

What Should I Practice? (Brass Player Edition)

- 1) Buzz on the Mouthpiece – the mouthpiece is where the basic sound comes from.
 - a. Play long tones with a slight crescendo and diminuendo, striving always for a full rich sound
 - b. Play “siren drills” – sliding from very low to very high and back with a big, well supported tone
 - c. Play scales from the bottom to the top of your range with a beautiful sound
 - d. Play melodies you know – make them sound full and rich in tone
- 2) Play a few long tones – strengthen the embouchure
 - a. Play the first, fifth and eighth notes of a scale as long as you can
 - b. Crescendo and diminuendo as you play the pitches to keep the muscles active and the air moving
 - c. Work with a tuner so that you don’t distort the tone
- 3) Practice flexibility – learning to find your way easily amongst the partials
 - a. The basic series starts with open, then middle valve, first valve, first and second valve together, second and third valve together, first and third valve together, and then all three valves together (trombones move out one position at a time from first position) – **MEMORIZE THIS PATTERN!**
 - b. Practice each series lightly tongued first, focusing on keeping the corners of the embouchure locked, then as soon as you can smoothly do so, play slurred and fluidly
- 4) Practice articulation – a clean beginning on each pitch is essential, and far music is articulated rather than slurred
 - a. It is essential that the tongue touches the hard palate right behind the teeth, as if you are lightly saying “too.”
 - b. Practice scales with a legato tongue – don’t allow the air to stop between the notes and always play with a big beautiful tone
 - c. Practice scales with a staccato tongue – strive to start each pitch as you did with the legato tongue and then create separation between pitches by stopping the air.
- 5) Practice the music you are playing
 - a. Focus on the passages that are giving you the most difficulty –
 - b. Always have a goal for your practice (“Today I want to play this section with no missed notes, rhythms or articulations, at a quarter note=88 on my metronome”) – your goal should be
 - i. Short; don’t try and do too much at once. If you have time, work one little spot then move on to another one – Rome wasn’t built in a day!
 - ii. Specific; have a definite objective that you will focus on

- iii. Measurable; how will you know that you have achieved your goal for the day? What will the music sound like if you have achieved your daily practice goal?
 - iv. Attainable; don't set yourself up for failure by attempting to do too much in one practice session.
 - c. Work slowly and methodically – practicing mistakes just leads to perfect mistakes
 - d. Always play with a well-supported beautiful tone – if that isn't happening, fix that first!
 - e. Isolate problems before putting entire passages together – identify correct fingerings, practice rhythms and articulations separately, before adding them to the entire passage.
 - f. Don't spend a lot of time playing pieces from beginning to the end – this is a waste of valuable practice time
- 6) Play something for fun
 - a. Always end a practice session playing something you particularly enjoy, so that you are excited to come back and play again tomorrow!
 - b. There are several books of popular song titles available at places like Amazon.com, talk to your parents about ordering you a book that has some of your favorite songs in it so you can play them.
 - c. If you have a favorite band piece that you enjoy playing, save it for the end of your practice session.
- 7) Applicable Rules:
 - a. No. 10 – They're called wind instruments for a reason
 - i. Always take a large relaxed breath before you play anything, and stand or sit in such a way that you can completely fill with air.
 - ii. Play each passage, regardless of dynamic, as if you are setting off on a long journey – with a full tank of gas (air)
 - b. No. 2 – Tension is the enemy
 - i. If you find that parts of your body other than your embouchure or diaphragmatic group are tense, you are getting in the way of creating a beautiful sound – relax!
 - ii. Muscles are voluntary – monitor yourself for tension and rid your body of it