extended with the thumbs by pushing on the bar weight support on the tuning slide.
  - b. The position slide should be inspected for proper lubrication and any signs of damage. This slide may need repairs to correct alignment problems or dents. Slide lubrication depends on the type of lubricant being used.
3. The main tuning slide should always be closed before it is put back in the case. A properly stored bell will reduce the risk of damage and protect the interior part of the tuning slide from drying out and becoming difficult to adjust.
4. Discourage students from using their shoe in operating the water key. This will prevent damage to the slide and the water key.
5. Do not allow students to use their chair as a trombone stand (with the bell standing straight up in seat of the chair). The instrument should be either in their hands or in the case to protect the instrument from damage.
6. Make sure students hold the position slide with only the thumb, the index finger and the middle finger. The slide can be twisted out of alignment by holding the slide too tightly with the entire hand.
7. Position slide lubricants are made from oils, creams and silicone blend materials. The oil base materials are easier to use but do require constant application. Slide cream products do give smoother slide operation when properly applied, but do require a spray water bottle and more preparation to achieve preferred results. The silicone blend products such as Slide-O-Mix give both easy application and very good slide operation results.

8. It is important for the trombone to be cleaned periodically. Cleaning a trombone is more of a rinsing procedure than a complete cleaning activity. It is recommended that the instrument be thoroughly cleaned at least once a month. I prefer that the instrument be cleaned every other week. Recommended procedures are the following.

Caution: Do not use any soaps or chemicals when cleaning the instrument.

- a. Clean the trombone in two parts, the bell section and the slide section.
- b. Use only very mild warm water (not cold and absolutely never too warm). Water that is too warm will remove the lacquer from the instrument.
- c. A snake cleaning brush is needed for cleaning the slide section.
- d. Begin by allowing the bathtub faucet to enter the bell section and flow out the connection tube. The water should be allowed to rinse through this section for a few minutes.
- e. Dry off the outside of the bell section and remove main tuning slide.
- f. Clean and apply tuning slide grease to the interior slide parts that are in contact with the main body of the bell section. One of the interior slide parts may be on the bell section. Be sure to wipe off any excess tuning slide grease after the tuning slide is reinstalled and closed completely.
- g. The main tuning slide can be difficult to reinstall on the bell section. Due care in replacing this slide is very important to prevent damage to this part of the instrument. Most tuning slides have one end that attaches just before the other. The tuning slide is pressure sensitive when it is first connected. This slide cannot be forced onto the bell section.
- h. Put the bell section back in the case and remove the slide section.
- i. Use the faucet on the bathtub with the same water temperature as above. Allow the slide section to fill with water. Both slides will fill with water.
- j. Operate the slide over the tub with the water inside the slides. This will help the slide to clean itself. Pour the water out of the slides and remove the outer slide.
- k. Be careful where you place all slides. Do not set them on the floor where they can be accidentally stepped on.
- l. Allow water to run and flow through the outer slide for a few minutes. Pour all water out of the slide.
- m. Refill the outer slide with water. Run a snake cleaning brush in both slides (water should be in the slides). Pour out the water in the outer slide and rinse water through the slide one more time.
- n. Set the outer slide down in a safe place.
- o. Rinse water through each of the inner slides. Use the snake cleaning brush through each slide and rinse water again through each slide.
- p. Dry all inner and outer slides with a soft towel.
- q. Put the slide section back together and reapply preferred slide lubricant.
- r. The last step is to clean the mouthpiece. A mouthpiece brush is very useful to clean the shank of the mouthpiece.
- s. Slide cream lubrication should only be applied to the two inner stockings at the end of the slides. The slide cream will coat the inside of the outer slide. Excess cream should be wiped off the stockings of the inner slides.

