



# Teaching Beginning Trombone Players



W

hether you are teaching private lessons, group lessons, or beginning band, introducing the trombone to new players should be the same. As teachers, we should revisit exactly what and how we teach new students. Are we just following along with the book we have chosen, or are we carefully considering the skills the student should be mastering from day one?

All students, whether beginning instrumentalists or students trained on another instrument, should approach playing a brass instrument from the mouthpiece first. The instrument is simply the amplifier. A beginner should spend at least two weeks playing only on the mouthpiece. Forming the correct embouchure along with using the appropriate air stream is of utmost importance and can be accomplished through buzzing. Regardless of experience level, students should practice the following exercise on the mouthpiece, beginning on the F a perfect fourth below middle C: F - E - F; F - E-flat - F; F - D - F; F - D-flat - F; F - C - F; F - B - F; and F - B-flat - F. Next, the students should practice F - C - F; E - B - E; and E-flat - B-flat - E-flat, continuing down chromatically as low as possible. Then, starting on F - C - F again, they should move up chromatically as high as possible. Each pattern of the buzzing exercises should commence with the tongue, but should otherwise be slurred. The corners of the mouth should be firm with the lips slightly pursed in order to form the aperture. The lips should be even or lined up vertically, which usually requires the lower jaw to be extended slightly forward.



# Beginning Trombone Methods and Band Methods

- Accent on Achievement* by J. O'Reilly and M. Williams (Alfred).  
*Alfred's New Band Method* by J. O'Reilly and S. Feldstein (Alfred).  
*Arban's Famous Method for Slide and Valve Trombone and Baritone* by C. Randall and S. Mantia (Carl Fischer).  
*Band Today* by J. Ployhar (Belwin Mills).  
*Best in Class* by B. Pearson (Kjos).  
*Breeze Easy Method, Books 1 and 2*, by John Kinyon (Warner Bros.).  
*Cimera-Hovey Method for Trombone and Baritone* by J. Cimera (Belwin Mills).  
*Encore! Best in Class Series* by B. Pearson (Kjos).  
*First Division Band Method* by Thom Proctor (Warner Bros.).  
*Pro Art Trombone and Baritone Method, Books 1 and 2*, by Charles Petrie (Belwin Mills).  
*Rubank Elementary Method for Trombone and Baritone* by Newell Long (Rubank).  
*Step By Step* by R. Elledge and D. Haddad (Kjos).  
*Total Musicianship* by F. Bencriscutto and H. Freese (Kjos).  
*Trombone Student, Books 1 and 2*, by F. Weber (Belwin Mills).  
*Walter Beeler Method for Trombone* by Walter Beeler (Warner Bros.).  
*Yamaha Band Student* by J. O'Reilly and S. Feldstein (Alfred).

Beginning students should practice buzzing for ten minutes, twice each day for two weeks, without attaching the mouthpiece to the instrument. After the two-week period (or when the embouchure is set correctly with a well-controlled buzz), the instrumentalist may then buzz five to ten minutes, once daily, before playing the instrument. Buzzing is the most important part of any practice session. It helps the embouchure to focus and strengthens the muscles for a perfectly centered tone. Most professional players swear by the benefits of daily buzzing. Although playing on the mouthpiece can be anything but fun for the new player, the firm foundation that it provides will enable the student to progress much more quickly than if he or she had played on the trombone itself from the very first day.

LIKE ADVANCED PLAYERS, BEGINNERS must perfect the whole-note long tone. Emory Remington made playing whole notes a staple in brass players' warm-up diet. For beginners, it is too early, beyond buzzing and whole-note long tones, to introduce a full warm-up routine. In essence, buzzing and

whole-note long tones are the initial playing experience that will become part of the daily warm-up routine.

Generally, beginning-brass method books begin the initial playing experience with whole notes, whole rests, and the rhythm counting that goes along with these notes—this is a crucial error. Printed music should be introduced after several tones have been learned, with characteristic tone, by ear. Without any lesson book, the teacher can introduce each whole-note long tone during a student's lesson by having him or her first sing the note and then play the note on the instrument. Once the student has mastered three to five notes by echoing the teacher in a whole note/whole rest playing experience, the teacher can engage the student in ear-training activities that can include echoing the teacher,

playing call-and-response exercises, and learning simple traditional melodies by ear. The teacher may slowly incorporate half notes and quarter notes along with the corresponding rests. Note reading with the beginning method book can begin once the student has mastered several tones and rhythms and used these skills to learn short familiar tunes by ear. For a list of suggested method books, see the Beginning Trombone Methods and Band Methods sidebar.

