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**Trombone 2020: Creating a Culture of
Success for the Modern Beginning
Trombonist**

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Trombone 2020: Creating a Culture of Success for the Modern Beginning Trombonist

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SEVEN KEY CONCEPTS TO BUILDING A MODERN TROMBONIST

I. REPETITION/ROUTINE (PRACTICE!!)

prac-tice \ ˈpræk-təs \

a : carry out, **apply**; *Practice what you preach.*

b : to **do** or **perform** often, customarily, or habitually; *Practice politeness.*

c : to be professionally **engaged in**; *Practice Medicine.*

(Merriam-Webster)

****The way we create progress on trombone is through time and repetition, identifying and solving problems, both musical and physical.****

-Because trombone playing requires complex motor synchronization, **physical repetition** is essential to skill-building.

-We rebuild our playing every day “from the ground up”. This is done in a systematic scaffolding process. Routine, organization, order, and patience are required.

-Students should practice for the same length of time as the average class instructional time (30-45 minutes), recreating the class lesson and reacting to our specific objectives. How do you fill up the time? *Repetition.*

TOOLS AND SKILLS FOR PRACTICE:

-Using a metronome, we Practice everything we do in class, placing air, tongue and arm exactly on the beat, or evenly between beats.

-When testing, have them use their personal metronomes on the test. This will confirm that they know how to use them (or not), and that they are using them 100% of the time (or not).

-The tempo at which we Practice is the speed at which we can be successful.

-*Correct playing is always a higher priority than tempo.* All students have their own best tempo; you can choose to reward *smart* tempo choices with a higher grade, but be aware of students with lower capacities.

-*Correct playing can happen **at all times.*** Every note you produce is a chance to Practice something.

II. EFFICIENCY/SYNCHRONICITY

-Every extreme thing we do on trombone (volume, range, speed) is accomplished through **efficiency** in technique, not physical effort.

-Brute physical effort makes technique difficult and creates a worse product.

-As with any performance-based physical activity, **correct form** is essential. Often, the muscle group being developed is weak and doesn't want to sustain its role. Constant, disciplined reinforcement will solidify a **habit**.

-We have a pulse; it is regular, therefore so is **time**. Music is organized as such, and the ability to multiply or divide time evenly (rhythm) can only happen *after pulse* is being achieved.

-Time, before rhythm, is a **skill** that has to be constantly reinforced. Because of the physical nature of the trombone, *synchronization* is the most important factor in fostering success, both musically and physiologically. **ALL THINGS THAT MOVE (FOOT, ARM, TONGUE) ARE SYNCHRONIZED.**

-Metronome work is about learning to play **comfortably** *while always creating time*.

BODY POSITION

- 1) We sit at the front of our chair, feet flat on the ground. We should be able to stand easily from this position.
- 2) All of the weight of the trombone should be in the left hand. Do not support the instrument by "hanging" the slide on the ring finger of the right hand.
- 3) With the trombone in a right angle (held in a V-shape) and the arms in a housetop, the trombone and the arms should together form an 'X'.
- 4) We always bring the instrument to us, rather than ourselves to the instrument.

****Attention should be paid to any unnatural body positions, i.e., head craning toward trombone, head bent downward, shoulders up, elbows up, etc.****

III. TONE

-ALWAYS (and have them sing) on the syllable that you eventually want. TA or DA.

-Define **resonance**: *A tone that is deep, full, and reverberating in our space.*

-By the middle of the second semester tone quality can be a **classroom** awareness.

-NEVER tell a student to open their throat--it is already open. Rather, tell them to keep a *soft* throat.

AIR

Voicing is the same for both the inhalation and the exhalation: *conversational*.

Teach the difference between **volume** and **speed**.

