

P E N N S T A T E



T R O M B O N E S

The Complete Warm-Up Routine

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Introduction

Why Is A Warm-Up Routine Important?

As brass players, we often hear discussion about doing a warm-up routine. To often the warm-up routine is a gray area in the brass player's practice vocabulary. For some a warm-up routine means a brief set of exercises, while for others a warm-up routine is an integral and extensive ritual of preparing to play our instrument competently. Regardless of what a warm-up routine consists of the benefits are numerous. Here is a selected list of four of the important positive benefits one can acquire from developing a consistent warm-up routine.

a) A warm-up routine helps to build consistency in a player's practice habits.

In the sports world, for example, a world-class sprinter practices the same routines and exercises daily, hoping to improve his or her performance each time - if only by .001 of a second. One cannot expect to perform consistently if one does not practice and prepare in a consistent fashion.

b) A warm-up routine develops control over the physical attributes of playing a brass instrument.

It is important to realize that brass playing is a physical activity involving many muscles of the body. Some of these muscle groups are delicate and some of them are difficult to understand and control. Regardless, it is necessary to train the muscles that form the embouchure and sustain the breathing mechanism. We must develop this muscle memory

to a level that is automatic; much the same way we are able to ride a bicycle after years of not performing the activity.

c) A musically healthy warm-up routine will transform us mentally from an amusical being into a brass player/musician who is actively ready to focus on the musical task at hand.

This transformation must occur physically (as mentioned above) and mentally. The mental aspect of a solid warm-up routine helps us control our internal rhythm, develop good aural skills, and prepare ourselves to be musically adaptable.

d) A warm-up routine, if followed regularly, can help with our natural progression to the performance arena.

As with any discipline, effective practice leads to positive results in performance settings. The confidence we gain, and the lessons we learn about ourselves during the process of developing a solid warm-up routine will be invaluable when it is time to perform.

When Should We Warm-Up?

Unfortunately, there is not a single answer to this question. The importance of a well developed and flexible warm-up routine cannot be over-emphasized. The elements of a warm-up routine could be the only material you play on some days. In other situations, such as performances, a different version of your routine may be appropriate. Be prepared! Have several versions of a warm-up routine prepared and whatever your situation is, stay focused in the execution of the warm-up routine to increase its effectiveness.

What If There Is Not Enough Time To Do A Warm-Up Routine?

It should be noted that no single warm-up routine is effective for all brass players. The following exercises and ideas are designed to give an outline of the elements of a musically healthy, physically sound and technically proficient warm-up routine. These exercises should be abbreviated or supplemented to fit each individual's strengths and weaknesses. A serious brass player/musician spends approximately 1/2 hour executing his or her routine. Often time restraints are a factor in the warm-up routine that you choose, but a quick, well-planned warm-up routine is still better than no warm-up routine at all.

How Should I Develop A Warm-Up Routine?

The warm-up routines suggested here below, and in the recommended Michael Davis materials have worked well for the author and the students over the last few years. The inclusion of the word "complete" in the title of this work refers to the overall goal of activating both the technical and the musical tools needed to perform music at the highest level possible.

It is important to realize that we are human, and as such our development as musicians is as unique as our fingerprint.

Constructive analysis is critical to success in developing a productive warm-up routine. The player should execute the warm-up routine in front of a mirror and/or record whenever possible. This will greatly enhance the player's ability to evaluate a routine's effectiveness.

The Air Stream

Arnold Jacobs (former tubist for the Chicago Symphony) is quoted as saying "As brass players, our first job is to produce wind . . . our second job is to turn that wind into song." Often, problems with pitch, intonation, range and dynamics are actually symptoms of a larger problem with the understanding and control of the air stream. Therefore, the air-stream is the first area to address in a comprehensive warm-up routine. The attitudes toward the air stream have been wide ranging. On one end of the spectrum, Emory Remington, the famed teacher of trombone at the Eastman School of Music, believed that trombone could be played on a "conversational" breath. While on the other end of the spectrum, we find Mr. Jacobs and his conviction that one must expand and utilize the full air capacity at all times. A reasonable compromise can be made that incorporates the positive aspects of both these extremes.

Anatomy of the Air Stream

As a way of dealing with the complex issues of the air stream it is helpful to categorize the different elements. This will allow the player to organize the warm-up routine in such a way as to develop consistency, control and an understanding of the air stream. The author has chosen the concept of the "anatomy of the air stream". In this system the air stream consists of three major components:

- 1) Volume - The amount of air taken into the body.*
- 2) Velocity - The speed and control of the air we exhale.*
- 3) Direction- The focus and completion of the air stream.*

Exercises to Develop Volume

The goal of these exercises is to maximize the efficiency of the player's capacity to take in air. It should be stressed that all of the physical exercises listed should be done gradually and with great care to avoid strain or tension.

1) Chest Cavity Stretches

The chest cavity exercises are intended to expand the rib cage and surrounding structure. These are isometric exercises. For the expansion of the frontal area of the chest cavity make a 90-degree angle with the arms and gently push back with elbows. This should be a very small motion. Do not over extend. At this point one should begin to feel some expansion across the front of the rib cage near the sternum. By moving the elbows higher or lower, one can change the focus of the stretching.

