Improving Legato and Phrasing

Dr. Natalie Mannix, Associate Professor of Trombone

University of North Texas

Natalie.mannix@unt.edu

Legato uses three skills: smooth air, light tongue, quick slide

1. **Smooth Air**

Outward projection of air: Focus on a consistent air stream and give it someplace to aim

Tools: hand, paper, pinwheel, inspirex spirometer

In order to play lip slurs well, it’s necessary to use smooth air.

Do lip slurs every day in all registers



Legato phrases combine natural “lip” slurs with legato slurs

First, start with no tongue and work only on smooth air:

* Blow air stream on hand/paper
* move to pinwheel and blow tune
* move to trombone and do air trombone, no tongue or sound (does air sound smooth?)
* play tune smeary (all natural slurs)



2. **Light Tongue**

On a smooth air stream, articulate “doo, doo, doo”; check it on pinwheel, hand or paper. Exercises go between “doo” tongue and “too” tongue. Air keeps moving.

* Static pitch: first air trombone, then play



* Now changing 1 position: air trombone, then play



* Also ascending



3. **Quick Slide**

* Tongue and slide movement need to happen at the exact same time, as quick as a valve can be pushed down. Move slide quick during 8th rests.
* Make sure slide is in good working condition
* Lightly grip slide
* Quick, but relaxed, slide motion
* Change accidentals for variation





Melodic slide speed exercise:

* Play each note separated and staccato
* Move slide at the last second as quick as possible



Play as written but move slide just as quick, first without slurs, then legato



Let’s try with a Bordogni etude:

1x. Air Trombone (listen for smooth air)

2x. Play smeared, no tongue

3x. Play

Bordogni



Phrasing (making music!)

* Shaping the air, try 4 bar phrases: crescendo 2 bars, diminuendo 2 bars. Are some phrases shorter than that? Longer?
* Bringing out the notes in between the beats, try emphasizing weaker beats
* Finding interesting stress and release points: bringing out chromatic notes, notes leading up to cadences, suspensions and syncopations
* Experiment! Imitate great musicians/singers! Don’t be afraid to try!