### **Basic Sound Quality Checklist**

(Back to Backs for Trombone © LS Publications)

1. The upper lip is the buzzing part that creates the sound. The bottom lip helps with endurance of the sound.
2. The mouthpiece should be placed about two-thirds on the upper lip and one-third on the bottom lip.
3. Always apply some pressure against the mouthpiece with the bottom lip.
4. Drop the jaw slightly to create a “ta” sound, not a “too” sound. The “too” and “tee” syllables are used in the higher range of notes. It is recommended that new students use the “ta” syllable for beginning in the lower range of notes.
5. Pull the corners of the mouth back slightly to allow the lips to lie in a flat position on the mouthpiece.
6. Take a breath, allowing the air to fill your stomach. You should then concentrate on blowing the air as if there were a tiny straw located just inside the mouthpiece. This is also known as “focusing” the airflow through the mouthpiece. The diaphragm controls the amount of air leaving the stomach.
7. Keep the head and the level of your instrument up to make sure the flow of air is not restricted. Make sure the mouthpiece is aligned properly with the top and bottom lips, teeth and jaw.
8. Practice daily even if it is only 15 to 30 minutes a day. One hour of practice does not make up for 3 days missed. It takes two days of practice to make up for one day of practice missed.
- 9 . Be sure to practice:
  - Long tones for good sound and endurance
  - Lip slurs for embouchure flexibility
  - Articulation and legato exercises for style

### Basic Clinic Methods

1. Students only blow enough air from the mouth into the mouthpiece to make a sound in the instrument. This results in an incorrect method of blowing air from the stomach through the lips, mouthpiece and instrument.
2. Moving the slide to other positions away from the body adds to poor sound quality when air is not properly blown into the instrument. All the technical things required to be done with air, buzzing and the mouthpiece are lost.
3. I find that most directors, because of the problem in #1 have students push the main tuning slide in completely in order for students to play in tune. Students play very flat by not blowing air properly into the instrument. Have students pull the main tuning slide out about an inch. The next procedures will cause students to play sharp. If the tuning slide is not pulled out, students will try to adjust the pitch by slowing down the air blown into the instrument. Students need to change this habit and adjust the pitch, if necessary, with the position slide.
4. You will need a large, McDonald's size straw. Cut the straw in half to simulate holding a mouthpiece. Have students place the tip of the straw in between the teeth, close the lips, and blow fast through the straw. Ask if they can feel the pressure in the stomach area. This procedure lets students feel exactly how to blow air from the mouth into the mouthpiece. The amount and speed of the air through the straw happens automatically. The straw placed between the teeth opens the teeth properly and helps to create a "ta" sound instead of "too" sound. More air is now blown into the instrument from this technique.
5. Have students now play an "F" and make sure that they are blowing the air like was done in the straw. Have students blow into the straw and then play the instrument several times to feel this concept. The next concept will now focus on the sound quality of the note.
6. Draw a circle using the side of the chalk and then draw the same size circle with the point of the chalk. Tell students that the wide chalk circle is the airy sound quality that does not sound good. We want students to create a clean, clear, fine sound that is represented by the fine line circle.
7. To get this fine line circle kind of sound, ask students if they have ever seen the brown, stir stick kind of straws used to stir coffee. (The kind we all like to chew on). Tell students that you want them to imagine this little straw being inside the shank of the mouthpiece and to blow all the air inside that little straw.

8. We are not going to fill the trombone “outward”. We are going to direct all of the air into the little straw. Explain that the pitch of the note is going to go sharp which is all right because the main tuning slide is pulled out. Many of us were taught that this is called “focusing” the sound. The young student does not really understand focusing but they do understand the straw concept.
  
9. The use of the straw concept creates focusing to occur by having students do and feel what we want to accomplish. Be sure to explain what will happen if students do not remember the straw. The pitch will go flat because the main tuning slide was pulled out. You need to remind students, “Remember the Straw” and encourage them to remind each other.
  
