

A Guide For Parents Of Brass Students

*all you need to know
to get off to a
great start*

**parents
students
teachers
band directors**

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Welcome —————	pg 2
Understanding how the sound is produced-	3
Instrument check —————	4
Why the mouthpiece is important ———	5
How to buy or rent at a fair price ———	8
What is a good quality instrument ———	9
How to help your school band director—	10
Oiling valves and trombone slides ———	11
Special care of trombone slides ———	13
How to clean a brass instrument ———	14
What to do with a stuck mouthpiece ——	16
Instrument maintenance —————	17
Why regular practice is needed ———	18
Finding a good private teacher———	19
Why a proper warm up is needed ———	20
Importance of listening and inspiration——	22
Epilog —————	23

WELCOME to the world of brass instruments. If you have a student starting brass instruments, congratulations and I

wish your child or teenager great success as music can be a wonderful joy in life. There are some important things however about brass playing and brass instruments that you need to know that will help you to help the student get a proper start.

Brass instruments are beautiful and unique instruments that produce natural acoustic sound. If you have ever listened to a classical orchestra with a full brass section or a jazz musician playing trumpet or trombone, you know that that sound can not be replaced by electronic sounds. It is a natural sound and brass instruments have been around for hundreds of years. That makes them very special.

Trumpets, trombones, baritones, french horns, valve trombones and tubas and other brass instruments all have something in common that is different from other instruments like guitar, piano and drums. The human body produces all the sound on brass instruments. There is no string, sax reed, or drum skin to help produce the sound. This is important to know and it makes them unique as the body is directly connected to the sound that is produced.

Understanding how the sound is produced

The sound is produced by the buzzing of the lips. Studies have shown that over two hundred muscles in the body are used to produce a sound on brass instruments. The horn is just a hollow tube that amplifies the buzz we produce. If you only blow air into the instrument, you will get no sound. Sounds need air and buzzing vibration. A good lip buzz translates into a good brass sound, a bad buzz makes a bad sound, it takes time to develop this.

Think of it like an athlete developing muscle strength and muscle timing to achieve a high level of performance. This is the same for brass players. It takes time so do not expect great sounds at first. Stay encouraging and positive as it takes time.

The starting instrument check

The first thing to start properly is to have a safe instrument to play, it does not need to be expensive, however it must be AIR TIGHT. A bad string on a guitar is quite obvious, however with air leaks on a brass instrument it can be tricky and hard to detect. I talk about this first because many times I have had new students come in for their first lesson and I find air leaks in the horn they are playing.

Not Good . Sometimes they have been playing for weeks and are struggling to produce a good sound. Once the leak is fixed they improve dramatically and get back on track.

Water key corks wear out over time and are usually the cause of most leaks, so check them and replace them as needed. It is an easy inexpensive repair. Valves and bracing can leak but this is less common. Either way have the instrument checked by a teacher, repair man or trained retail clerk. Play it safe to avoid a possible bad start.

NOTE that SCHOOL BANDS that loan instruments to students do their very best to keep the instruments in good condition. However please understand that they are dealing with hundreds of instruments and students and it is very difficult to be perfect. If anything does not seem right please inform the band director right away. The band directors care and want to help the students.

The mouthpiece is important.

The mouthpiece is what touches the face and it must be comfortable and efficient. Brass mouthpieces are available

in many different diameters and cup depths to fit individual needs in comfort and also tone preferences.

You should start the student with something mid size in cup depth and rim diameter and it should also be a very common brand. After developing some players experiment with different sizes, but a foundation needs to be set first.

Common brands that are easy to find in most music stores or online are BACH, FAXX (Note: FAXX are usually less expensive copies of BACH and use the same model numbers), YAMAHA, BLESSING, DENIS WICK, SCHILKE, KING, CONN.

BACH mouthpieces are the most popular and have been around for a long time. Many companies copy them in shape and use the same numbering size system. A lot of school bands use BACH mouthpieces. Starting recommended mid size models in the BACH brand are listed below.

Keep in mind that with BACH the higher the number the smaller the cup diameter. The letter C is the standard cup depth which I recommend for starting. The models listed

below would all be considered SAFE starting mouthpieces and easy to find in most music stores and online.

Some music stores will let you test play a mouthpiece and some will not depending on store policy. However all the mouthpieces listed here are all safe to start off with. You can always experiment later if needed.

NOTE: again, the chart below is for size reference, you do not have to play only BACH mouthpieces, but starting students should use this as a size reference if playing other name brand mouthpieces. Check with a teacher or trained sales clerk for other brand size comparisons.

