Four Weeks to Better Playing

Part of the

Comeback Trumpeters Guide
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Introduction

Four Weeks to Better Playing

Based on a Rafael Mendez idea (in his book Prelude to Brass Playing) we have designed a 4 week system for getting rid of some of the problems plaguing a lot of comeback as well as amateur players.

"The NATURAL method for playing a brass instrument boils down to the following points:

(a) FLEXIBILITY OF THE LIPS
(b) STRENGTH OF FACIAL MUSCLES ABOUT THE MOUTH, CHIN AND JAWS
(c) EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TONGUE
(d) POWER FROM THE DIAPHRAGM.

There are no tricks to this method, nor are there any short cuts. The rules are dictated by common sense; they follow only the principles governing sound production. Lip vibration produce sound; the lips, then must be brought to a soft, pliant, vibrant state whereby the may be easily controlled and regulated. Control comes with development, training, and co-ordination of the many sets of muscles going to make up embouchure. The tongue, one minute flicking lightly, the next caressing gently, and so on, must be trained for accuracy, developed for strength. The power for brilliant tone, for endurance, must come form the only source – the "powerhouse."

And so, we arrive at the approach to embouchure training. The whole method of natural playing depends upon your attitude, your work, this next few weeks. This is where you “make or brake.”

You are going to learn how to produce a sound – a good sound! Once that is accomplished, you are on your way; you have the foundation upon which to build successful brass playing. You have heard the expression "Well begun is half done." Keep that in mind!

(Embouchure training, page 25, Prelude to Brass Playing)
First week

Preparing the lips
Knowing that sound on your instrument is dependent on lip vibrations, that lips must be loosened up before they will vibrate naturally, that Nature must take its own course in this training, will you spend one week – a full seven days – on this all-important phase? There will be no need for your instrument during this period of training, so put it away and concentrate on the job at hand.
(Embouchure training, page 27, Prelude to Brass Playing)

Here is a series of exercises for a whole week. Try to do them several times during each day. If you can, do them 3 times, one in the morning, one during the day and one in the evening.

Why was Rafael Mendez such a great player? He had talent, but he also practiced all day. In small portions - 20 minutes practice, then he rested 20 minutes or more, then a new practice session, etc.

PRACTICE - REST - PRACTICE - REST - PRACTICE – REST
Day 1, Week One
"Brass Playing is no harder than Deep Breathing" (Claude Gordon)

Breathing
We start this first session with some breathing exercises. The motto (see above) is very important. We will be working on making an effective embouchure and on buzzing the lips, but without a lot of air to feed the lips there will be troubles. The approach should be SONG and WIND.

NOTE: When doing these breathing exercises (rhythmic and "melodic") try to make a sort of "silent whistle sound", where you can hear the pitch. Form the mouth into an almost whistling position.

Empty and Fill

Empty completely. Fill with a yawn. Repeat. Try to breathe in and out with a big OOO-feeling. Think "OOOH" for intake, and "HOOO" on out.

Rhythmic Breathing
- Exercise 1

"Melodic" Breathing
- Exercise 1

Setting the Embouchure

The M setting:
- Relax jaw and open throat.
- Teeth 1/2 inch apart. Jaw forward.
- Pull the mouth corners in toward your lips. Say M.
- Roll both lips in slightly.

The First Buzz

One, two, three, "UP" - BUZZ
- Exercise 1

Massaging and relaxing the lip and face muscles

The Bobby Shew “flutter”
Blow air through the lips and make the lips flutter. Try to imitate the sound of a horse. If you keep the teeth together, you will get a deeper sound.
Day 2, Week One

Breathing
We continue the second session by repeating one breathing exercises and adding a new one ("melodic").

Rhythmic Breathing
- Exercise 1

"Melodic" Breathing
- Exercise 2

Preparing the lip and face muscles

Do the Bobby Shew "flutter"
Blow air through the lips and make the lips flutter. Try to imitate the sound of a horse. If you keep the teeth together, you will get a deeper sound. Do this exercise between the buzzing exercises (see below), to loosen up the lips.

Buzzing

One, two, three, "UP" - BUZZ
- Exercise 1
- Exercise 2
- Exercise 3
Day 3, Week One

Breathing
We continue the third day by doing the breathing exercises first.

