

“Fun”damentals of Playing the Tuba

An explanatory Warm-Up for the developing Tubist

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 tuba 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 tubist'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

Parrish

$\text{♩} = 80-120$

The exercise is written in bass clef, 4/4 time. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff contains eight measures of whole notes: G₂, F₂, E₂, D₂, C₂, B₁, A₁, and G₁. The second staff contains six measures of whole notes: F₁, E₁, D₁, C₁, B₀, and A₀, with rests in the first and last measures. The third staff contains six measures of whole notes: G₀, F₀, E₀, D₀, C₀, and 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 $\text{♩} = 60-120$ Parrish

The musical score consists of seven 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 score is composed of several phrases, each starting with a slur. The first phrase is a four-measure sequence of quarter notes: B2, B-flat3, B-flat4, B5. The second phrase is an eight-measure sequence of quarter notes: B-flat2, B-flat3, B-flat4, B5, B-flat6, B-flat7, B-flat8, B9. The third phrase is an eight-measure sequence of quarter notes: B-flat2, B-flat3, B-flat4, B5, B-flat6, B-flat7, B-flat8, B9. The fourth phrase is an eight-measure sequence of quarter notes: B-flat2, B-flat3, B-flat4, B5, B-flat6, B-flat7, B-flat8, B9. The fifth phrase is an eight-measure sequence of quarter notes: B-flat2, B-flat3, B-flat4, B5, B-flat6, B-flat7, B-flat8, B9. The sixth phrase is an eight-measure sequence of quarter notes: B-flat2, B-flat3, B-flat4, B5, B-flat6, B-flat7, B-flat8, B9. The seventh phrase is an eight-measure sequence of quarter notes: B-flat2, B-flat3, B-flat4, B5, B-flat6, B-flat7, B-flat8, B9. The score ends with a double bar line.

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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♩ = 80+

The musical score consists of four staves of music in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 80+. The first staff contains four measures of music: a half note Bb, a quarter note G, a quarter note F, and a quarter note E. The second staff contains four measures of music: a quarter note D, a quarter note C, a quarter note Bb, and a quarter note A, followed by a quarter rest. The third staff contains four measures of music: a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, and a quarter note D, followed by a quarter rest. The fourth staff contains four measures of music: a quarter note C, a quarter note Bb, a quarter note A, and a quarter note G, followed by a quarter rest. The exercise includes various articulation techniques such as slurs, accents, and triplets.

Range Extension

The capable range of the tuba is large, however most tubists 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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♩ = 100

The musical score consists of six staves of music in 4/4 time, with a tempo marking of ♩ = 100. The first five staves contain melodic lines with various intervals and accidentals. The sixth staff contains a series of chords, likely for harmonic support or as a separate exercise.

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 musical notation for major scales in bass clef, 4/4 time. Each staff represents a different major scale, starting with C major and moving through the circle of fifths (F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#) and then the circle of fourths (F, C, G, D, A, E, B). The notation includes the key signature, the scale sequence, and a double bar line at the end of each staff.

Natural Minor Scales

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The image displays ten staves of musical notation, each representing a natural minor scale in a different key. The scales are written in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The keys, from top to bottom, are: 1. B-flat minor (two flats), 2. C minor (one flat), 3. D-flat minor (three flats), 4. E-flat minor (three flats), 5. F minor (two flats), 6. G-flat minor (three flats), 7. A-flat minor (three flats), 8. B-flat minor (two flats), 9. C minor (one flat), and 10. D-flat minor (three flats). Each staff begins with a whole note followed by eighth notes, and ends with a whole note. The notation includes various accidentals (flats and naturals) to indicate the specific notes of each scale.

Recommendations for other Warm-Up/Daily Routine Studies:

- Rubank Advanced Method for Tuba, Vol. 1 and 2
- 60 Selected for BBb tuba, by C. Kopprasch
- Melodious Etudes for Trombone Book 1, by J. Rochut (played down the octave)
- Daily Routines for Tuba (second edition), by D. Vining
- 50 Etudes, by B. Grigoriev
- Low Etudes for Tuba, by P. Snedecor
- Arban Complete Method for Tuba, Edited by Dr. Jerry Young/ Wesley Jacobs