TRUMPET / BACH 7C and BACH 10.5C

FRENCH HORN / BACH 11

TROMBONE / BACH 12C, BACH 11C, BACH 7C, BACH 6.5AL (tenor shank)

TROMBONE with F attachment / BACH 6.5 AL (with L shank)

BARITONE / BACH 6.5 AL, BACH 4G, BACH 5G

TUBA / BACH 18 (smaller) BACH 7 (larger)
(With a very young tuba player the # 18 may be best for starting, however as they grow the # 7 is usually better. If the # 7 does not feel too big, then start with that.)

The face muscles get accustomed to a mouthpiece over time, so remember the brand and model number of your mouthpiece so if it gets lost you can replace it with the same brand and size. This is important.

How to buy or rent a good instrument at a fair price.

If you are looking to buy or rent an instrument you should be aware of some important things. Most music stores rent instruments and some have rent to own plans. Parents often like this idea as a “ just in case “ the student does not like playing, it can be returned and monthly payments stopped.

However renting over the long term can cost more than buying the instrument in most cases. So if your student is determined to practice and stay with it, then buying is best if you can. Be careful what you buy though as explained.

WHAT IS A GOOD QUALITY INSTRUMENT.

This is important to know as a bad instrument can cause frustration and discouragement. With brass instruments, there are some companies with long histories and proven reputations for quality. I am not saying that all less common brands are not good, however this is an area of great caution. Some super low price instruments on the internet sites may look good in pictures, however they can be cheaply made and hard to play. Not a good deal at all.

A few common trusted companies that have been around for a long time are BACH, KING, CONN, SELMER, YAMAHA, OLDS, BLESSING, GETZEN, HOLTON, KANSTUL, CALICCHIO, (B.A.C. Trombones) (SHIRES trombones). BENGE, REYNOLDS, SCHILKE, JUPITER, are all safe established brands.

Finding a used instrument is often a great deal if you find one in good shape. Often well made old horns of common brands are better constructed. Do not be concerned about scratches, small dents or worn outside lacquer plating on older used horns. Just make sure the valves or slides are

working well. How well it plays and sounds is what matters, not cosmetics.

Professional players are often playing older horns that they have been playing for many years. My King valve trombone was made in 1963, and I plan to keep playing it. One of my students just bought a great old KING trombone made in 1910, and it plays great. Brass does not wear out if it's taken care of.

Try to find a trusted local music store with knowledgeable honest clerks and a good selection. There are many great music stores that have websites with a large selection that can ship something to you if there are not any good music retailers in your area.

If you are buying online or on EBay, make sure it is returnable incase there is any unusual problem. If you can find an experienced professional brass player to do a play test before buying it, that can be a great advantage.

Remember a good brass instrument can last a lifetime.

How to help your school band director

School band directors have an enormous task to teach music to large groups of kids and they deserve much respect. Allowing your child to be exposed to orchestral music is a blessing in this otherwise limited pop culture. There are a few things you can do to really help out.

If you are using an instrument that is being loaned to you by the school, PLEASE take care of it and respect it like it is your own. There are sections in this book that tell you how to clean and protect the instrument. Countless tax dollars are wasted each year because band directors must repair or replace instruments that were needlessly abused.

Sometimes schools ask parents to help with programs like marching bands and concerts, you can always offer to help if needed. It is fun and will be greatly appreciated.

Last but not least, make sure your young student does PRACTICE the school music. When the band sounds good, everyone is happy. Thank you.

Oiling valves and lubricating trombone slides

Valves must be oiled and trombone slides need special lubrication for the efficiency of performing and to protect the instrument from damage. Kids get busy and neglect this most of the time, causing damage to the valves and slides. If you have invested in a \$ 500.00 trumpet and the valve plating gets damaged from lack of oiling, the repair for plating valves can cost more than the trumpet.

I tell my students to oil the valves daily before playing. Make this a part of setting up to play. Also musically if a valve sticks in a performance, it will seem to the audience that the player made a playing mistake when it did not need to happen.

Make sure you buy valve oil from a good music store (not a hardware store) and the student has a teacher or clerk show them how to apply it properly. Sometimes students are told just to pour the oil in the holes of the bottom of the valve casing for simplicity, that is better than nothing, but is not the best professional way. The valves should be partially removed, oiled and reinserted to spread the oil on the valve piston properly.

TROMBONE LUBRICATION

Trombones with slides have two options, slide oil or slide cream with a water spray bottle. Slide oil is fast to apply, but the slide cream and water spray bottle is better and more professional. The trombone slide must move without friction. Any friction or tug when moving the trombone slide can interfere with the flow of the music and the proper buzz of the embouchure.

