



Beginning Trumpet Not So Fast – It Takes Time

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I would like to present some ideas that will help to slow the process in starting beginning trumpet students in the areas of instrument selection, setting the embouchure, creating a buzz, and expanding range at a slow pace. Over the years, I have observed many young players who have developed poor playing habits as a result of being asked to play too high too quickly.

I. Instrument selection

- A. Try to use a mouthpiece visualizer
- B. Check size, texture, and shape of lips-check for teardrop
- C. Check teeth (overbite or under bite)
- D. Physical size of hands and arms
- E. Select an appropriate mouthpiece

II. Setting the Embouchure

- A. Place a small straw into the lips to form the embouchure. The corners of the mouth will be firm and the chin flat without any explanation.
- B. Think of pulling a string
- C. Again-use a mouthpiece visualizer

III. Creating a buzz

- A. Form embouchure and blow air onto hand-let lips gently touch
- B. Place mouthpiece-All of the red needs to be inside of the rim. If it is not, the lips are probably too thick.
- C. Mouthpiece visualizer will help.
- D. Begin to buzz on the mouthpiece-do not worry about what pitch is made
LOWER IS BETTER!!

IV. Classroom suggestions

- A. Try starting on a low C
- B. Go down by half steps-teach names of notes below the staff as well as enharmonic spellings.
- C. Expand range upward by half steps from low C to G We can teach a one octave chromatic scale, teaching theory while expanding the range very slowly. It is my opinion that a beginning trumpet player should not play

above second line G for at least six months, and that they should not play above third space C for the first year.

D. For mixed classes, you can write some unison tunes in the low register, and stay away from the book until that one octave chromatic scale is comfortable

E. Work in rhythms, articulations, and other fundamentals during this time.

TEST YOUR CREATIVITY

NOT SO FAST-IT TAKES TIME!!!!!!

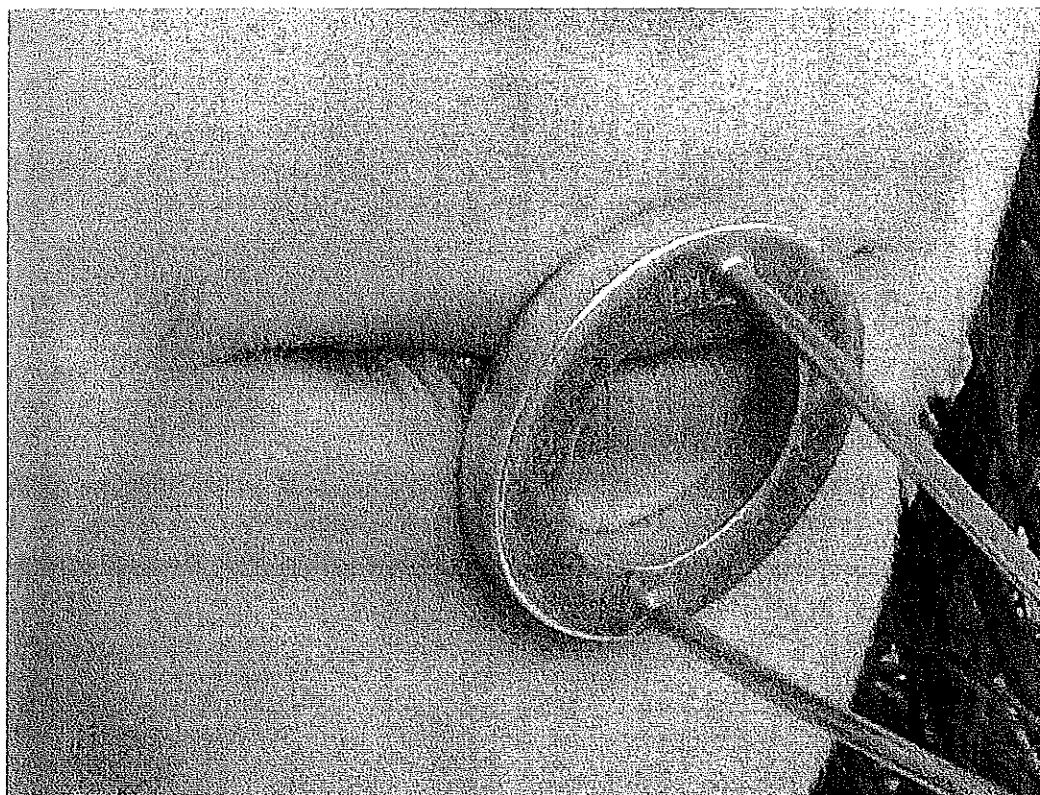
MOUTHPIECE PLACEMENT ON THE LIPS

Determining a beginning trumpeter's correct mouthpiece position is difficult because his or her embouchure is not yet developed. The teacher can only guide the novice player in a general way until the mouthpiece settles into a comfortable and workable position.

