

Notes on Technique David Bilger

Trumpet technique can be broken down into 6 main headings: Sound (tone production), Articulation, Flexibility, Agility, Range, and Endurance. The following are ideas and examples of exercises and etudes that can be used to improve these necessary trumpet skills. Ideas about how the warm-up and practice routines will be offered later.

Sound:

Good tone production on the trumpet is a combination of a functional embouchure and the proper use of air. Therefore, the following examples will focus on improving embouchure strength and focus, or air flow (or both!).

1. Long tones. Play sustained notes for at least 12 beats at quarter = 60, making sure that the tone is full and that the pitch is stable. Continue the same feeling of air flow that you got with the long tones while playing Herbert L. Clarke Technical Studies (#1-5). I call these "moving long tones", and the idea is to keep the free air flow that we achieve on regular long tones. Also look at Schlossberg Daily Drills and Gordon Systematic Approach to Daily Practice.

2. Flow Studies. These could also be called lyrical studies. Just as we talked about keeping the air flow in the above "moving long tones", playing flow studies continues to reinforce the feeling of always using enough air. Materials to use for this purpose are Stamp Warm-up Studies (also used for pedal tones), Concone Lyrical Studies, Bordogni 24 Vocalises (also used for transposition). and Cichowicz Trumpet Flow Studies (examples are in the addendum).

3. Pedal tones and lip bends. Using both pedal tones and lip bends can strengthen the embouchure. Pedal tone exercises from the Stamp Warm-up Studies and Gordon Systematic Approach to Daily Practice are a good place to start. Lip bends will be discussed in depth at the class, and examples will be found in the addendum.

4. Mouthpiece buzzing. All of the above etudes can be done on the mouthpiece alone. Mouthpiece buzzing is an important part of sound development because it forces the player to focus the notes instead of relying on the trumpet to do it for you.

Articulation:

Articulation and response are completely interrelated. Both are a combination and appropriate balance between the tongue and the air. When working on articulation, a player must always concentrate on floating the tongue on a foundation of air, and then work on tongue position and easy tongue motion. Single and "K" tonguing are the basis for all articulation, and must be practiced independently of one another. Without a quick single tongue, smooth triple tongue is impossible. There is no substitute for practice on articulation. The following are suggestions for exercises, but literally every text has a section on tonguing. Try Charlier 36 Etudes (#14, 16, 22, and 25), Goldman Practical Studies (1-4), and most of the Arban book.

Flexibility:

Flexibility actually impacts all aspects of trumpet playing, especially articulation and range. Lip flexibility exercises are actually "tongue level" exercises, since the tongue channels the air to produce the notes. The Arban book is a good starting place, but other materials include Colin Advanced Lip Flexibilities, Schlossberg Daily Drills, and Irons 27 Groups of Exercises.

Agility:

Agility actually refers to the quickness of a player's fingers and brain. Included in this topic will be dexterity drills, transposition etudes, and sight reading texts.

1. Finger dexterity is extremely important, and often overlooked. To improve dexterity, I recommend practicing major and minor scales, chromatic scales, and arpeggios right out of the Arban Complete Method. Nothing can replace these etudes. Other sources of challenging finger benders are Nagel Speed Studies and Vizzuti Advanced Etudes.
2. Transposition is a necessary skill for any player with professional goals. It is also one of the most overlooked, since it is hard work and is unrewarding in the short term. Start with the Caffarelli 100 Studi Melodici and Bordogni 24 Vocalises, and graduate to the Sachse 100 Etudes. Be aware that transposition requires a constant long term investment of your time (years!), and should not be overlooked.
3. Sight reading is a skill that can be practiced on a daily basis. Take out any new, old or unfamiliar piece of music, and you have an instant text. Sight read duets with a friend, or challenge yourself just for fun. Hickman Music Speed Reading is a quality text with tips on improving your skills, as is Dufresne

Develop Sight Reading.

Range: Range (both high and low) are functions of embouchure strength, tongue position, air flow, and centering. Many exercises that we have already discussed will increase range, such as pedal tones, lip bends, flexibility studies, flow studies, etc. Try practicing octave slurs while making sure to change your vowel sound from ah to eee as you go from low to high. Also make sure not to over-adjust by playing too small or with too much pressure in the high register. Remember, if you don't practice it, you can't do it-- and this applies to high notes as well. Some things to practice are Stamp Warm-up Studies, Gordon Systematic Approach to Daily Practice, Smith Top Tones, and Vizzuti Advanced Etudes.

Endurance:

As is the case with range, endurance is also a combination of many of the topics we have already touched upon, and will benefit from many of the same etudes. The two other things that will most quickly improve endurance are efficiency and loud practice.

