



**Texas Bandmasters Association
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**Building the Brass Performer from the
"Inside Out"**

**CLINICIAN:
Dr. Chip Crofts**

Building the Brass Performer from the “Inside Out”

DR. Chip Crotts

TBA Virtual Conference
2020

Preparatory Exercises

- Breathing – Stretches/Flows/Therapies
- Balloons (Immediacy of Sound/Dynamic Work)
- ASV Approach (Aural/Sensory/Visualization)
- Allows Us to Build “Inside Out” for Both Sides of the Instrument

Tonal Concepts

- Resonance Exercises (Sing/Hum) A Great Sound is Resonant and In-Tune (regardless of color)
- Using Drones to Improve Ear Training (Audiation)
- Modeling (students/directors/ recordings, etc.)
- To Buzz or Not to Buzz, That is the Question?

Building Articulation & Style

- Air create Sound, Tongue guides the Air (tip of the tongue/one taste bud)
- Style is created through Articulation and Sound/with a focus on vowel (AH-OH) over consonant (D-T)
- Breath Attack Techniques and Value (HA-DA)
- Articulation and Dynamics – WHY and Troubleshooting

Building Flexibility

- Crucial but often Underutilized in Training
- Lip Slur – Misnomer (Tongue level Exercises)
- Air Speed/Whistling Exercises
- Soft Touch Technique – Target Practice for Lip Slurs

Building Musical Technique

- Combined (Mixed) Technique - Turning Singular Exercises into MUSIC
- Be Creative and Always think MUSICALLY – Technique means NOTHING if its not used in a MUSICAL fashion!
- Bridging the GAP – An important step often missed by programs

Building Range

- Building Range through CONTROL and then POWER (The 2 V's - Velocity and Volume)
- Work dynamic ranges daily (p-mf-ff) putting a premium on soft and controlled. Work harder internally than externally (Duck Analogy)
- Perfect Car Analogy (Fuel Efficient and Powerful!)
- Range is Discovered, not Created!

Building Endurance

- Building Endurance improves with more practice over periods of time (Meal Analogy)
- Practice the OPPOSITE of what you are playing (High/Loud/Fast vs Low/Soft/Slow)
- Rest as much you play/Playing Reps should be at a Premium! (Find ways to create improvement away from the horn)
- Range and Endurance are Independent Concepts and should be practiced as such.

Dynamic (Over) training

- Important to overall development and creates a truer musical application, versus teaching in the Box and dealing with issues as they arise
- Allows students the opportunity to fix things on their own from the outset – “Teaching Themselves”
- Breathing Therapies/Balloon Work as prescribed for Dynamic Definition and Use

Building with Variations

- More Exercises vs. Varied Exercises (Less is More) Can be done with same exercises as opposed to always creating MORE things to do.
- Find CREATIVE and MUSICAL applications within your existing fundamental routine
- “Show Exercises” can help improve both music and entire technical/fundamental facility of your brass players

Two Quotes

- “Our Job as Educators is to Teach Our Students How to Teach Themselves” – Anonymous..
- “Good Music Plays Better” – Raymond Crisara
- THANK YOU TBA!!!
- chipcrofts@gmail.com

“Balloons and the Art of Over-Training”

Dr. Chip Crotts

TBA Virtual Clinic Handout

Balloons are wonderful tools to use with wind players and can have great benefits long term in their fundamental development. The simple design of a balloon allows for opportunities to both “over-train” our students and to more clearly help them “feel” various aspects of wind performance. Developing correct dynamic range, as well as a more clear and immediate sound, are direct benefits of this kind of training. So... let’s discuss how to implement these into your daily practice routine.

I suggest using standard size bags of 12- inch balloons that can be found at any Wal-Mart or Target. Most standard bags sizes come in 72, so just a few of these can get you going with almost any size group. To get started, have your students stretch them out and just have a little bit of goofy fun time with them. I always give my groups a minute or two to just have fun and do crazy things to get it out of their system! ☺ Then, without much description, have them begin blowing up the balloon in specific count structures: 12,16,8,20, and so on. Set a metronome to around quarter note = 108-112 and have the goal be to use all of your air over those counts. I like to use the phrase “all the air in all the counts” to get them used to this kind of overtraining.

Initially, the resistance of the balloon stem will push back on them, thus reminding us about the value of overtraining. As they get more used to this sensation, they will be instinctually using “faster air” to get the balloon to inflate in time. This is the first benefit of this training: helping us to achieve a more immediate sound as a wind player. Continue with several repetitions of each number sequence so they begin to “feel” exactly how to pace the air over the counts. This “feeling” will start to help them equate what they hear dynamically as compared to what they feel dynamically (ASV Method).

You will also notice that I have the numbers listed in a “spider sequence”, from middle and then out to the extremes. This will force the students to more quickly acclimate to the differences in each dynamic. When you go from pp to fff back to back, it will be very noticeable how slowly and poorly we often adapt to quick dynamic changes in music. Realize, this system shows us that we use the same amount of air for each exercise, but at varying speeds depending on the numbers. Matching airspeed is a key component for ensemble success! And when your students learn that dynamics are simply equated to air support, air amount and relaxation as opposed to sheer force, then they will be on their way towards improving one huge element of wind playing success.

In terms of the breakdown of how each number equates to a dynamic, I typically use the following chart:

12 air = mf

16 air = mp

8 air = f

20 air = p

6 air = ff

24 air = pp

4 air = fff

You may find that these are “outdoor level” dynamics and you can adjust them to see fit as you need for any ensemble. Each number helps us define a very clear difference between mf and mp, or f and ff, creating the second important benefit: developing a professional range of dynamic expression. Students will immediately begin to realize how “much” air they should be using to create each dynamic and in turn, will help them feel the sensation behind the horn more clearly.

You will likely have a few troubleshooting things that will come up, so let’s discuss a common one very briefly. When blowing up the balloon, students should focus on using their embouchure at the same time to match the feeling. If your students are blowing their cheeks out (which some will), then you can use your first two fingers of the opposite hand to create a “V” on your corners and keep them in place. This can also help strengthen the embouchure in its own right, as well as improve balloon technique long term.

Also, a great self-teaching tool to add is having them plug one of their ears and listen to the smoothness and evenness of the airflow. This is paramount to them understanding how much air is needed and how consistent it has to be to achieve uniformity in all dynamic ranges. I also like to have them hold the balloons inflated and check the sizes with their friends. Ideally, there should be similarities in size and even though we all have slightly different lung capacities, they will provide a great visual tool for them to try and match sizes. If the balloons are very small, then those students are simply not using enough air to generate the dynamics. If they are way bigger than the others, you’ve probably found your “heroes” in the band and can adjust accordingly. Learning proper air amounts for dynamics will be a game changer for your program!

In conclusion, balloon exercises are GREAT over-trainers to help us work dynamics, immediacy of sound and building the sensation needed to help your students improve quickly. Likewise, issues of balance, blend and tonal inconsistency will dramatically decrease in your ensembles as your students’ abilities to “teach themselves” become a more regular part of their training. Win-Win!

I do realize there is a good bit of technical description in here that may be confusing at first, but remember the basics are to simply fully blow up a balloon at a certain tempo and let them use the numbers to equate to each dynamic feeling. As acclimation begins to happen, you will notice improvement quickly and consistently with daily application.

I hope these exercises will be helpful to your programs and please reach out to me with any further questions or thoughts!

Best,

Chip Crotts
chipcrotts@gmail.com