Rhythmic Breathing
- Exercise 1

"Melodic" Breathing
- Exercise 3

Softening the lips

Do the Bobby Shew "flutter"
Blow air through the lips and make the lips flutter. Try to imitate the sound of a horse. If you keep the teeth together, you will get a deeper sound.
Do this exercise between the buzzing exercises (see below), to loosen up the lips.

Buzzing

One, two, three, "UP" - BUZZ
- Exercise 2
- Exercise 3
- Exercise 4
Day 4, Week One

Breathing
We continue the fourth day by doing the breathing exercises first.

Rhythmic Breathing
• Exercise 1

"Melodic" Breathing
• Exercise 4

Softening the lips
Do the Bobby Shew "flutter".

Buzzing

One, two, three, "UP" - BUZZ
• Exercise 2
• Exercise 4
• Exercise 5
Day 5, Week One

Breathing
We continue the fifth day by doing the breathing exercises first.

Rhythmic Breathing
- Exercise 1

"Melodic" Breathing
- Exercise 5

Softening the lips
Do the Bobby Shew "flutter".

Buzzing
*One, two, three, "UP" - BUZZ*

Buzzing has to do with finesse, not brute force. Roy Poper, a long time student of James Stamp, said in his book "Roy Poper's Guide to the Brasswind Methods of James Stamp" (page 8):

> For years I tried to use too much force of wind to accomplish this exercise. When I relaxed and concentrated on the correct form, i.e.: corners together, only enough lip tension to start the first note, steady feeling of crescendo on that "Too" etc., steady progress on range began to occur.

So let us review exercise 1. Try to make it very soft and if it is easier for you, take the pitch down (maybe to a low G)
Then try Exercise 4 with crescendo, decrescendo to test if the buzz is loose.
Use the "flutter" between each exercise.
- Exercise 1
- Exercise 4
- Exercise 6
Day 6, Week One

Breathing
We continue the sixth day also by doing the breathing exercises first. Work on an open relaxed throat. Use OOOH when breathing in and reverse that to HOOO when breathing out.

Rhythmic Breathing
- Exercise 1

"Melodic" Breathing
- Exercise 6

Softening the lips
Do the Bobby Shew "flutter".

Buzzing

One, two, three, "UP" - BUZZ

First review exercise 1, then exercise 4 with crescendo, decrescendo to test if the buzz is loose. Use the "flutter" between each exercise.
- Exercise 1
- Exercise 4
- Exercise 7
Day 7, Week One

Breathing
We finish the first week by doing the breathing exercises first.

Rhythmic Breathing
We do a second exercise here, using a Vincent Chicowicz patter.
• Exercise 2

"Melodic" Breathing
Here we do the Andante from the Haydn Trumpet Concerto.
• Exercise 7

Softening the lips
Do the Bobby Shew "flutter".

Buzzing

*One, two, three, "UP" - BUZZ*

Buzzing has to do with finesse, not brute force.

For years I tried to use too much force of wind to accomplish this exercise. When I relaxed and concentrated on the correct form, i.e.: corners together, only enough lip tension to start the first note, steady feeling of crescendo on that "Too" etc., steady progress on range began to occur.

So let us review exercise 1. Try to make it very soft and if it is easier for you, take the pitch down (maybe to a low G)

Then try Exercise 4 with crescendo, decrescendo to test if the buzz is loose. Use the "flutter" between each exercise.

Then finally go to exercise 8, a James Stamp variation with a range (including pedal register) of two octaves.

• Exercise 1
• Exercise 4
• Exercise 8
Second week

Mouthpiece practice

And now, position of the mouthpiece on the lips. Slow! Caution! Red light ahead! This is the step that can spell success or failure. Take no chances!

First in this step is finding the vibrating center of the lips. Vibrating center! …

You should have no trouble locating the vibrating center of your lips. Provided you have worked conscientiously this past week on the loosening process, a glance in the mirror as you buzz the lips will show the natural vibrating center. Wherever that happens to be, there is the place for your mouthpiece!

(Embouchure training, page 34, Prelude to Brass Playing)
Day 1, Week Two

Breathing

We start second week’s session with a breathing exercises. (Melodic breathing is now part of the finger exercise below)

- Rhythmic breathing

Lips

We also continue second week with a lip buzzing exercise.