To find the same results for the back area, one should imagine holding a large ball with your elbows. Now gently and deliberately squeeze the ball. Again do not over extend, and remember this is an isometric exercise. At this point one should be aware of a pulling and

expansion across the back. As before, the raising and lowering of the elbows will change the focus of the stretching.

Remember, these are subtle exercises - be very conscious of the effects on the body as it undergoes a physical transformation in preparation to play the instrument.

2) Lung Tissue Stretches

The lungs are made of expandable tissue that functions like a balloon. In much the same way an ordinary balloon's elasticity is increased by stretching it before inflating, the lung tissue needs to be stretched before it can perform at its highest level. Before beginning this exercise, try to eliminate all tension from the body. Tension will impede the development of a healthy breath and cause further tone production problems.

Gently exhale all air from the body, do not block the airway with tension in the throat or the tongue. Inhale deeply, to the maximum capacity, filling from the bottom of the lungs while being careful not to interrupt the breath with any blockage or tension in the airway. At the end of the inhalation, cap off the air by simply closing your mouth. While holding the breath, gently stretch front to back and side to side. This should be a very subtle motion. It is not necessary to bend over 90 degrees to make this exercise effective. After a stretch of 5 to 10 seconds, exhale slowly in a relaxed manner.

3) Inhalation Exercise

In order to make all breathing exercises more efficient, it is important to have a solid concept or image of how to take a good breath. Music demands a variety of inhalations. Sometimes we are given the opportunity to inhale slowly and but often we are required to inhale quickly. Whether extended or short, we now need to focus on getting air to the bottom of the lungs and maximizing capacity.

One image that has proven to be very effective for is the 'Poe' breath. The player begins by simply saying 'Poe' aloud several times (pronounced the same as the famous poet, Edgar Allen Poe). Next, the player whispers 'Poe' several times. It is important that the individual allows the throat and jaw to open quickly and speaks with 'warm, wet air'. The breath should be capable of fogging a mirror. The next step is to say 'Poe' while inhaling. It is crucial that the jaw drops and the throat opens in this process. If done properly a player can feel and hear immediate results of taking a deep, dark breath.

4) Suction Exercise

This exercise is designed to emphasize the intake of air. Often we open the passageway for a healthy breath but we don't actually inhale to our maximum. Immediately after beginning to take the 'Poe' breath, cup the hand over the mouth. Tightly seal the entire mouth with the palm. Continue inhaling against the resistance. After only a few seconds break the vacuum by simply removing the hand and feel the air rush to the bottom of the lungs.

As a reminder, stay relaxed throughout the above breathing exercises. Always listen to the sound of the breath. The richer and more relaxed the breath, the richer and more relaxed the sound.

Exercises to Develop Velocity

This area deals with support of the brass player's sound. The following exercises are designed to create imagery to help control the muscles that control the air stream. They are also designed to help us learn which muscles actually are responsible for this task.

1) Exercises to Help Identify the Diaphragmatic Muscles

The first exercise is to simply exhale aggressively with no shoulder or chest movement. Imagine the diaphragm climbing up the chest. (Actually the diaphragm is relaxing during the exhale.) Continue to exhale until the air is completely gone to maximize the effectiveness of this imagery. To enhance this picture, use the hand to trace the progress of the diaphragm.

The second exercise is to lightly cough, as if clearing the throat. Place the hand on middle of the torso at the base of the sternum. The contraction felt is the diaphragm at work.

Once you establish where the diaphragm is located, practice flexing this muscle. If controlled correctly, one should be able to talk comfortably with the diaphragm firmly in place.

If a player can control this muscle effectively, the air stream will begin with the proper support and control that we need to play music effectively on a brass instrument.

The author considers the initial point of diaphragmatic support as "First Point of Interest."

Exercises to Develop Direction

Our next concern as brass players needs to be the delivery of sound. The work spent developing volume and velocity will undoubtedly improve the sound. Nevertheless, it is the direction, or projection of one's sound that is critical in the communication of one's musical ideas.

This is an exercise to create the "Second Point of Interest."

If the "First Point of Interest" is the diaphragmatic support, then we must create a "Second Point of Interest" to complete the flow of the air stream. To do this, select a target ranging from 5 to 25 feet away. This target should be relatively small (i.e. a doorknob, a light switch etc.). Stare intensely at the target. One must establish a conceptual contact with this target, so that even when the player looks away at the music or the conductor, the target is still secure.

Utilize the concept of "volume, velocity and direction" skills to take a good breath, support and project a full rich sound at the desired target. The player must then be able to transfer this imagery to different environments. The player should pick out this "Second Point of Interest" as soon as he or she enters a new playing area. The difference in the quality of the sound will be immediately evident.

At this point, the player is recommended to refer to the following warm-up specific play along materials:

*“10 MWU”
“15 Minute Warm-Up Routine”
“20 Minute Warm Up Routine”
and the
“Total Trombone”*

*all by Michael Davis
available from Hip-BoneMusic.com*

*“Long Tone Accompaniment”
by
Walter White*

List of other related play along materials:

*SmartMusic
The famous practice software available at SmartMusic.com*

For general play along:

*Spotify, Itunes, YouTube, Music Minus One,
Jim Snidero and Jamey Aebersold*

Play along material for focused intonation practice:

Cello Drones by Sloane, TuneUp by Colley, and Breakfast by Schwartz

Highly recommended studies for the basics:

David Vining, The Breathing Book

The Breathing Gym III

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