

2021 Phi Beta Mu Educational Outreach

Building Better Brass:

Making the Most of the First Year of Instruction for Brass

**Clinic Handout Submitted by
Russ Teweleit, Ph. D.**

**Contact:
WTAMU Box 60879
Canyon, TX 79016-0001
Email: rteweleit@wtamu.edu
Phone: 806-651-2863**

Expectations

We should strive to hold the highest of expectations for our students. Your students are capable of learning whatever **you** are capable of teaching them.

Persistent Insistence

Let's face it. Most of us say the right things; however, the best teachers are those who INSIST that the students actually do what they expect.

Air!

Strive to achieve big, full, and rich sounds. Air usage is perhaps the most challenging and essential aspect of teaching a good tone.

Motivation

Motivating students should be a multi-faceted and daily occurrence. Make it part of your planning.

Daily Chair Tests	Weekly Grades	High-fives
Games	Prizes	Recordings
Mini-performances	Solo and Ensemble	High Expectations
Enthusiasm (on your part)	Contests	

Playing Ratio of 8:2

Try to make it a goal to have 8 minutes of playing to every 2 minutes of instruction. This is a very aggressive goal and one that is difficult to achieve; however, in a 50-minute class, 10 minutes of instruction should usually be enough (see attached article from TBA Journal).

We learn by:

1. Imitation
2. Repetition
3. Trial and Error (Musical Performance: Learning Theory and Pedagogy by D. Kohut)

Playing time is perhaps the single best cure for a bad tone. We should constantly teach our students about how to practice, and then rehearse as if they don't.

Your Single Best Teaching Tool – Your Instrument

Your instrument is your single best teaching tool! Modeling (even if it is not a brass instrument) will provide more than verbal explanation ever could.

Posture

Proper playing position is one of the best ways to avoid bad habits. Goal = Mention posture 3-4 times a day, even if it is perfect.

Consistent Tempo

Use quarter note = 60-72 bpm for 90% of the first year. This will allow students to internalize the beat more quickly. Note this does not mean that you shouldn't encourage building technique. If the students are playing a line well in 4/4, play it in 2/2 or even 1/1.

Eastman Counting System and Foot Tap

A counting system provides a vocabulary that allows you to instantly check for understanding. The foot tap helps students to internalize the beat, and also affords the teacher a quick and easy way to check for understanding (see attached).

Legato playing

Teach legato playing first. It is more difficult to do properly and encourages proper air usage. Legato playing should make up approximately 90% of the first year. This also includes teaching your students phrasing from the very start. Note: A beginning student who breathes at every bar-line (or worse, after every note) will always sound like a beginner. In most beginner method books, the place to breathe is at the rests or at the end of a four bar phrase. A 2 bar phrase with a big sound is a realistic expectation for much of the first year and a 4 bar should be the goal by the end of the year.

Build Range

Let's face it; brass playing is a very physical activity. Whereas woodwind students can quickly begin to explore the full range of the instrument once a proper embouchure and air usage are established, brass range must be developed over long period of time through a great deal of repetition and consistent hard work. Don't rely on the method books or band literature to build range. It simply won't happen. There are essentially two ways to build range:

1. Diatonically through slurred scales
2. Lip Slurs

Articulation

Again, hearing someone is more valuable than verbal explanation. If it sounds right, it probably is. The syllable you teach is not nearly as important as the sound that the students produce. I have found that students frequently tongue too high, too hard, and use too much tongue. It is often helpful to have the students tongue lower (almost between the teeth) and to use less tongue (less width).

Intonation

Tuning is not a topic that should be reserved for the 2nd or third year. At a minimum, you should approximate the tuning slides of every instrument from the first day. The instrument is not designed to have the main tuning slide pushed all the way in. Take the time to teach students what in tune sounds like.

Listen!

Goal = Strive to hear every student individually at least once per day for the entire first year and a minimum of once a week after that. This can help prevent bad habits from going unnoticed.

Sing!

Singing is a valuable teaching tool that instrumentalists often ignore. Suggestion: Have 1-4 students play while the rest sing note-names or count on pitch.

