

# BRASS ARTICULATION AND MUSICAL STYLE

Joe Dixon

## I. Embouchure and Articulation – An Odd Place to Start?

- Responsiveness: Embouchure should create “instant sound” whether you articulate or not.
- Undesirable percussive articulation is often an attempt to “kick-start” a non-responsive note. In this case, changing the articulation to solve the issue is band-aiding the symptom.
- Incorrect breathing can destroy the articulation function.

## II. Syllables

- Syllables help create appropriate musical style and tone color through: Shaping and definition of the start, firmness or lightness of the start, and voicing.
- The consonant in a syllable helps create the clarity, immediacy, and shape of the note’s start.
- The vowel in a syllable helps voice the tone color of a note.
- Using syllables allows one to easier replicate the same start continuously.
- Tah, Too, Toe, Tee are “default” or “regular starts.” Immediacy and definition.
- Dah, Doo, Doe, Dee are “legato” or smoother starts.
- ALL syllables have a spectrum of lightness and firmness.

## III. Physical Action of the Tongue

- “Up and Down” motion allows less tongue to move.
- Air compression is controlled by: where the tongue touches, how much surface area touches, and how long it touches.
- The higher you place the tongue (toward the roof), the lighter the start; the lower you place the tongue (toward the aperture), the firmer or percussive the start.
- The less surface area (number of taste buds) that touches, the lighter the start; more surface area of the tongue touching creates a firmer or more definite start.
- The longer that the tongue makes contact, the more air compression is created. Moving the tongue out of the way quickly helps create a lighter start.

## IV. Matching Brass Articulation Throughout Your Brass Section

- Matched syllables and matched physical placement does not give matched musical results
- Just to complicate your life: Understanding the role of tessitura.

## V. Reading Style Markings

- Analyze markings based on three criteria:
  1. The start of the note
  2. The weight of the note
  3. The length of the note

- Most markings do not affect the start; only the length and the weight.
- Remember that all markings must be analyzed in context of the piece.

## VI. The Mystery of Trombone Slurring – All Secrets Revealed

- How our 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Teaching can undermine learning to slur.
- The old “note goes up – slide goes down” rule is imperfect.
- The easy way: Trombone slurs like any other instrument (except for when two notes will glissando)

| <u>LIP SLUR</u> | <u>NATURAL SLUR</u> | <u>VALVE SLUR</u> | <u>LEGATO SLUR</u>  |
|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Air Continues   | “ “                 | “ “               | “ “                 |
| No Tongue       | “ “                 | “ “               | Legato Tongue*      |
| Same Position   | Different Positions | Same or Different | Different Positions |

\*The only slur that requires a tongue-start is a legato slur. Legato slurs occur between notes that are on the same harmonic/partial. Notes on the same partial can “glissando” and the legato slur is used to prevent that “smear” effect.

Legato slurs require:

- A soft legato syllable, “dah” or “doo”, that brushes very lightly (think ‘3 taste buds’).
- The tongue brushes on the ridge above the teeth; the legato tongue does not touch enamel.
- The tongue must move away quickly to prevent compression of the air.
- The tongue must be synchronized with an efficient slide movement.

## VII. Multiple-tonguing

- Consonants alternate (T-K-T-K); vowel remains constant.
- Final product should sound like an incredible single tongue.
- T and K consonants must match to sound identical.
- Tone color and volume must match.
- My rules for all fast technique:
  1. Start as slow as needed to make the quality work; don’t just work for tempo.
  2. Work conceptually; tone, intonation, rhythmic evenness, clarity of start – and, it looks, feels, and sounds effortless.
  3. Increase metronome in increments of 2 beats per minute. If there is any perceived loss of quality or increase in effort required, return to the original tempo.

## VIII. Questions & Answers

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