In short, I advocate breaking down the learning of a musical instrument into the critical pieces or phases that limit the variables that can lead to poor habits. By starting with the mouthpiece, holding the horn and maneuvering the slide are not part of the equation. Once the embouchure is set, the student can focus on the instrument itself and play several notes without the worry of printed music. It is important to spend time training the ear to play the instrument without relying on the printed music as a guide. After all, we do not learn to speak and read words simultaneously. We are avid talkers with a sizable vocabulary by the time we reach the age of five. Only then do we usually begin to read and write. Just so, only after the beginning player has mastered several notes and simple melodies or phrases, should we introduce printed music.

FROM THIS POINT, MOST OF THE beginning method books are adequate. They introduce rhythm, note reading, scales, articulation, and nomenclature in a systematic fashion. Most include traditional melodies in each of the lessons, as well. About half

## Daily Warm-Up Studies for Beginning to Intermediate Players

- Basic Routines* by R. Marsteller (Southern Music Company).  
*Daily Drills and Technical Studies* by M. Schlossberg (Baron).  
*Remington Warm-Up Studies for Trombone* by D. Hunsberger (Accura Music).

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way through the method book, lip slurs are introduced in one of the lessons. Often, no other mention of warm-up activities is included.

However, warm-up activities are the most important portion of a practice session or lesson.

Warm-ups for brass consist of two basic types: tongued exercises and nontongued (or slurred) exercises. All other types of warm-ups, whether they are long tones, scales, arpeggios, or some other type of exercise, fall under these two categories. Most players use a short, ten- to fifteen-minute warm-up along with a longer thirty- to sixty-minute "daily routine." All warm-ups and routines should aim to accomplish the same tasks: readying the muscles in the embouchure (buzzing), centering the tone (long tones), building flexibility in the facial muscles (lip slurs), mastering tongued and slurred scale and arpeggio patterns, and catalyzing, or jump-starting, the air stream.

For beginners, if whole-note long tones and buzzing are already part of daily practice, only lip slurs need to be added to complete their ten- to fifteen-minute warm-up. As scales and arpeggios are learned, they too can be added to the warm-up to complete a daily routine. The Daily Warm-Up Studies for Beginning to Intermediate Players sidebar lists some time-tested warm-up and daily routine method books.

By the time the student has established a short warm-up and daily routine and has learned several scales and arpeggios, he or she should also have learned many melodies by ear and completed the first elementary method book. The student is now ready to move on to the myriad of étude, technique, and musical studies that will help him or her to prepare to play the instrument proficiently. The Scale Studies and Etudes for Beginning to Intermediate Trombone Players sidebar lists elementary and intermediate method and étude books

## Scale Studies and Etudes for Beginning to Intermediate Trombone Players

- Etudes for Trombone* by T. Pederson (Schmitt Music Center).
- Fifty-Five Phrasing Studies (Legato)* by J. Cimeria (Belwin).
- First and Second Book of Practical Studies* by G. Bordner (Belwin).
- Forty Progressive Studies* by H. Tyrell (Boosey and Hawkes).
- Forty Progressive Etudes for Trombone* by S. Hering (Carl Fischer).
- Introducing the Tenor Clef* by R. Fink (Accura Music).
- Melodious Etudes for Trombone (Legato)* by J. Rochut (Carl Fischer).
- Pares Scales for Trombone* by G. Pares (Rubank).
- Rubank Advanced Method for Trombone and Baritone* by W. Gower and H. Voxman (Rubank).
- Rubank Intermediate Method for Trombone and Baritone* by J. Skornicka and E. Boltz (Rubank).
- Selected Duets* by H. Voxman (Rubank).
- Selected Studies* by H. Voxman (Rubank).
- Seventy-Nine Trombone Studies* by J. Cimeria (Belwin Mills).
- Sixty Studies for Trombone, Books 1 and 2*, by G. Kopprasch (Carl Fischer).
- Studies in Legato* by R. Fink (Carl Fischer).
- Thirty-Six Studies for Trombone (with F attachment)* by O. Blume (Carl Fischer).
- Twelve Melodious Duets for Two Trombones* by O. Blume (Carl Fischer).
- Vandercook Etudes for Trombone or Baritone* by H. Vandercook (Rubank).

appropriate for the second-year-and-beyond trombone student.

IN SUMMARY, THE BEGINNING STUDENT should focus on the fundamentals of brass playing—embouchure, aperture, and air stream—by carefully developing the facial muscles through buzzing and daily warm-up activities. Tone production will develop quickly, and then time can be spent on mastering the technique of the instrument. A typical half-hour practice session or lesson should consist of ten to fifteen minutes of warm-up and daily routines, five minutes of ear-training practice, and ten to fifteen minutes of printed lesson material. This time allotment for practice will ensure the greatest benefit toward building a firm playing foundation in the beginning instrumentalist. In the end, how we sound is the most important attribute of our playing.

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