Building Better Brass: Concepts for Teaching Lip Slurs

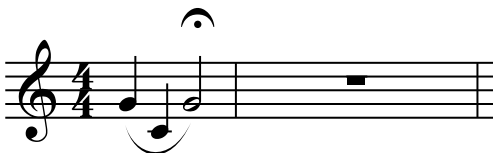
General Concepts

- Slurs can be started in the first few weeks or days. Gradually build on what they are doing.
- Tone, tone, tone!
- Play each slur in one breath.
- The last note is the most important note of each slur. If you are not satisfied with the students' tone, have the students repeat the note as a long tone. They should do the same at home.
- Do not tongue. It defeats the purpose and makes the exercise ineffective. It is important that you hear individuals often in order to ensure that the students are not tonguing.
- Rest as much as you play. Alternate solo/soli. (Teacher/students, 1st chair/student, small group/large group, down the row solo/soli, etc.)
- Play each slur through all seven positions.
- If the slur is going to stretch the group's range, start in seventh position and work your way up.
- The following slurs should be done once a day in class and once a day at home.
- Note: Use these same concepts when building range diatonically.



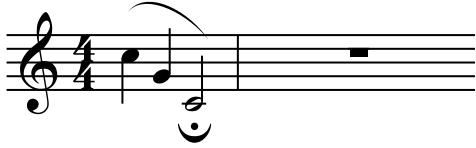
1. Start with a simple half note slur from concert F to Bb.

- Slurring down is easier and less likely to produce manipulation.
- Those students who begin too low may actually lock-in at 5th or 6th position. Then they will eventually start locking in on 3rd or 4th, followed by all correct notes.
- Suggestion: After this slur is learned, start your class with this each day for the rest of the year. Counting, announcements, etc. can be done after your daily routine.



2. Add this slur only after #1 is going well.

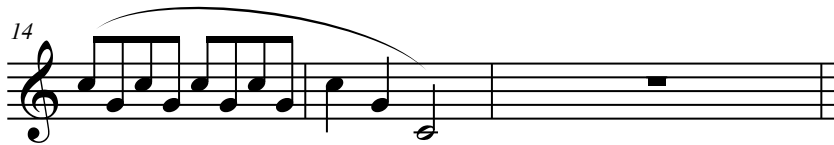
- Use this slur to prepare the group for #3 below. After #3 is added there is no need to continue with this slur.



3. Add this slur after #2 is going well.



4. Replace #3 with this slur when the class is ready.



5. Replace #4 with this slur when the class is ready.



6. Four note slur. Add this when #5 is going well.

How to approach the slurs that build range:

- Start in 7th position and work your way up
- Rules – Don't stop the air and don't tongue. Remember: DON'T STOP (even if the student totally misses the top note and the most important note of the slur is the last.



7. Five-note slur. Replace #6 with this when #6 is going well.

How to approach the slurs that build range:

- Start in 7th position and work your way up
- Rules – Don't stop the air and don't tongue. Remember: DON'T STOP (even if the student totally misses the top note and the most important note of the slur is the last.
- Some students will be able to do this easier than others. Make sure they know that is just the way it is, and it is only one aspect of brass playing.
- IMPORTANT: If the student misses the top note, finish the slur and then rest (approximately 30-45 seconds).
- Attempt the slur again. If you miss the top note again, you are done for the day. If you get it, go on to the next slur. Continue until you have missed the slur twice. Note: In class, have the students be honest and drop out after they miss it the first time and continue working with those who are left. Be sure to emphasize that it is no big deal to drop out (after the last note) and that this is only one small aspect of playing.
- Once the 4-note slur is going well, move on to a 5-note slur. However, have the student look at the music to the four-note slur and just go one note higher than the top note. This can help avoid the extra tension that is often caused by seeing notes that look high.
- Five-note slur in cut time. Once the 5-note slur is going well, try the 5-note slur in cut time.
- More Slurs! At home, have the students who can play the 5-note slur add the 6-note slur using the same concepts add 7-note slur, 8-note, etc. Note: It would be too time consuming to do these exercises everyday in class. At most, once a week you can continue with 6, then 7, then 8-note slurs as a mini-contest.

8. More advanced slurs!

- This is one of the most valuable slurs any brass player could play.
- This slur can be taught slowly at ½ tempo. Teach 7th position for a week or more, and then add a new position each week.



In Closing

In order to properly develop range and endurance of the young brass student, follow the following 3 guidelines:

- Slur any exercise that is expanding the student's range.
- Keep the air moving throughout the entire exercise.
- End with a long tone on a lower and easily played note.