

“Fun”damentals of Playing the Trombone

An explanatory Warm-Up for the developing Trombonist

By Allen R. Parrish

How do I approach my warm-up?

There are a number of various ways that musicians approach their “warm-up” – if at all. An article on Woodwind & Brasswind’s website describes the physical importance of a warm-up and describes exercises to warm-up the areas of your body utilized during music-making. Joseph Dubose mentions the benefits of warming up in regards to mental preparation in his article entitled “Getting Started: The Importance of a Warm-Up Routine.” Both aspects – physical and mental – are involved in warming up and because both aspects are involved, you must be mindful and intentional of them while warming up. For example, if you are thinking about what is physically required to play your instrument well (the fundamentals), but are not totally focused on what is at hand (day-dreaming, checking text messages, etc.), then your warm-up will be substandard. Inversely, if you are mentally engaged in the warm-up but you are not thinking about the fundamentals, your warm-up is not going to be very beneficial.

Where do I start?

First you must find a good place to practice, away from any distraction. When I sit down to warm-up, the very first thing I do is mentally prepare myself. I erase all distractions and place myself in the moment. When I am “in my zone,” I then think about what I want to accomplish for the day, I ask myself: what are my goals for this practice session? If I do not think about this before my warm-up/daily routine, I am losing precious time that could be utilized towards that goal and I might even be reinforcing bad habits during the warm-up that I am trying to break. A warm-up can do more harm than good if you are not focusing on improving your fundamentals.

What should I include in my warm-up?

A warm-up should consist of Long Tones, Lip Slurs/Flexibility Exercises, Articulation Exercises, Chromatic Studies, Range Extension Exercises, and Scales. Within these categories what you play is not nearly as important as what you focus on during the exercises – the “fun”damentals. I have compiled some exercises that I find useful in developing fundamentals for all trombone players. With each exercise is an explanation which includes the specific fundamental involved and how to make the most out of the exercise.

Long Tones:

Long tones aid in developing a trombonist's tone and intonation. Long tones should be played with a focus on the sound. Each series of long tones should begin with a big, full breath. The intake of the breath should be open and relaxed, filling from the bottom of the lungs with **absolutely no** tension in the shoulder. The breath should not be held and then released, but the inhale and exhale should be one fluid motion. The breath is just as important as the note. The air is the currency by which a good note is "bought." The musician should breath regularly during the long tones – not trying to completely run out of air. It is completely fine to breath during a whole note. As you are playing lower into the register, you should slow down the air (keeping the same air support.) These exercises should be played with a tuner in order to develop proper intonation. This exercise can be played in any register, however, the focus should ALWAYS be a better sound and better intonation. Complacency is destructive.

Long Tone Exercise

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♩ = 80-120

Staff 1: G₂, F₂, E₂, D₂, C₂, B₁, A₁, G₁

Staff 2: Rest, G₁, F₁, E₁, D₁, C₁, B₀, Rest

Staff 3: G₁, F₁, E₁, D₁, C₁, B₀, A₀, G₀

Staff 4: G₀, F₀, E₀, D₀, C₀, B₋₁

Flexibility Exercise:

The purpose of flexibility exercises appears to be self-explanatory: to be more flexible. But what does that mean in the context of tuba-playing. I think of flexibility as in reference to the ability to play intervals with greater smoothness, slur notes with greater accuracy and clarity, and achieve more comfort with the partial series.

It is very important to play this exercise with a metronome and recommended to play it with a tone drone (you can get an app for both). When playing this exercise, think about constantly supporting the sound with air. **Do not forget to take full breaths of full air.** You are not tightening and loosening your embouchure, but you are speeding and slowing the air. Those are basically two ways to think about the same thing, however if you are thinking about changing pitches by tightening your lips, your sound is going to be pinched in the upper register. These exercises should be played at slower and faster tempos, at different dynamic levels, and with crescendos.

Flexibility Exercise

$\text{♩} = 60-120$ or $\text{♩} = 60-120$ Parish

The musical score consists of eight staves of music in bass clef, 4/4 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo is indicated as quarter note = 60-120. The exercise is composed of several phrases, each starting with a slur. The first staff begins with a slur over a quarter note B-flat, followed by a half note G, a quarter note F, and a quarter note E. The second staff has a whole rest followed by a slur over a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, and a quarter note D. The third staff has a slur over a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note G, a quarter note F, and a quarter note E, followed by a slur over a quarter note D, a quarter note C, a quarter note B, and a quarter note A. The fourth staff has a slur over a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, a quarter note D, a quarter note C, a quarter note B, and a quarter note A, followed by a slur over a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, and a quarter note D. The fifth staff has a slur over a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, a quarter note D, a quarter note C, a quarter note B, and a quarter note A, followed by a slur over a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, and a quarter note D. The sixth staff has a slur over a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, a quarter note D, a quarter note C, a quarter note B, and a quarter note A, followed by a slur over a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, and a quarter note D. The seventh staff has a slur over a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, a quarter note D, a quarter note C, a quarter note B, and a quarter note A, followed by a slur over a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, and a quarter note D. The eighth staff has a slur over a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, a quarter note D, a quarter note C, a quarter note B, and a quarter note A, followed by a slur over a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, and a quarter note D.

