

Why Routine?
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Chapter 2: The Breath

Once again, if you read Chapter 1, these are my opinions only.

People tend to make breathing too complicated.

Let me say up front that it is a mistake to separate breath from SOUND in our thinking.

Breath and Sound are better thought of as two sides of the same coin, inseparable. Trying to “breathe right” absent of a great sound is folly.

In fact, when that sound is right, you probably don't need to know anything about breathing! The sound guides and justifies everything.

When Mr. Adam said our trumpet mind needs to be 90% Sound and 9% Breath, I think he meant it.

However, most of us have had some faulty input along the way, so consider the following:

“Sit up straight!” is no good. It is FAR better to simply think “tall.” “Straight” gets your back muscles tightened up, often causes you to crane your neck into an unnatural posture, and that is no good. **Once muscles are tight they are no longer useful.** We have to stay loose, so just sit “tall,” but stay loose.

Over athleticizing, or muscling the breath is a mistake. Just breathe. Mr. Adam told us time and again, “watch a baby breathe.” Their tummy is moving up and down but (presuming the baby is OK) nobody taught the baby how to breathe. Just breathe.

The closest place our lungs are to our skin is up under our collar bones. The inhale naturally starts low in the body (as the diaphragm drops, causing suction) and fills up like a pitcher of water, but needs to fill all the way up to our collar bones.

Charley Davis caught me starting my inhale high up in my chest years ago - What?! Once I turned that upside down and imagined the breath coming in from low and filling upward from there, my first double C was that very day (thank you Charley!).

Bob Slack has offered two thoughts on this that I find profoundly helpful:

- 1) “Take every breath as if you are going to play a 2nd line G.” But that is an ENERGIZED BREATH, and an ENERGIZED G!. (my words added here, but I think Bob would approve). This applies to ALL registers! When you are doing your routine in the upper register, is your attitude toward breathing any different that it is on that 2nd line G?
- 2) Add to that Bob’s other quote that I think of daily, “great energy without force.” There is never “relaxed blah.” Never. Amen. Simple.

Mr. Adam got after us all the time to take a big breath and “get your air going!” He said “you must take such a big breath that there can be no tension in the sound.”

“You must take such a big breath that you cannot clamp down on it high in your chest.”

Just breathe.

I suggest that most frustrated players are lazy breathers... When you ponder what you can control vs what you cannot control, anyone can develop the discipline to become a trumpet-healthier breather. But again, simple, natural, just breathe.

For me, there is great satisfaction and pride in hearing my life-long friends play so well. Greg Wing, Bob Slack, Bobby Burns, Charley Davis, Jim Reed, Vicki Hastings, many others. It is easy for me to imagine, and go to school on, their model of a fantastic sound with great energy and freedom; their mind is in that opulent SOUND and the breath is with great energy without force. Good stuff...