



Effective Practice Strategies

<http://plaza.obu.edu/bynumj/lowbrass>

Plan each practice session before beginning in order to maximize your time

Session 1:

Warm-up/Daily Routine (30 minutes)

- Mouthpiece Buzzing of simple melodies with piano as a pitch reference
- Long tones (add dynamic motion)
- Soft-tonguing legato
- Tonguing on a line
- 2-5 note slurs
- Flexibility
- Scales (use different articulations)
- High and low register

Session 2:

Etudes and Study Materials (30-45 minutes)

- Lyrical Etudes
- Technical Etudes
- Clef Studies (Trombone)
- F-Attachment Etudes (Trombone)

Session 3:

Miscellaneous (45-60 minutes)

- Solo Literature:
Focus on sections, don't always run the piece. Map out breathing and stylistic interpretation. Zero in on consistent mistakes (which are very common), in order to make yourself aware of them. Recording yourself will prove very helpful.
- Ensemble Material:
Focus on the material to be covered in the next ensemble rehearsal (wind ensemble, jazz band, low brass ensemble, or brass quintet). Work on the most difficult passages. Get the notes under your fingers so that you can concentrate on musical detail. Be prepared for every rehearsal...don't make a rehearsal your personal practice time.

Be smart – Don't try to cram everything into one practice session. In order to prepare yourself properly for the next lesson, rehearsal, or audition, it is important to plan your practice sessions. Make sure to spend an appropriate amount of time on each lesson assignment.

Go slow – It only takes a second to make a bad habit, but it takes a year to break it. Joe Alessi (New York Philharmonic) is very fond of saying, "If you want to get better slowly, practice fast. If you want to get better fast, practice slowly."

Record yourself – You need to become your best teacher and pickiest listener. This is not possible without objectively listening to your playing. Recording yourself makes this easier. Handheld tape recorders are very affordable and are available at most electronics stores. It is best to buy a recorder that can play back at half-speed. This slows everything down and really highlights problem areas.

Concentrate – It is better to have 30 minutes of solid, concentrated practice than to have 3 hours of unfocused rambling on the instrument. This is why it is so important to map out exactly what you are going to address. If you find that your mind is wandering while practicing, take a break. Get a drink of water or go for a walk. Come back later, and regroup for another session. This is better than simply going through the motions.

Keep a practice journal - Write down exactly what you work on, and any insights you may have had about your playing. What came easy? What was challenging? Why? What areas do you want to improve? Also include any important events such as solo opportunities, master classes, concerts, etc. This may seem useless, but looking back after a length of time, you begin to see a pattern of what you need to work on. This is also a wonderful way to track your progress on the instrument.

Listen – Find recordings of several different trombonists, both jazz and classical. Go to concerts and listen to great playing. It is very important to have a standard that you are trying to reach. If you hear great playing, it makes you want to be great. Slowly begin to build a library of study material that focuses on aspects you would like to improve. For a comprehensive list of solo and etude materials, visit www.hickeys.com or call 1-800-HICKEYS for a free music catalogue.

Attack deficiencies – It never fails to amaze me at how much time students spend practicing areas of fundamental technique that are already at a high level. In order to avoid embarrassment, many students will avoid working on playing deficiencies. It is important to understand that focusing on your weaknesses is the only way to make significant progress. Identify your weaknesses and incorporate exercises into your daily routine that focus on them.

Sight Reading Fundamentals - Remember that sight reading is a skill that requires practice. In order for your sight reading to improve, you must incorporate it into your daily practice. Spending just 5 minutes a day on sight reading will greatly improve your comfort level. Below is a sight reading checklist:

1. Check the key signature, time signature, and tempo marking of the selection
2. Scan the selection for unique rhythms or awkward placement of rests, etc.
3. Scan the selection for accidentals or key changes
4. Scan the selection for any rhythmic or melodic patterns (repeated phrases, going up or down a scale, etc.)
5. Scan the selection for articulation markings, dynamics, and any other musical direction (*accelerando* or *rallentando*, etc.)
6. Mentally set your tempo before beginning
7. Remember that if you have to choose between playing a correct rhythm or correct pitch...always play the correct rhythm.
8. Once you start...do not stop!

Scales – Practice scales in a musical fashion --- as though they were part of a Mozart Concerto. Remember to play with your best sound and pay close attention to accurate intonation. Once the scales are comfortable, vary the speed, dynamics, and articulation.

Through the study and practice of scales in the pattern given, the player will gain the comfort of being at ease in any key --- after all, on the trombone, the only reason the key of C is easier than the key of B is that we more often play in the key of C. Familiarity provides comfort --- the same idea holds true for major scales versus minor scales. Practice minor scales more often and they will become easier.

Other Tips –

- When working on a technical etude, use the concept of fragmentation. Break down each measure into individual beats. Perfect each beat before moving on. After you are more comfortable, slowly piece the fragments together until you are playing the entire phrase.

- True legato technique combines legato tonguing (Dah) with natural slurs. Natural slurs can occur between any two notes on different partials of the harmonic series. In order to play with beautiful legato technique, you must blow through the notes. When practicing a legato etude, play an entire phrase without using your tongue. Simply blow air through each note of the phrase, allowing for a full sound and visualizing one note melting into the next.
- If you are experiencing performance anxiety (nerves) you need to do the exact opposite of what your body is telling you. Your body will want to take small, shallow breaths - before playing, take a few deep, relaxing breaths – in through the nose and exhale slowly through the mouth. Your body will want to collapse on itself (in order to hide) – you need to stand tall, with your feet firmly planted shoulder width apart. Keep your elbows out and away from your chest. Posture that projects confidence allows you to play your best.
- Don't allow yourself to worry about what anyone thinks of your playing. You have no control over someone's opinion. The only thing you have control over is being the best musician and performer that you can be. If you find that you continue to worry about other people's perceptions of your playing remember this: the audition panel wants you to do well.
- Concentrate on what you are doing, when you are doing it. Don't focus on that hard passage that is coming up in 10 measures; that mistake you just made; or that beautiful high Bb you just hit. These distractions will only have a negative impact on your performance. Live in the moment.
- Instead of focusing on what not to do – concentrate on exactly what kind of musical performance you want to present. Thinking in negative terms will almost always have a negative effect. For example – what happens when I say to you, “Don't think about an elephant.”? Likewise in a musical performance, by thinking of what you don't want to happen – you will psych yourself out. Instead of thinking, “I don't want to crack that note”, you should think about your ideal sound, and what you need to do to achieve that sound.
- Remember the three main fundamentals of performance – great tone; in tune; and great rhythm

Online Resources

Trombone

International Trombone Association - www.ita-web.org
 The British Trombone Society - www.trombone-society.org.uk
 Online Trombone Journal - www.trombone.org
 Stacy's Website - remember.to/practice
 Trombones Online - www.trombones-usa.com

Tuba/Euphonium

International Tuba and Euphonium Assoc. - www.iteaonline.org
 Tuba Central - www.tubacentral.com
 Tuba Logic Index - galvanizedjazz.com/tuba.html
 Tuba and Euph. Manufacturers - www.angelfire.com/ca7/loyaltubist/TubaMFG.html
 Tuba News - www.tubanews.com

General:

Hickey's Music - www.hickeys.com
 Low Brass Bibliography - www.ulm.edu/~everett/resources/bibliography.pdf
 Music Related Websites - www.geocities.com/richardbegel/musiclinks/htm
 Brasswind - www.wbw.com