- Buzzing (part 8 from Week 1)
- Do the “Shew flutter” exercise

Mouthpiece

Then we start off with buzzing the mouthpiece. Remember what Mendez says: “Slow! Caution!.. First in this step is finding the vibrating center of the lips.”

- Lip to mouthpiece buzz
- Simple pattern
- Siren

Fingers & B.E.R.P

We also start working on developing finger dexterity. If you have a BERP use it, if not, tape the mouthpiece outside on the leadpipe. This is important to make this exercise close to a playing situation.

- Melodic with valves + breathing + BERP
Third week

The Instrument
You are about to insert your mouthpiece into your instrument and produce your first notes – as opposed to the sounds you have been making up to this point. Congratulations! But, first what do you know about this instrument of yours? While even a fine pianist needs know little or nothing about the mechanism, maintenance, tuning, etc. of the piano, it is important for you as a brass player to know your instrument, know how to care for and keep up the working parts, know how to tune it, and know the principles governing its operation.
(Embouchure training, page 40, Prelude to Brass Playing)

Instrument Practice
You will do well to regard your instrument as an amplifier – a loudspeaker that amplifies the sounds made by your lips. You are aware by now that there is nothing magical about valves or trombone slide. They merely make more notes available to you. It is for you to make your lips vibrate at the frequency for the notes desired. In other words, you depend on the lips. The action of moving the valves or slide may be reckoned as only about two percent in importance.
(Embouchure training, page 55, Prelude to Brass Playing)
Day 1, Week Three

Breathing
We start the third week by doing the breathing exercises first.

Rhythmic Breathing
- Exercise 1

Softening the lips
Do the Bobby Shew "flutter".

Buzzing on the lip

One, two, three, "UP" - BUZZ

Let us first review exercise 1. Try to make it very soft and if it is easier for you, take the pitch down (maybe to a low G)

Then try Exercise 4 with crescendo, decrescendo to test if the buzz is loose. Use the "flutter" between each exercise.

Then finally go to exercise 8, a James Stamp variation with a range (including pedal register) of two octaves.

- Exercise 1
- Exercise 4
- Exercise 8

Buzzing on the mouthpiece.

Do exercises 8 on the mouthpiece.
- Exercise 8

Playing on the instrument

Approaching the pedal register.
- Pedal Exercise 1
Fourth week

Practice Habits
Practice every day! There is no one thing better for morale, that will help you «stay with» study, more than the steady advancement that follows from everyday blowing. On the other hand, there is nothing more demoralizing than the sad result of hit-and-miss practice. The lips stiffen and refuse to vibrate, reactions in general slow up, and it takes days of hard work to get back to where you were.

Form the habit of routine. If possible, start practice at the same time each day. Keep at it until music time becomes as regular a part of the day as breakfast, lunch and supper. The beginner would be wise to have three or four sessions of fifteen minutes, rather than one long practice (which would be too much for an undeveloped embouchure)

(Embouchure training, page 58, Prelude to Brass Playing)
Exercises

We have placed all the exercises here in the order they appear in the guide.

First the breathing exercises,

then the lip buzzing,

then the mouthpiece buzzing etc.
Use a metronome. Start with MM=120.

Take in air on count 3 and 4 (after breathing mark). Blow out air and try to sing the scale pattern in your mind at the same time. Try to take in more air for each new pattern.

When you are able to do the whole scale easy, take down the metronome to MM=116. Then MM=108, etc.
Use a metronome. Start with MM=200.

Take in air on count 3 and 4. Blow out air and try to sing the pattern in your mind at the same time. Try to take in more air for each new pattern. When you are able to do the whole exercise easy, take down the metronome, two notch at a time.
"Melodic" breathing - part 1

J.B. Arban

Use a metronome. Set it to MM=120.

Take in air and "breathe" (and sing silent inside) the first two bars with legato. Then, the next two bars, etc. Take in air as quick and silent as possible.

Repeat this exercise but this time use a gentle "Ta" attack with the tip of the tongue.

Keep the air going all the time like when doing it the first time legato. The tongue must not stop the air, just flip it lightly.

When you can do this easy try to "breathe" 4 bars. First legato, then with "Ta".
"Melodic" breathing - part 2

G. Concone

Use a metronome. Set it to MM=100.

Try to "breathe" each phrase as indicated. Take in more air before bar 4 and before the last four bars, since there is no quarter rest there.

To help you feel the phrasing more natural (crescendo, decrescendo, etc.) try to sing the whole etude.
Use a metronome. Set it to MM=60.