1. Efficiency is a necessity for any brass player. Playing the trumpet is extremely physical, and efficient playing will reduce the demands on the player. Efficiency can be achieved by taking care of the following:

- A. Always use a good volume of air, and high air speed
- B. Always play with your embouchure set
- C. Do not use excessive pressure
- D. Practice upper body relaxation
- E. Always think about what you are doing while you play

2. Loud practice is another part of trumpet playing that is often overlooked. Remember, when practicing at loud dynamic levels, always keep your sound from distorting, and never cause yourself physical pain. Do not use excessive pressure! Orchestral excerpts are a good source of loud material, as are the Brandt Orchestral Etudes. Perhaps the best resource for loud playing is the Schilke Power Exercises. Playing 5 minutes of these a day will be all you need to develop the necessary strength for increased endurance. They are not published, but are outlined in the addendum.

Notes on Practicing:

The first and probably most important part of practicing is the warm-up. Warming up is a personal thing, and everyone will need to experiment with what works for them, but the following are some ideas and guidelines for establishing your own personal warm-up. I think of the warm-up period as having two main goals, the first being to wake up your chops (and brain), and the second to practice the basics of technique. The warm-up should start you off slowly, and then move on to include the six aspects of technique as discussed earlier. Of course further specific practice of the problem areas in your playing will be required, but a certain amount of all technique should be covered in the first session of the day.

I like to begin with Clarke Technical Studies and Cichowicz Trumpet Flow Studies. By the time I have played 5 or 10 minutes of these, I have accomplished the first part of my warm-up. Sometimes I will continue with Stamp Warm-up Studies, which I use as a "centering medicine" if I feel I need it. Then I continue with Ray Mase's 10 Week Practice Routine, which is a simple compilation of technical drills from a number of sources. I believe that Ray's book is an excellent example of how to put together a warm-up/practice book. The book is unpublished, since it is a compilation of copyright materials, but I have included the guide page in the addendum, which tells you how to put the book together. You can also put together your own book using the same principles. Additional practice sessions should be dedicated to practicing weaknesses, learning new etudes and excerpts, and learning solos and other performance pieces. No matter what you are practicing, your metronome should always be handy, since it can act as both the "rhythm police" and the "practice coach." The metronome can help you become aware of inconsistencies in your rhythm, and also help in your training by making you practice things at more difficult tempi than are called for, so that performances will seem easy.

Another sidekick should be a tuner, so that you get in the habit of playing in tune with yourself. It is impossible for anyone to play in tune with another musician if they cannot play in tune with themselves. The tuner doesn't lie.

Chris Gekker (of the American Brass Quintet) wrote about practicing, "Every player, no matter how good, makes mistakes, but the very best performers do two things: they don't tolerate them in practice sessions, correcting the slightest mishap in an unhurried, determined manner (also practicing with concentration and slowly enough so that mistakes are not learned); and in performance, they react to any error by immediately raising their level of energy and concentration, staying loose and aggressive." Etudes should be a part of your regular practice, and a good way to approach them is to perfect one a week. There are endless sources for etudes, but some of my favorites are Arban 14 Characteristic Studies, Charlier 36 Etudes, Bitsch 20 Etudes, Brandt Orchestral Etudes, Gates Odd Meter Etudes, Reynolds 48 Etudes, Wurm 40 Studies, and Longinotti Studies in Classical and Modern Style. Your teacher will be able to tell you what books are most appropriate for your level, and professional level players will benefit from all the books mentioned above.

The other advice I have on practicing is to invest time in training your ear and your musical soul. Every player needs to develop an understanding about that the trumpet's role is in each piece of music, as well as to understand what emotions the music is trying to express. The best way to achieve this is to listen to all kinds of music every chance you get, and to experiment as an artist on your instrument. Polished technique is a means, not an end. Most of all, keep practicing, keep improving, and remember that only you are responsible for how you play!

Notes on Performing, Recitals, and Equipment:

Every type of performing situation places special and unique demands upon a performer. I have identified six ways in which you can meet these demands, regardless of the style of music or performance situation. The following are skills that you must develop to achieve excellent performances.

1. Practice your part. Thorough practice not only improves your chances of hitting the right notes, but will add to your physical conditioning. Your "chops" can learn to pace themselves for individual difficult passages.
2. Learn the music. Every good performer understands the style of the piece, as well as having a feeling about what the composer was trying to say with the music. A musical approach can actually help technique, as well.
3. Communicate with your colleagues. Communication is what performing is all about. We communicate with our audience through the content of the music, but more importantly, we must communicate with the musicians with whom we share the stage. This is accomplished by listening (to players other than yourself!), leading when appropriate, moving your body to dictate phrasing and pacing, and eye contact--both with other musicians and the conductor.

4. Be reactive. Every good musician must listen and react to tuning, ensemble, and style; especially articulation, note length, and phrasing.