10. After notes in first position are accomplished with better sound quality it is important for students to do the same techniques with the straws in other slide positions. To accomplish this it is important to review where students have placed the slide when playing all other positions. Reference points on the slide help to show students where the other positions are located on the trombone. The bend of the elbow can also be used as reference point in locating the proper position on the trombone.
  - a. The end of the outer slide and the bar used to hold the slide are used as reference points in locating the proper slide positions.
    - i. Second and fourth positions should use the end of the outer slide as a reference point.
    - ii. Third, fifth, sixth and seventh positions should use the bar held in the right hand as a reference point.
  - b. The bell of the instrument is also used as a reference point for third and fourth position. It is important for students not to develop a bad habit of holding the bell with the right hand fingers.
  - c. The crease created by the change in bore size at the end of the inner slide stockings are reference points to locate sixth and seventh positions.
  - d. Fifth, sixth and seventh positions are more difficult to locate. They require moving the position slide by trial and error based on students hearing the correct pitch. An electronic tuner is very helpful to achieve the correct pitch for these positions.



11. It is important for students to hear the correct pitch and adjust the slide to the proper position.
  - a. Too often students adjust the pitch with the airflow rather than moving the slide. I like playing thirds up and down the scale. Students move from first position to other positions fairly easy. They do have more difficulty moving to and from other positions. Slide checks to see where the slide is being placed while playing thirds are very helpful. Have students look at where the slide is actually being placed.
  - b. A simple method I like to use is having students play a note, and then play down to the note that sounds like a doorbell. (Ding-Dong). Examples are F1 to D4, E2 to Db5, Eb3 to C6, and Bb1 to G4. These patterns are used to practice fourth, fifth and sixth positions.
  - c. The Remington exercises are also a very good source for intonation development.
  - d. Encourage students to listen to other instruments being tuned to determine whether they are sharp or flat. This form of ear training can be very helpful in developing the trombone section. Make it part of grading to challenge the students.
12. Each student should have his or her own music stand in order to hold the instrument properly while reading the music and watching the director.
13. Encourage students to play the proper dynamic level in the room. Most young musicians play the dynamic level at their music stand not the room. I encourage the trombone section to play louder with controlled, good sound until the band director tells them they are playing too loud.

## **Basic Practice Methods**

(Back to Basics for Trombone @ LS Publications)

### Level One:

The student musician only practices the music given to him or her by the music director. The student musician normally reads through the music verifying key signatures and only practices what is required for the next class or those parts that are the easiest to play. Mistakes are not seriously practiced and the normal response to the band director is “I had trouble with the part or I did not understand it.” The student normally does not practice his or her instrument on a regular basis.

### Level Two:

The student musician practices teacher directed warm-ups and other school assigned materials. Practice also includes outside technique materials and music the student musician enjoys playing. Beginning students will practice 15-20 minutes and advanced students will practice 20 to 45 minutes. This form of practice is helpful to maintain endurance, good sound quality and basic technique if regularly followed. This is designed for level two, three and four practice. It provides technical exercises and warm-up drills to assist any musician who practices their instrument on a daily basis.

### Level Three:

This musician prepares for concerts, regional band tryouts, solo and ensemble contests, chair and grading tests. This musician is more serious about the time spent practicing his or her instrument. The musician makes sure to warm-up properly and practices all required music. Difficult parts will be repeated as many times as necessary to play the part correctly. A musician always stops to work on more difficult measures slowly at first to make sure that correct notes and rhythms are played properly. Pencil notes are often marked on the music to eliminate mental errors when the music is performed at a later time.

### Level Four:

This musician will always warm-up at this level before performing the music during a practice session. This level of practice includes sight-reading and practicing alternate clefs. Jazz music is an excellent source for this type of practice due to the various rhythm patterns that are encountered. This form of practice helps the musician develop his or her playing ability at a very high and respected level among other

## **Basic Music Note Recognition**

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Note recognition requires you to memorize notes on the staff. You will be able to play these notes easier if you think of the note and the position at the same time by thinking of the game BINGO.