This is the start of the Charlier etude No. 1.

"Breath" 2 bars, then take a quick breath for the next two bars.

Repeat, but this time set the metronome to MM=108. Try to breath all 8 bars in one breath.
"Melodic" breathing - part 4

This is the melody Amazing Graze.

"Breath" to breathing mark, then take a quick breath and continue.

Use a slow tempo - find the tempo by singing the melody first.

Try to use the same "singing feel" when practicing it as a breathing exercise.
This is the melody Londonderry Air.

Find the tempo by singing the melody first.

Try to use the same "feel" when practicing it as a breathing exercise.
This is part of an etude by Baganz.

Do 2 bar at a time first, then 4, and finally 8 bars.

Try to hear the pitch in the breath sound.
"Melodic" Breathing - part 7

This is the Andante from J. Haydn Trumpet Concerto.

Find the tempo by singing the melody first. Try to use the same "feel" when practicing it as a breathing exercise.

Since this is only the start, get the rest of the this concert. There are several editions.

If you have a recording of this concerto play it, and practice the breathing exercise while listening to it.
Lip buzzing - part 1

Use a metronome. Set it to MM=60.

Take in air on count 4 (after breathing mark) and close lip by saying "UP". Then try to make a buzz with the lips by using the sound POO. Keep the tongue down and use the syllable P. If you can hit a low C it is good, but the pitch is not important here. It is more important to aim for a relaxed buzz. Be very exact with the rhythm.

Repeat 5 times, then take a rest.
Lip buzzing - part 2

Use a metronome. Set it to MM=60.

Take in air on count 4 (after breathing mark) and close lip by saying “UP”. Then try to make a buzz with the lips by using the sound POO. Keep the tongue down and use the syllable P. Try to hit a low C. The pitch is not important here. It is more important to aim for a relaxed buzz. Be very exact with the rhythm. On the repeat, use TOO attack, with tip of tongue.

Repeat 3 times more with TOO - attack.
Use a metronome. Set it to MM=60.

Take in air on count 4 (after breathing mark) and close lip by saying "UP". Buzz a C for 2 counts, then try to make a glissando up to a D by increasing the airspeed, hold the D for 2 counts, then slide down to the C.

Next bar: Hold C, then slide down to B, then back and hold C for 4 counts. If this is hard at first, take a rest. Then repeat the exercise (5 times in all).
Lip buzzing - part 4

Use a metronome. Set it to MM=120.

Take in air on count 4 (after breathing mark) and close lip with "UP". Start the buzz with a POO attack as soft as possible and try crescendo - decrescendo. Maintain the same pitch. If you can do this you have a relaxed buzz.

This exercise can be used to test that your buzz is correct, that is: **relaxed**
Use a metronome. Set it to MM=60.

Take in air on count 4 (after breathing mark) and close lip with "UP".

Start the buzz with a POO attack.

First time "slide" up to the next note. Second time go from center of each pitch.
Use a metronome. Set it to MM=60.

1. Do this as a breath exercise.

2. Do it as a buzz exercise with glissando. Slide from note to note. Take in air on count 4 (after breathing mark) and close lip with "UP". Start the buzz with a POO attack. Do it very soft. Try to use the same feeling as when doing it as a breathing exercise (1).

3. Do it with legato and centered tones.

Do it with TOO attack and without legato.
Use a metronome. Set it to MM=60.

1. Do this as a breath exercise. Try to hear the pitches in the breath sound.
2. Do it as a buzz exercise with glissando. Slide from note to note.
3. Do it with legato and centered tones.

The note in last bar is a so-called pedal note on the trumpet. You should use the lower lip more active as you descend. By buzzing these low notes you will strengthen the lower lip.
This is a variation on a famous James Stamp exercise.

Use a metronome. Set it to MM=60.

1. Do this as a breath exercise. HOOOO feeling.

2. Do it as a buzz exercise with glissando. Slide from note to note. Take in air on count 4 (after breathing mark) and close lip with “UP”. Start the buzz with a POO attack. Do it very soft. Try to use the same feeling as when doing it as a breathing exercise (1).

3. Do it with legato and centered tones.

4. Do it with TOO attack and without legato.

Note: If you can't do the whole exercise at first, work on it! The last bar is excellent for developing lower lip strength.