



What's Going on Back There? Teaching Beginner Euphoniums and Tubas

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What's going on back there?!

Teaching beginning euphoniums and tubas

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Playing Fundamentals

It is important to instill good fundamentals when students begin playing a brass instrument. Insist that the students do everything the right way from the start. Being a stickler about the fundamentals early will pay off in the long run.

The first buzz

Demonstration is best method.
Show students how to buzz.

- Say the letter "M"
 - This puts the lips in place to make buzz
- Gently blow air between lips to make the lips buzz
 - The tuba requires a larger aperture. Try saying the word "Too"
- Avoid bad habits early
 - Extensive lip puckering
 - Puffing cheeks
 - Smiling lips
- Very important to keep a defined aperture that is also flexible
 - Gain inner mouthpiece control
- Also keep lips evenly placed
 - Avoid one lip overlapping the other

Mouthpiece placement

- Start off students placing the mouthpiece in the center of their lips and teeth.
- Most players use either even placement between top and bottom lip inside mouthpiece, or a little more upper lip in mouthpiece than lower lip. But this can vary player to player.
 - 50/50 between upper and lower lips
 - 2/3 upper lip and 1/3 lower lip
 - Too much lower lip in the mouthpiece can cause future problems with range and control.

Buzzing on the mouthpiece is great for teaching beginners the technique for brass playing.

Buzzing develops embouchure muscles, and builds strength and endurance.

- Teeth need to be open inside mouth.
 - Some beginners tend to have their teeth closed while buzzing.
 - Open teeth allow air to move into the instrument the best.
- Tongue should be at bottom of mouth.
 - Some beginners tend to place their tongues forward against their teeth while buzzing.
 - Tongue out of the way also allows for proper airflow into the instrument.
- Student should be able to sustain the sound for an extended period of time.

Teach students how to change the pitch while buzzing.

- The aperture gets narrower for higher pitches, and wider for lower pitches.
 - Inner mouthpiece control
- Also think the direction of the air in the mouthpiece for range.
 - While playing, directing the air downward towards the chin can help a player's high range.

Posture

The point of having "correct" posture is to allow for efficient breathing and to eliminate body tension.

- Feet flat on the floor
- Upper body is in the same position as if the player is standing up straight
- The Instrument should come to them.
 - No hunching over to get to the mouthpiece.
 - For euphonium players you must monitor whether the instrument rests on the student's leg, or if they have to hold the instrument up just like they are standing.

- For tuba players you must monitor where the lead pipe points when the student is sitting down.
 - It may be above or below their face, and needing adjustment.
 - Make sure the student positions the instrument where they can sit up comfortably while playing.
 - The instrument can shift up and down their legs, while also tilting left or right.
 - The instrument may also rest on the edge of the chair.

Breathing

Playing a brass instrument requires moving large amounts of air through the tubing.

- Must be relaxed air
- In order to move air through the instrument, the player must breathe in a large amount.

Air = Sound

- The sound is a direct result of the quality of air the student uses.

full air = full sound
wimpy air = wimpy sound
forced air = forced sound

Deep breaths need to be taken to have the best tone quality. Small breaths can produce weak and out of tune tones, and the player won't be able to hold notes to their full value.

Long tone practice with decrescendos and crescendos are good breath control exercises

Use a visual device

- A pinwheel or a breathing bag helps students visualize airflow and technique.

Hand Placement

The point of "correct" hand placement is to allow for efficient playing technique

- Hands should be in a natural relaxed position.

Upright bell tuba and euphonium

Right hand in "C" shape

- Thumb should be anchored on the valve casing.
- Place the pads of their fingers on top of the valves.
 - Fingers not too flat
 - Fingers not too arched

Left hand goes across the front of the instrument and grips the outer tubing.

- For the euphonium, the left arm should be able to hold up the instrument on its own.
- Avoid the lead pipe “Gorilla Grip!”
 - Many beginners like to grip the lead pipe with their left hand.

Bell front tuba and euphonium

Right hand in a “C” shape

- Place the pads of their fingers on top of the valves.
 - Fingers not too flat
 - Fingers not too arched

Left Hand grips the outer tubing in a relaxed fashion.

Tonguing/articulation

Articulation technique on a brass instrument involves striking of the tongue.