5. Concentrate at all times. Most of the mistakes that creep in at performance time are a result of a lack of concentration. Every player should develop a few tricks that they can use to re-focus wandering attention.

6. Play with confidence. Playing with assurance results in a proper use of air and better technique, and is the first and best step to prevent nerves. A well deserved belief in one's abilities (combined with good preparation) will go a long way towards eliminating nervous reactions. The majority of concerts that musicians participate in are planned for us. The one major exception is the solo recital. Recitals may be required by a university or conservatory for graduation, or they may be for profit or merely for fun. No matter what the genesis of the recital is, one basic question remains: How does one program for it?

The following are some ideas that have helped me to come up with successful programs.

1. First of all, it is important to define the purpose of the recital. Is it educational, a fee concert, or merely for the enjoyment of friends and family.

2. Understand your audience, their special circumstances and expectations or, if it is a student recital, what will you be gaining from the experience.

3. Make a list of possible repertoire with timings of each piece, and be sure to pick music you enjoy. I always make three separate lists: pieces I already know, pieces I am learning, and pieces I should know but don't yet. Once you have these lists, you can select from them to assemble a workable program.

4. Select a good strong opener first. I prefer either something a bit flashy or something for piccolo trumpet. Next, select your closer. I look for something a little lighter or a chamber music piece, and then select the major works (Sonatas or Concertos). Lastly I pick a few filler pieces that will provide contrast and rest.

5. Write down some potential concert orders, taking into account how the pieces flow from one to the next, what kind of endurance demands they place on you, placement of specialty pieces (i.e. piccolo), and the logistics, especially if there are stage changes involved.

Full Recital (30 min. per half) Opener

Transition (Contrast) Concerto or Sonata INTERMISSION

Concerto or Sonata

Rest piece (Contrast) Closer

Half Recital (35 min. total time) Opener
Transition (Contrast)
Major work (Sonata or Concerto) Closer

Equipment is the most highly personal and controversial aspect of trumpet playing. I would not presume to tell anyone what set-up to play on, but I can give some general advice. Remember that when you are changing to something new, it should always sound immediately better than your old equipment. The idea of "working into it" is bunk. There may be an adjustment time, but there must be some immediate improvement. Also make sure to play your new equipment in a couple of different rooms, and always play for other musicians. Their ears may catch something in the sound that you cannot hear from your side of the bell. Here are some other ideas.

1. Identify your needs. Do you require a set-up for a specific style or job, or do you need something more versatile? Do your chops tolerate switching equipment for different repertoire? Do you need more than one set-up to meet the demands of your playing? By answering these questions, you can narrow your possible choices.

2. There are general tendencies in horns. For Bb trumpet, most people use medium large bore. The weight of the bell is a matter of taste. C trumpets are generally large bore. I prefer Bach trumpets for Bb and C because they have a good balance between high and low overtones in the sound. Many players are getting off track by trying to play too dark and sacrificing the highs in the sound. To my ear, it then is no longer a true trumpet sound. For small trumpets, look for quality of sound, response, and ease of high playing.

3. Most trumpet players spend a great deal of time (and money) selecting mouthpieces. I play on a Bach 1 1/4 C (or 1 1/2 C or 1B), and I have found that most legit players favor this size of mouthpiece. The best idea is to try a wide variety of mouthpieces keeping the following in mind:

A. Cup depth and shape affect the range, response, sound, and pitch. Too deep a cup results in a weak high range, slow response, dead sound, and flat pitch. Too shallow a cup tends to weaken the low range, thin out the sound, and raise the pitch too high.

B. The size and shape of the rim must fit your facial structure, your dental shape, and take into account the amount of pressure you use. Too flat or cushioned a rim will slow response, too thin a rim will decrease endurance.

C. Opening up the backbore and throat increase the volume and richness of the sound, but can destroy the focus of the sound and flexibility. Most orchestral players open up their mouthpieces.

4. Mutes are an often overlooked part of trumpet equipment. Every serious trumpeter should own a wide variety of mutes, and be selective about their use. I have loud and soft straight mutes, as well as in tune ones and sharp ones. There are times all of the above come in handy. Make sure to practice with your mutes, because "if you don't practice it, you can't play it." A harmon mute without the stem can also be an effective practice tool. Try to practice etudes while keeping the timbre (the amount of buzziness) the same.

5. Other accessories you should carry are:

- A. Oil. Make sure never to mix valve oils. Some are incompatible and can seriously gum up your valves.
- B. Cleaning supplies--mouthpiece brush and snake. It also helps if you use them.
- C. Slide grease. Any non-water soluble grease will do. I use Vaseline on my slides. D. Pencil with eraser.
- E. Aspirin or Advil (both for headaches and as an anti-inflammatory for the chops).