The note G should be thought as    G     4     for fourth position

The note F should be thought as    F     1     for first position

The note C should be thought as    C     6     for sixth position

The note Eb should be thought as   Eb    3     for third position

If you practice naming notes like this, your reaction time to play these notes will be much faster. Remember .READ NOTES LIKE BINGO.

Practice this method on the next page. If you need help, look at the position chart on the front inside cover of this book.

### **TBA Clinic Note:**

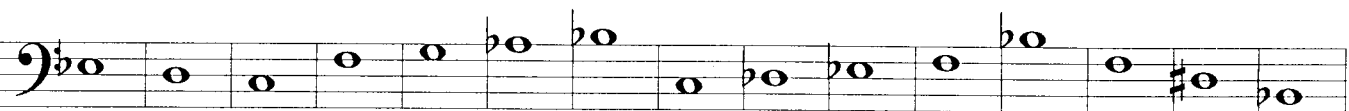
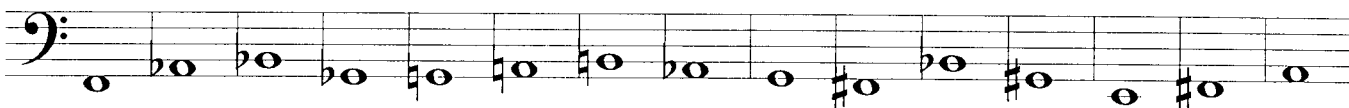
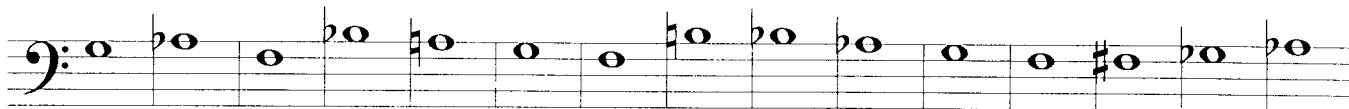
The naming of notes and their positions is not related to pitch notation commonly used in standard music terminology.

Position chart is on page 15 of this handout.

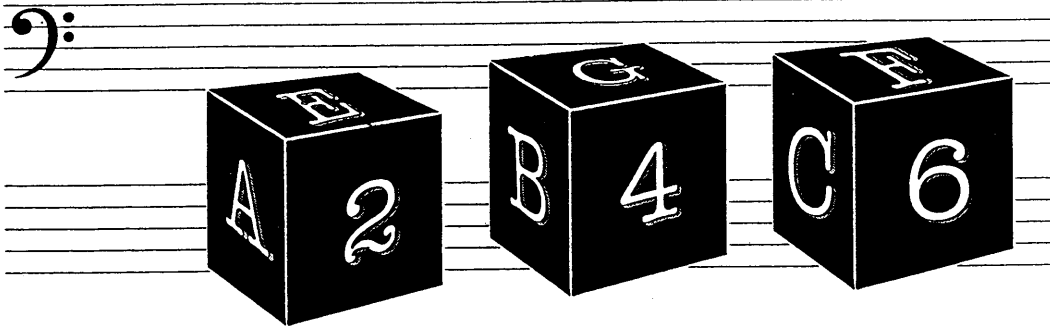
# Note Recognition Exercise



F1 D4



**BACK**  
**to**  
**BASICS**  
**for**  
**Trombone**



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# Trombone Position Chart

The chart displays seven positions for the trombone, each with a specific note and fingering for both the right and left hands. The notes are listed in the center of each column, and the fingerings are shown as musical notation above and below the notes.

Position	Note	Right Hand Fingering	Left Hand Fingering
1	Bb	1-2-3	1-2-3
2	A	1-2-3	1-2-3
3	Ab/G#	1-2-3	1-2-3
4	G	1-2-3	1-2-3
5	Gb/F#	1-2-3	1-2-3
6	F	1-2-3	1-2-3
7	E	1-2-3	1-2-3

Positions

## Clinic Notes