Difficult Trombone Passages
In Standard Band Repertoire
by Larry B. Campbell

In the band repertoire there are a number of perplexing passages that often trip up inexperienced trombonists. Here are some suggestions that may help band directors who have little experience playing the trombone.

Grade 3 and 4 Compositions
In *Second American Folk Rhapsody* (Boosey & Hawkes) by Claire Grundman the glissando passage seems easy enough at first glance. The first and second parts should adjust the starting position to correct the intonation. In the first part the fourth position D1 should be lowered a half inch, while the second trombonist should raise the fifth-position B♭ by bringing the slide in half an inch. Try to make sure that students do not reach further than a half inch.

*Down a Country Lane* (Boosey & Hawkes) by Aaron Copland, Creed (General Words and Music, Co.), by William Hines, and *An Irish Rhapsody* (Boosey & Hawkes) by Clare Grundman are full of difficult legato tonguing passages. In the Copland the trombones play a legato crescendo to ff six measures before D♭.

The trombones have a similar pattern in the Hines in measures 10-15.

In such cases students should take full, relaxed breaths and avoid tensing the shoulders. Too much air force and a tight tongue will cause an explosive attack, which can be prevented by using the syllables tu or ta and later du or dah. It is easier for students to take relaxed breaths if they imagine blowing a feather out of the hand. The tongue should lightly interrupt the air stream just long enough for the arm to reach the new position for a smoothly-shaped legato phrase played with a rich, singing tone. The breath should not be held before playing each note.

The last note of the phrase is released when the air flow stops and should not be abruptly tongued. It is best for students to work on accuracy slowly before playing the passages at tempo. Regardless of the player's ability level, repetition will improve the phrase.

All trombonists should be able to play fast passages of short, detached notes. The opening of the third movement of Telemann's Baroque Suite, arranged by William Hill, and measure 28 of Susato's Renaissance Suite, arranged by Jim Curnow, are excellent examples of rapid, loud tonguing technique.

*An Irish Rhapsody* begins with accented ff notes followed by legato passages at measure 9.
To show the beauty and grace of late Renaissance and Baroque music breathing should be deep and relaxed. The first trombonist in the Telemann should not press the horn into the lips when playing the high G to avoid excess pressure. With lip corners tight, the tongue should hit the top of the upper teeth on the F5 and G4. For low F the tongue of the bass trombonist should hit the bottom of the upper teeth. The slight difference in tongue placement will help students to obtain the correct aperture throughout the range of the horn.

Grade 5 and 6 Compositions

Lincolnshire Posy by Percy Grainger is one of the finest works in band literature, and although it is not terribly difficult the trombones have some deceptive passages. In the second movement there is a sustained ff section in D♭ major at measure 34. The decrescendo to pp in measure 35 on ascending quarter-note triplets to a high A♭ on the first two beats can be tricky.

The player should take deep relaxed breaths and use air pressure rather than lip pressure to smoothly reach the high A♭. To practice evenness in the quarter-note triplets over the two beats students can clap the beats with the metronome while counting the three sets of triplet quarter notes.

The opening of the third movement, has a section of mixed-meter rests, which can be difficult to count. The easiest way to keep track of the rests is to count the eighth notes in each measure. The director should clearly differentiate between beat patterns with two and three eighth notes in ¾ meter. Another difficult counting excerpt is from the third movement of Gustav Holst’s Second Suite for Military Band in F Major: “Song of the Blacksmith.” The final two lines of the trombone part have a consistent mix of on-the-beat and off-the-beat notes. Students should count the eighth notes to prevent early entrances on the quarter-note rests in the final two measures.
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Larry B. Campbell received a bachelor's degree in performance from the Eastman School of Music and a master's degree in education from Southwest Texas State University. He has played trombone, euphonium, tenor tuba, and bass trumpet in many ensembles, including the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra, Eastman Wind Ensemble, U.S. Coast Guard Band, San Antonio Symphony Orchestra, New Orleans Symphony, and St. Louis Symphony. He teaches trombone and graduate euphonium at Louisiana State University and presents concerts and clinics throughout the United States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.
When students look down, they tend to open the lips into a better position with corners pulled towards the mouthpiece. Try to position the mouthpiece high on the lips where it almost touches the nose for appropriate upper lip vibration. Because it takes more air to produce pedal notes than pitches in any other register, a full breath and strong support are essential. Working on the embouchure in the pedal range builds muscles that help through the entire range of the instrument for both bass and tenor trombone students.

The range between low E and pedal B is one of the most misunderstood and poorly-taught aspects of trombone playing. In the above example the bass trombone holds D\textsuperscript{2} for ten beats before going to C\textsuperscript{b}, B\textsuperscript{b}, and pedal A. However, a bass trombone with a single rotor cannot play C\textsuperscript{b} because using an F attachment results in only six positions, not seven. The slide positions are also different when an F attachment is used. First position is still played with the slide all the way in but now sounds as F. Low E is still second position, but the player should add three quarters of an inch to second position to play in tune. Third-position E\textsuperscript{b} with the F attachment should be an inch above the normal fourth position; D, normally played in fourth position, becomes fifth position; low D\textsuperscript{b} is played in a slightly lowered sixth position; and for low C the slide should be in an extended seventh position. At this point the slide is almost off the end and low C\textsuperscript{b} is not possible.

The player should use a double-triggered bass trombone for low C\textsuperscript{b}. These come in two versions: B, F, and E\textsuperscript{b} or B\textsuperscript{b}, F, and D, the latter of which is more common today. Both have two triggers, one in F and a second in E\textsuperscript{b} or D. With an E\textsuperscript{b} trigger the third-position notes with the F trigger depressed move to first position with both triggers. With a D trigger the fourth position notes with the F trigger depressed move to first position with both triggers.

Both trombones can play low C\textsuperscript{b} easily and have independent rotors or triggers. The original bass trombones had a double trigger that was in F only worked with both trigger pressed at the same time. These instruments were excellent although difficult to manage.

Incantation and Dance also poses rhythmic difficulties. Quarter-note subdivisions will make the passage in measures 91-94 easier. The bass trombonist should count carefully to play the low D in each measure at the appropriate time. The ability to keep a steady beat is necessary for such passages.

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Rehearsal marking of the first movement has difficult, triple-tongued passages. Triple-tonguing can be played three ways: tu-ku-tu-ku-tu; tu-ku-tu-ku-ku-tu; and tu-ku-tu-ku-tu-ku. All produce good results, but the last one is most effective. The syllables tu and ku should be practiced on repeated notes, scales, and chords until it becomes impossible to hear which one is used. The tip of the tongue moves up for tu while the back of the tongue moves up for ku for good multiple-tonguing. Once the ku syllable is clean, the performer will be able to play multiple-tonguings faster and more accurately. Complete Method for Trombone by Arban teaches this technique effectively.

At rehearsal marking in the last movement of the Four Scottish Dances, the first and second trombones play glissandos in minor thirds. This is another example of how even slight differences in slide positions affect the tuning.

In the first trombone part the E to G have to be played from sharp fifth to sharp second position while the second trombones will go from flat fifth to flat second position because out-of-tune partials are used in both parts. Students should first tune the E and G and then slowly glissando up to the G and E.

Whatever obstacles they encounter, students who listen to what they play and who try to play their best will realize that good performing can bring fun and pleasure.