Deep breathing has to be **conscious**. *If you don't remember the breath you took, it probably wasn't full.*

-Inflate...Deflate...don't make it complicated

*-80-90% of daily breaths are **couch** breaths, or **survival** breaths (approx. 30% capacity)*

-Full-capacity breaths will ALWAYS require consciousness

CAUTION: Breathing exercises challenge the performer, under increasing intensity, to remain calm, natural, and to inflate **without tension** to capacity. They must be monitored for **inefficient effort**, otherwise they are a waste of time, and most likely detrimental (can get silly or cause hyperventilation).

EMBOUCHURE

Why is a brass player special? First, we must determine what makes an acoustic instrument unique:

Most acoustic instruments are made up of the same 4 components:

- 1) A **vibrating** element
- 2) A **frame** to shape it to
- 3) A **fastener** or set of **fasteners** for structure and stability
- 4) An external force (apart from the instrument) that **initiates** vibration

A trombonist is very similar to a vocalist, therefore how our bodies behave is very important. *We play like we sing.*

MOUTHPIECE BUZZ (TONE, cont.)

Each student needs a separate session to discuss embouchure and how to make the first buzz.

- 1) Always on exact pitch, after a period of random pitch
- 2) Achieve a clear, singing sound
- 3) Make it sound as close to a complete instrument as possible
- 4) The buzz happens when it is ready. *Do not force a result.*

IV. ARTICULATION

-Tongue briefly compresses the airstream; **conversational airstream** is essential.

-All articulation exercises should be done with an **awareness** of our airstream.

-Touch with as little **surface area** as possible to achieve desired strength.

-Articulation is best learned **off** the trombone, in the mouth, as a human skill.

“If you can say TA, you can play TA.” - Emory Remington

DEFAULT ('HARD') TONGUE

These are the accepted syllables:

-TA for a default, unmarked note

-Hard DA for more advanced/stylized music (rounded, but still firm start)

-Touch tooth/gum line with **four** lines of taste buds.

LEGATO TONGUE/SLURRING

*-Legato DA touches **one** line of taste buds just above tooth/gum line.*

-The problem with **LA**

-WE SLUR ON TROMBONE LIKE **EVERY** OTHER BRASS INSTRUMENT: WITH OUR **LIPS**, EXCEPT FOR WHEN TWO NOTES WOULD **SMEAR**. THAT IS ALL.

V. ACCURACY/INTONATION

MOUTHPIECE SIRENS/LIP SLURS (Y-COORDINATE)

A siren is a long tone whose pitch is “bent” by increasing or decreasing airspeed *while buzzing*.

- We never buzz higher or lower than what we can do with a **clear, singing tone**
- Aperture** focuses/unfocuses (by micrometers) *INSIDE MOUTHPIECE*
- Embouchure** (bottom lip especially) becomes flatter/firmer or softer
- NO movement **outside** mouthpiece. MUST be monitored by teacher and student (mirror)

*A lip slur is a **siren** on the instrument. That’s it.*

- Nothing about the adjustment should affect tone
- Smooth/glossy note changes (no pops, bumps, splits)
- NO movement **outside** mouthpiece. MUST be monitored by teacher and student (mirror)

SLIDE ACTION/SLIDE POSITIONS (X-COORDINATE)

-We learn tuning on trombone with our eyes first, then our muscles, then our ears.

-We measure the distance between half steps in 100 increments; therefore on a trombone we can actually **see pitch**.

Hand Position:

- 1) We use our first two fingers and thumb to operate the slide. In first position your slide fingers should be pointing at your left shoulder
- 2) The back of the hand and the arm make a straight line
- 3) Wrist is relaxed but straight, not loose and floppy

Slide Action:

- 1) The shortest distance between two points is a straight line

- 2) The elbow is the only hinge that works until 7th position
- 3) We use a *sprinting* action: **“blink of an eye,” “light and quick”**

SLIDE POSITIONS (INTONATION, cont.):

TEACH IN THIS ORDER: 1, 3, 4, 6; 2, 5, 7

-Keep in mind that our **location references** for positions will be slightly different, depending on the model of student trombone.

-The end of the hand slide is the visual reference for 2nd, 4th, and 5th positions. Some student hand slides are longer or shorter here, and those positions will have to be re-learned on a symphony tenor.