Special care is needed for trombone slides.

Young and beginning trombone students need to be made aware of how easily trombone slides can get damaged. Extra care must be taken as the slightest dent on the slide will cause it to need a repair. Some dents if bad enough can make a slide need to be replaced. Slide replacement is usually a special order and it is quite expensive. So please teach your child to be extra careful when handling the slide of a trombone.

NOTE There is a slide LOCK to use to keep the slide tube from falling off when not playing the horn, always use this.

How to clean a brass instrument

It is also important to clean the instrument often to keep it hygienic and in good working order. Especially clean the instrument after a cold or flu so the student does not reinfect the virus back to themselves or others.

Dirt inside the instrument can stop the valves and trombone slides from moving easily. The tuning slides can get stuck if not cleaned and lubricated often, causing a trip to the repair shop. Accumulated dirt can also block the air passage if bad enough. So there are many reasons to clean the horn.

First buy a cleaning kit for your particular instrument, it is usually cheaper to buy the cleaning kit with the following items or you can buy the items separately if needed.

Cleaning kits should normally have the following items: valve oil (for trombone: trombone slide oil or slide cream with a water bottle), a mouthpiece brush, tuning slide grease, and a long wire snake brush.

Follow the steps below in order. One set of steps is for valve instruments and one is for trombones. HOWEVER if

any valve or tuning slide, or trombone slide is stuck and will not pull out easily, DO NOT FORCE them. Take the instrument to a proper instrument repair shop to avoid damaging it. Do not try to fix this yourself.

The cleaning steps in order for all valve instruments.

Take out the valves by unscrewing the top of the valve casing and keep them in order so you can put them back in later without mixing them up. - Keep the valve stems dry as they have felts, but clean the valves with a damp soft cloth. - Pull off all tuning slides and disassemble the instrument. - In the bathtub, turn on the water in the bathtub and flush all instrument tubing and inside the tuning slides, use the snake brush with mild soap on it to scrub the inside tubing. Rinse the tubes. - Put the tuning slide grease on the tuning slides and reinsert them. - OIL the valves and reinsert them in proper order. - Dry the instrument with a soft towel so you do not scratch the instrument. - Use the mouthpiece brush to clean the mouthpiece with soap, and then rinse and dry it. DONE.

Cleaning slide trombones

Take off the slide sleeve from the slide and under the bathtub flush water through all slide tubing, - use the snake brush with mild soap to clean all inside slide tubing.- rinse under tap again to get the soap out of the tubes - with a paper towel or soft cloth make sure the old slide cream or oil is wiped off the silver nickel plated slides. - Rinse out the slides again under the tap water and dry them with a soft cloth - apply fresh slide cream or slide oil and reassemble the slide - On the bell section, take off the main tuning slide at the back of the bell and clean the inside tubing with tap water, mild soap and snake brush, then rinse it under the tap water. - Rinse out the bell under the tap water with mild soap and then rinse. Put the sneak brush through all bell tubing and rinse. Dry all outside tubing with a soft towel so you do not scratch the instrument. - Put the tuning slide grease on the tuning slide and reinsert it carefully back on the bell section. - now both sections slide and bell are clean. - Use the mouthpiece brush to scrub out the mouthpiece with mild soap , rinse and dry it. DONE.

What to do If the mouthpiece ever gets stuck in the horn and how to prevent this from happening.

Often a horn gets dropped or the student has pushed the mouthpiece too hard into the lead pipe and the mouthpiece gets stuck in the instrument. If this happens...DO NOT try to fix this yourself as you will do more damage than good. If the horn belongs to the school just tell the band director as there is a special tool they usually have to pull it out without damaging the horn. Most good music stores will pull it out at no charge as well for good customer service.

Teach the beginning student to put the mouthpiece in CAREFULLY and do not force it as it will stay in place without force. There is a very smooth taper in the lead pipe to let you just gently insert the mouthpiece and it will stay in place.

Instrument case maintenance

The inside case should be clean at all times. No cat or dog hairs, food, books, pencils and pens or anything that can damage the horn. Make sure the mouthpiece is in the proper spot and not loosely banging around in the case. Some kids like to put music books in the case and then force the case closed, this can damage the instrument,

especially trumpet valves. Also check the case locks. I have seen many horns damaged because the lock brace was loose and the horn dropped out and hit the floor. Be careful and you will avoid expensive repairs.

For extra safety use an instrument stand

All brass instruments have an available floor stand and I recommend using them. It is much safer than laying them on the floor or a chair. Using stands can prevent a horn from being knocked over and can avoid a big repair issue. Stands are not expensive and I always say “stands are much cheaper than a trip to the repair shop”.