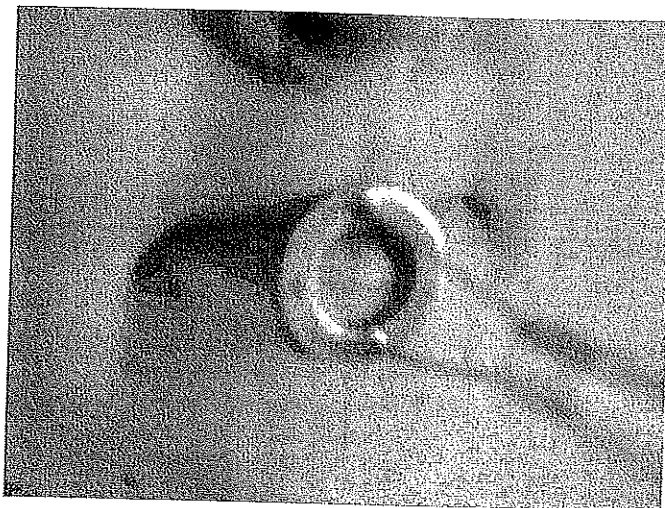
As a guideline, the mouthpiece should be vertically and horizontally centered on the lips. Each player must make slight adjustments in mouthpiece position and angle to accommodate jaw position, teeth alignment, length of top lip, and size of lips. (See "Mouthpiece Placement" in Chapter III: Embouchure Formation and Control.)

The horizontal position of the mouthpiece is not a critical factor in forming a working embouchure. However, playing on one side of the mouth prevents facial muscles on both sides of the face from sharing the workload equally, causing one side of the face to tire quickly. It may also cause the tongue to shift to one side of the mouth, limiting efficiency of air flow and articulation.

Vertical mouthpiece placement on the lips is critical. If the setting is very high (80+% top lip), the upper lip area under the mouthpiece is large, and the player loses some of his or her ability to maintain a consistently firm and stable lip aperture because the upper lip has a tendency to bow inward and change shape when loud dynamics are played. This also places the aperture very low inside the cup of the mouthpiece which may cause excessive blow resistance due to air reflection against the side of the cup. On the other hand, placing the mouthpiece extremely low on the upper lip dampens vibrations, resulting in a loss of fullness of tone and a diminished upper register.



*mouthpiece placed somewhat low
on embouchure (acceptable)*



*mouthpiece placed very low
on embouchure (not acceptable)*

Mouthpiece placement varies with each player. However, it is generally advised that the mouthpiece be placed so that the lip aperture is within the middle one-third of the mouthpiece rim. This provides firm support of the lip's vibration. (See photos of famous players' embouchures in Chapter III: Embouchure Formation and Control.)

JAW POSITION

The relationship between the upper and lower jaws is very important to the trumpet player because it determines the alignment of the lips. This alignment has a huge effect on the formation of the embouchure and how the muscles of the face control the lips.

The majority of children's jaws are not fully grown; thus, children's teeth often shift position as they get older. Teachers may need to assist young players in aligning the lower jaw properly so the teeth provide an even and flat surface as a basis for the embouchure.

When playing the trumpet or cornet, a player's upper and lower jaws must be vertically aligned. If the student has a large overbite, the lower jaw should be extended forward until the playing angle of the instrument is fairly horizontal. Since most people have a slight overbite of perhaps one-eighth inch, a slight downward angle of the bell is normal. The bell should not be angled upward unless the player has an underbite.

Beginning players with large overbites have a tendency to tuck the lower lip behind the top lip. This causes the airstream to flow downward when passing between the lips, resulting in a "stuffy" tone quality and greatly diminished sound projection. Also, the vibrating surface is on the soft, inner portion of the upper lip which is not conducive to producing clear and high pitches. Lastly, the instrument is angled severely downward which also diminishes the projection of sound in the room.

center is of no major consequence, and is generally the result of the student's teeth formation.

When all is set properly, the student's face should have a natural look. There should be no excess tightening, twisting, etc. The band director should spend five to ten seconds of every class period reinforcing the above checklist on an individual basis. Have each student play something short (perhaps even a single pitch), then give them one or two points to address for improvement. One might even have chair tests based on embouchure formation on occasion, since nothing seems to motivate young players more than a good, old-fashioned chair test. The total time should take only a couple of minutes, but there is no better way to spend part of your class time.

Finally, the reinforcement of a good embouchure should continue every year. Some of the worst embouchures I have seen in those ninth grade and up are on students who had satisfactory embouchures earlier in their band career. Sometimes embouchure placement begins to migrate as students grow physically, or as more demands are placed on them. When younger students start to do well and are asked to play in a fairly high register, they frequently start pulling the mouthpiece down further on their upper lip. The smaller surface area of the upper lip within the mouthpiece cup often allows students to play higher a little easier at first, but there will be consequences later if they are allowed to continue in this manner. Reinforce the idea of learning to play high on a properly formed embouchure. They can do it, and the future remains unlimited for them if they do so.

Figure A. Diagram of the ring resulting from an improperly placed mouthpiece.



Figure B. Diagram of the ring resulting from a properly placed mouthpiece.



The Texas School Music Project is a source for ideas and information concerning pedagogical practices in the music classroom or rehearsal hall.

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