-Intonation must be monitored week to week due to the **variable** of students' physical growth.

VI. READING/SIGHT-READING

READING

-Students should make constant progress processing **as much new music as possible** while still maintaining correct standards of playing.

-Key signature work is essential to *unlocking* the ability to play music.

-Most young trombonists will learn patterns (in a piece of music or exercise) by memory, not as a result of reading. However, their work is not finished until they attach the action to the music.

-If a piece's range and rhythms are in their capacity, there is a tempo that will allow them to be successful the *first time*. ****This one skill seems to be the most difficult for a motivated child to wrap their head around, yet it is among the most important!****

SIGHT-READING

This starts with rhythms, then notes, then basic styles and articulations. There could be differentiated levels of grading (awarding all capacity levels). One example:

- 1) Rhythms: counting on “TAH”; counting on rhythm syllables; playing on Concert F

- 2) Notes: saying note names while positioning; playing notes on a **pulse**, rather than on a **rhythm**; playing as written
- 3) Style and Articulation: saying on “TAH” or “DAH”; playing on F; playing on changing notes (if applicable)

VII. OWNERSHIP/PERFORMANCE CULTURE

Encourage **performance**. Have "show and tell" days where they bring something they've found and worked on. Expose them to the **culture**. Get them listening to the heroes and role models on trombone. Examples can be found on the digital presentation.

POSSIBLE PHYSICAL PROBLEMS (and SOLUTIONS) INHERENT TO TROMBONISTS

PROBLEM: RANGE, VOLUME, AND VELOCITY MALFUNCTIONS

CAUSE: DIMINISHING RETURNS FROM INEFFICIENT EFFORT: MOUTHPIECE PRESSURE*; FORCING AIR; STIFF, RIGID SLIDE ARM*****

Mouthpiece should be able to float (NOT anchored to the teeth)

A **conversational airstream should prevent forcing air, even when power-playing**

Use only enough muscle energy to move from point to point in space instantaneously

PROBLEM: WEAK/STUFFY/PINCHED TONE

CAUSES: WEAK/RESTRICTED AIRFLOW*; LIP SURFACE AREA IMBALANCE;
ORAL CAVITY NOT VOICED*****

*Send air to the **end** of the slide, no matter what position*

****Only touch enough lip together to form a *seal* while keeping everything flat. We should be able to see the red of top and bottom lip****

*****Say “TA,” play “TA” works here, also (with emphasis on *vowel* shape)*****

PROBLEM: UNCLEAR/UNMATCHED DEFAULT ARTICULATION

CAUSES: INCORRECT TONGUE PLACEMENT*; COMPRESSING AIR TOO EARLY;
LACK OF ARTICULATION AWARENESS*****

*Again, have student say “TA.” Where did their tongue touch?

- 1) Air only+tongue+mouthpiece
- 2) Buzz with TA
- 3) Add instrument and monitor for changes.*

****Keep air focused *past the tongue*, at the aperture. One common problem: students compress air with the middle of their tongue or with their glottis, in their throat.****

*****In order to match articulation, we must match:**

- 1) Same location
- 2) Same strength
- 3) Same number of taste buds (surface area)***

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FINAL THOUGHTS

We will move as fast as ***you allow me to***, based on behavior and correct effort.

Everything that we do has a thoughtful purpose.

Always ask for the purpose from the class. (*‘I don’t know’ is the correct answer if it’s the truth.*) **MAKE SURE YOU KNOW THE PURPOSE FOR THE EXERCISE!**

*There are many sufficient beginner books out there; it is important to use them to reinforce **your** goals and standards. **Do not be a slave to a book!***

Our Routine (Daily Drill) is about **mental awareness**, first and foremost.

The brain controls the body. *What are you thinking about?*

Always have a specific goal to focus on.

There's a difference between **incorrect** and **bad**.

“Manufacture a Miracle”: create a situation for even the weakest individual to be successful.

Catch a kid being good and tell them.