Why a regular practice schedule is needed for brass instruments.

As previously explained, brass instruments require physical development of over two hundred muscles to produce a tone, much like an athlete. All instruments require practice to get good, however because brass instruments need muscles to produce the tone, the muscles need regular exercise by steady routine practice.

Hit and miss practice and always skipping several days between practice will not work out for success on brass instruments. Students who do this will never sound very good and they usually quit at some point in frustration. Ironically, the reason they quit is because they do not sound good. So a good routine is of most importance.

A good private teacher is a good idea

If your student is in the school band program that is a great thing. It gives them an instant opportunity to perform with other kids and share musical experiences. Private lessons do give an extra advantage though if possible.

Please understand that band directors always have a very large class of kids to teach. They can not always give as much attention to one student as they would like to. It's very difficult. Most schools are underfunded and teachers are overloaded. To have private lessons if possible is a big help to the student and the band directors.

**PRIVATE TEACHERS SHOULD HAVE REAL
PROFESSIONAL PLAYING EXPERIENCE.**

My college had a great well known music program, however I feel my true deeper knowledge in music and brass playing has come from my many years of professional performing experience. Professional players who are also teachers have real life experience to be shared and that is a big advantage to young students.

So my point is this. If you can afford private lessons for your kids please do so, it will really help them and help keep good grades in band class as a side bonus for your investment. I suggest looking at a prospective private teacher's resume to see if they have both lots of teaching experience and professional playing experience as well.

NOTE that online SKYPE or ZOOM lessons are available from most teachers now because of Covid19. I do this and it works very well. The other advantage is parents do not need to take time to drive to a music store and wait around adding one more thing to do on a busy day.

A proper warm up is very important

It is VERY IMPORTANT that the muscles are not forced or strained at any time. Like an athlete getting ready to play a sport, they always do a warm up of some sort before the

game or event. With brass players it is the same thing. All my lessons start off with having the student warm up first before any lesson material is played.

Daily playing warm ups should start with mouthpiece buzzing for a few moments, then EASY NOT LOUD mid range and lowerer range long tones. Remember that high notes should NOT be played until a proper easy warm up has been done. Very important.

Most school band directors do have the kids do some basic warm ups or scale exercise before playing the school band music. It is the normal thing.

The best starting exercises to develop a good sound is LONG TONE studies.

I have learned from many years of experience that LONG TONE STUDIES are the key to developing and maintaining muscle strength. The reason is simple, the sustained long tones work the muscles more than single short notes and that makes them stronger.

This is something I teach my students to do as part of a daily routine and also I do this myself. ALL professional brass players I know have a daily routine of long tones to keep the muscles in good shape. This improves tone, range and endurance.

A starting student will be learning notes, valve and slide positions and playing simple songs to start with in a school band or with a private teacher. That is very important however LONG TONE DRILLS of slow whole notes should be included. It really helps.

The importance of proper listening for musical inspiration.

Listening to great brass players and great music is of UTMOST IMPORTANCE. When you play any instrument you need to listen to professional musicians who play that instrument so you know the level of quality that is possible on that instrument. If you do not listen to the masterful players, it is like a ship setting sail without knowing where it is going.

I was inspired at age eleven to play jazz because I listened to a recording of jazz trumpeter CHET BAKER. I

was always listening to trumpet players, trombone and sax players, jazz and classical orchestras. I was INSPIRED to practice. Later in life I was able to perform with CHET BAKER and my life dream had come true. I practiced by inspiration, not obligation. A big difference.

Now with YouTube it is so easy to listen and watch great music. Part of my weekly lesson assignments to my students involves having them listen to inspiring You Tube videos. You listen for inspiration, and practice to become great.

Epilog FINAL THOUGHTS

Thanks for reading this information and I hope it is helpful to you to get a good start with playing brass instruments. REMEMBER if you are in doubt of any other details always ask your band director, professional teacher, or trained retail clerk.

Playing music is a great gift we have in life. It allows for creative healthy interaction with other musicians and listeners. Live music happens in the moment, and this makes it special and unique in the world of art.

Remember again that musical skills develop one step at a time and as long as someone is doing routine practice it will get better and better. I tell all my students that “ the better you sound, the more you will enjoy it, so keep working and practicing. “

Most of all enjoy the music, that is what it is really all about.

My very best regards, Barry Mosley.

Barry Mosley

Jazz artist / brass instrument teacher / jazz studies

All info at www.barrymosley.com

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