Have the students say the word "tah"

- The tongue movement when saying the word “tah” is the same as when articulating on a brass instrument.
- The word "tah" also has fast air with it. (Which the student needs to get in the habit of playing with.)
 - Once the student gets used to it. Tell them to switch to a "dah" syllable. (Around high school age.) "dah" is a softer articulation, but shouldn't be switched to until the student is in the habit of using the right amount of air. "Tah" might be too harsh of an attack at its point, but having the ability to do both gives a variety of articulations.

Avoid bad habits while tonguing

- Chewing
- Air before tongue

Sound Concepts for a low brass instrument

Brass players are judged mostly on the quality of their sound. The most important characteristic of a fine musician is their tone quality.

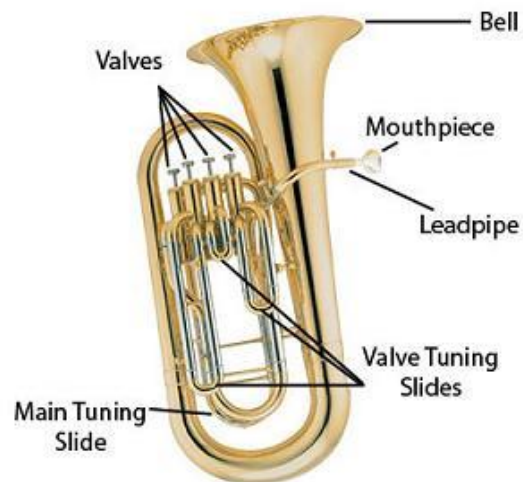
Words to describe a good tone quality

- Pure, round, full, resonant, warm, beautiful

Problems in the tone can result from having problems in the embouchure shape, tongue placement, airflow/breathing, lip placement, mouthpiece placement, and body tension. Developing good fundamentals results in the best tone qualities.

Use knowledge of the fundamentals to diagnose problems with the student's sound in any register.

Beginning Equipment



Beginning euphonium mouthpieces

- Bach 6 1/2 AL
 - Later move them to a Bach 5G, 4G, Schilke 51D

Beginning euphoniums (3 and 4 valves)

Yamaha YEP 321 (4 valve)

Yamaha YEP 201 (3 valve)

- 3 valves are cheaper
- 4 valve euphoniums provide better intonation and low range capabilities.

Beginning tuba mouthpieces

- Bach 18 or 24AW
- Schilke 69c4 67c4

A popular mouthpiece is the Conn Helleberg, but some teachers avoid it for beginners. It has a thin rim and is a “funnel” mouthpiece. “Bowl” mouthpieces

have more resistance, helping young students with limited airflow. It is a good idea to move a student to a Helleberg when they show lots of progress and desire to play the tuba better. It will take more air to play on a “funnel” mouthpiece.

Beginning tubas

“3/4” Bb tuba

Tuba models use the “quarter” system.”

i.e. 3 quarter, 4 quarter, 5 quarter, and 6 quarter

- Yamaha and Miraphone are good practical brands
- 3 valves are cheaper
- 4 valve tubas provide better intonation and low range capabilities.

Front action valve sets are recommended, but know what is practical for your program.

- Top action valves don't allow for slide moving.
- Tubists push and pull their valve slides to improve intonation note to note.

Literature

“Rubank” and “Essential Elements” books are still great.

- Use any beginning method books that build the student’s technique and range as the book progresses.
- Get students playing solos, duets, trios, quartets, quintets, etc. The more music and exercises they play, the more fun they will be having while also advancing their technique and reading skills.

Recordings/listening

Be sure to provide professional recordings for students to hear.

It is very important for the students to hear what a good tone quality sounds like.

They can also be inspired after hearing professional capabilities.

- Euphonium Soloists on YouTube:
 - Steven Mead, David Childs, Demondrae Thurman, Ben Pierce, Adam Frey, Brian Bowman
- Tuba Soloists on YouTube:
 - Oystein Baadsvik, Roland Szentpali, Pat Sheridan, Roger Bobo

Practice habits

Brass players need to develop their embouchure muscles along with their playing technique. Insist on the students practicing every day for a specified amount of time. Developing good practice habits should start in beginning band.

Brass players have “exercises,” like athletes, to develop their skills.

- Lip slurs - Flexibilities
- Long tones
- Tonguing exercises
- Scales
- Arpeggios
- Range building
- Playing melodies