

TROMBONE BASICS



The Modern Trombone

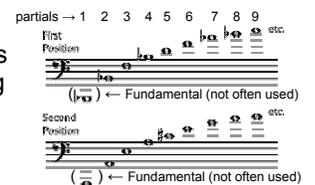
- the “default” trombone one thinks of when hearing the word is actually designated as the “**tenor**” trombone
- this is meant to differentiate it from other instruments within the trombone family (alto and bass)
- like the trumpet, the trombone has a **cylindrical** bore
 - to clarify, the bore is the tubing between the mouthpiece and the flaring of the tubing into the bell
- obviously differs from the rest of the brass family due to the absence of valves... the slide **allows for constant intonation adjustment** (or in the case of beginners consistently **INCONSISTENT** intonation)

The Historic “Trombone”

- oldest brass instrument, dating back to 15th century through the Renaissance
- was known then as the “**sackbut**”...
 - I'll let you decide whether you want to tell this to your younger students... or your older ones for that matter
- had a much smaller bore and the bell flare was not as exaggerated as today (much more funnel-shaped)

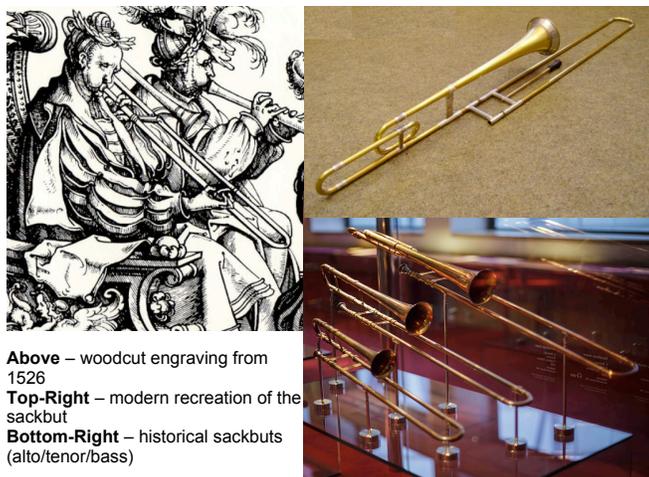
Harmonic Series & Tuning

- Pitched in B-flat and is a non-transposing instrument reading primarily in bass clef; advanced players performing in the upper range **should learn to read tenor and alto clefs, usually during high school**... this makes for easier reading without excessive ledger lines



As the harmonics get closer together in the upper register of the instrument, more notes can be played in the near positions, allowing faster playing.

- The B-flat harmonic series is present in 1st position, moving down by half step with each incremental slide position



Above – woodcut engraving from 1526
 Top-Right – modern recreation of the sackbut
 Bottom-Right – historical sackbuts (alto/tenor/bass)

Harmonic Series & Tuning (cont.)

- While the trombone is essentially a giant ever-changing “tuning-slide,” the instrument has a tuning slide at the top and should be tuned to concert B-flat in first position, adjusted accordingly

- micro-tuning should be done using the main slide, not with the embouchure or oral cavity (this is different than valved instruments) – always aim for the center of the note



Considerations for Trombone Students

- due to the nature of the flexibility of slide position and the effect it has on pitch, trombone students should demonstrate good aural skills for success (i.e. **the ability to match pitch and/or sing a melody in tune**)

- due to the trombone's unwieldy nature (awkward size/slide manipulation), students should not be playing prior to 4th grade (take into consideration a student's size when starting the trombone)

- sit up straight, with head held high, shoulders relaxed; weight should not be distributed to the left shoulder area; bring trombone **TO YOU**, do not bring yourself to the trombone.

Legato/Slurred Playing

- do not stop airflow in-between notes; lightly interrupt the continuous airstream with a light articulation such as "dah" or "nah"

(represented below: continuous air stream interrupted by light tongue)



- do not need to use light articulation if slurring between two partials on the same slide position (these are essentially just lip slurs)

- counterintuitively to smooth/lyrical playing, the **slide must move very quick**, smoothly, and precisely to the exact slide positions, or a glissando effect will smear the pitch in-between notes

Hand Positions/Posture Review

- left hand in "gun" holding formation, with thumb resting on bell brace, and index finger on mouthpiece shank; remaining three fingers in the inner-corner of slide brace "box" - **the left hand solely supports the weight of the instrument**

- right hand using only three fingers: index, middle, and thumb; remaining fingers should be tucked in towards the palm, **NOT** resting on the underside of the slide

- sit up straight, with head held high, shoulders relaxed; weight should not be distributed to the left shoulder area; bring trombone **TO YOU**, do not bring yourself to the trombone.

F Attachment

- the F attachment (thumb trigger) **adds overall length to the trombone**, diverting the air through a rotor valve into extra tubing and lowering the fundamental down a P4 from Bb to F

- **not for beginners**; too heavy and does not promote learning of the "normal" slide positions; more serious players should be playing on one by High School

- extends low range

- makes for easier slide position movements (for example: Bb2 to C3)

Where normally this would be first position to sixth position, the F attachment allows C to be played in first position by depressing the thumb key.

Embouchure Placement

- should be centered horizontally, and the **vertical default** is **50/50 upper to lower lip**

- many players will ultimately favor either a 2/3 to 1/3 **higher placement** (similar to horn), or they will favor the opposite using, a 1/3 to 2/3 **lower placement**

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJW4wibjR_E

- Use **mouthpiece buzzing** and **long tones** to strengthen embouchure muscles and aural skills

- resist cheeks puffing out by avoiding excessive mouthpiece pressure – strengthen corners and direct airstream toward the mouthpiece

Cleaning and Maintenance

- water should be emptied through the water key at the base of the trombone slide (encourage students to use their right hand to do so, **NOT** their foot)

- cleaning should be done every couple of months in a bathtub, using warm soapy water (dish detergent is fine) – use a flexible snake to clean the inside of tubing

- mouthpiece should be cleaned regularly (use mouthpiece brush under running water... or Q-tip)

Cleaning and Maintenance (cont)

- wipe off any dirt/excess lubrication from slide before applying new lubrication
- lubricate main slide regularly with slide oil, or slide cream with water (DO NOT mix the oil lubrication method with the cream method) – **the slide should move extremely fluidly, free of resistance**
- for more details on slide lubrication, see Bailey p. 82