Articulation Exercise

The exercise is designed for clean articulations. In vocal music, choirs spend a good portion of their time working on clean articulations. Because of the nature of language and dialects, there are many different ways that words can be pronounced and the choir has to sing words in ways that are clear for the audience. Instruments do not have exactly the same problem, but I like to think of articulations similar to vocal ensembles; if a note does not have a clear and clean beginning, the note will not be “understood” by the audience.

The warm-up is the ideal time to work on articulations outside of a piece of music. Time should be spent on the following exercise making sure that each note is well-articulated with a good sound. “The tip of the tongue should touch the tip of the teeth.” A good way to think about articulation is to imagine a faucet, the water is the air and the hand is the tongue. In order to create quarter notes, it would be much less efficient to turn the faucet on and off repeatedly rather than use your hand to break the stream. The tongue acts in this manner, instead of stopping and starting the air every time you articulate a note, it is much more efficient to use the tongue to create space in between the air. In order to practice this, play the exercise in whole notes (with no articulations) and then go back and play it again as written (your air will be doing the same thing both times, the only difference is your tongue).

This exercise should be played at different tempos and in different octaves; always using a metronome. Take large breaths after every 4 measures.

Articulation Exercise

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$\text{♩} = 80+$

The exercise is written in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a tempo marking of quarter note = 80+. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff contains four measures of quarter notes: B \flat 2, C3, D3, E3. The second staff contains four measures of eighth notes: B \flat 2, C3, D3, E3. The third staff contains four measures of sixteenth notes: B \flat 2, C3, D3, E3. The fourth staff contains four measures of eighth notes: B \flat 2, C3, D3, E3. Trill markings (3) are placed under the second and third notes of the eighth and sixteenth note runs in the second and third staves. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Range Extension

The capable range of the euphonium is large, however most trombonists have trouble developing their upper and/or lower register. This exercise is designed to assist in developing both. Proper air support is a must for playing this exercise. Take time in between each group of 2 measures to take in a full breath. This exercise should be played slurred and tongued. Be cautious not to play much higher than you are comfortable. Know the difference between pushing yourself in a way that is healthy and pushing yourself past your limit. If you struggle playing past the "F" in the staff, it is perfectly okay to only play the first 4-8 measures. Do a little more each day. Like I have mentioned, a warm-up is designed to improve your fundamentals. The lower portion of this exercise requires large amounts of air. It is okay to breath in between notes, but make certain that the notes do not suffer from a lack of air. I would not, however, breath between beats 2 and 3 of the second measures because of the ascending perfect 4th interval. If you can play these ranges comfortable, feel free to extend them.

Range Extension

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$\text{♩} = 100$

The musical score is written in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. It begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 100. The first five staves contain eighth-note patterns with various accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and slurs. The sixth staff contains a sequence of quarter notes with various accidentals, ending with a double bar line.

Scale Study

Scales are important for all musicians to study and memorize because music is built on scales (most music). Studying and memorizing scales require time and discipline. Memorizing scales is not always fun, but it is always rewarding. When playing scales, it is important to remember all of the fundamentals and not just play them to play them. Practice using different articulations and patterns (staccato/legato, slur 2/tongue 2, etc.) Use a metronome at different tempos.

Major Scales

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The image displays ten staves of music, each representing a major scale in a different key signature. The music is written in bass clef and 4/4 time. Each staff begins with a whole note rest, followed by an eighth-note scale pattern. The scales are: 1. C major (no sharps or flats), 2. G major (one sharp: F#), 3. D major (two sharps: F#, C#), 4. A major (three sharps: F#, C#, G#), 5. E major (four sharps: F#, C#, G#, D#), 6. B major (five sharps: F#, C#, G#, D#, A#), 7. F major (one flat: Bb), 8. C minor (three flats: Bb, Eb, Ab), 9. G minor (two flats: Bb, Fb), and 10. D minor (one flat: Fb). Each scale is played in both ascending and descending directions, with a whole note rest at the end of each line.

Recommendations for other Warm-Up/Daily Routine Studies:

- Rubank Advanced Method for Trombone or Baritone, Vol. 1 and 2
- Melodious Etudes for Trombone Book 1, by J. Rochut
- Daily Routines for Trombone, by D. Vining
- Arban Complete Method for Trombone, by Randall & Mantia