

WSU Low Brass Class 2020
1st Lesson Tutorial
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Topics to cover in the first lesson:

- How to make an embouchure.
- Breathing, posture, and counting
- How to assemble and hold the trombone
- How changing notes works (slide vs. partials)
- Maybe: The tongue and reading music (depends on how quickly the student picks things up).

I usually “build” the experience of playing the instrument from the ground up. I do a lot of demonstrations, and ask them to mimic what I’m doing. Often, mimicry is easier than explaining (i.e. “make this face,” “sit like this,” “can you make this sound?” “copy my air”).

Here is my basic order of operations:

Part One: What To Do With Your Body

- 1) Explain and show how to sit.
- 2) Explain and show how to make an embouchure (review “Trombone Setup Series #1: Making an Embouchure” from James Markey Trombone on Youtube). A tried and true method is to say a word that ends in “m” and freeze the embouchure. This will put the lips in a partially rolled in position with structure from the corners and chin but without clamping them together too much. Have them practice this and ask them to remember how to do it for later.
- 3) Now discuss counting and moving air in time (“1-2-3-Breathe- Let it out”). Emphasize how important counting is. Watch for puffed cheeks (remember: they won’t puff if you keep them in before you start moving air out). Have them practice this with you.
- 4) Now instead of having them just blow all the air out on beat 1, ask them to keep the air going for 3 beats.

Part Two: Buzzing

- 1) Have them form an embouchure so they remember what that feels like.
- 2) Have them put the mouthpiece in position and blow air through their embouchure in time as established above (1-2-3-Breathe- Buzz).
- 3) You may have to talk about breathing through the corners of the mouth. Some people mimic this easily. With others, it’s a battle. Breathing through the nose at this stage is okay too.
- 4) I usually add tonguing to the equation at this point. Really emphasize how counting will organize all these actions in time, and allow your body to coordinate itself.
- 5) If no buzz is happening, remember that the basic parameters at play are air speed and amount of structure provided by the muscles of the embouchure. Some things to try to

find a balance (and you'll probably need to adjust both air and embouchure): relax the embouchure or make the "m" face more (embouchure flex), blow less/slower or more/faster air (air support from the torso), blow colder/warmer air (air speed combined with aperture size). Figuring out this balance between air and structure is the real art of brass playing and teaching.

- 6) Work on getting a consistent buzz. Also see if they can make it go up or down in pitch. A higher buzz is going to give them a better start than a really low one (aim for F on the bass clef staff or so). Ask them to remember how to do this.

Part Three: Add the Trombone

- 1) Show them how to assemble and hold the instrument.
- 2) Make sure they are sitting with good posture and have them bring the instrument to them, rather than leaning into it.
- 3) At some point, warn them about pinching their hand in the slide.
- 4) Once the trombone is assembled and in their hand ask them to buzz one last time, then have them put the mouthpiece in the horn and make a sound. COUNT IN!!
- 5) Try to get them to feel F on the staff as their "home" note. Low Bb is easier, but starting with the F will help ensure that their embouchure is working correctly. Many students who establish low Bb as their "home" note struggle with range later on.
- 6) With your guidance, have them experiment with changing the slide and partials. Do lots of demonstrations.

Part Four: Read Music

A detailed discussion of this is probably beyond the scope of this tutorial. Often I will leave this until the second lesson (it really depends on the student). Correlate the sounds they have discovered with the printed page. I have had good success by explaining that the shape of the note tells you how long to play it, and its location on the "ladder" (staff) tells you how high or low it is (pitch, letter name, etc). There is a lot to explain here. Hopefully they already learned a lot of it in general music, recorder, and (if you're lucky) piano lessons. I often watch their eyes while they are playing to see if they are actually looking at the music or trying to do it all from memory. The ones who just do it all from memory or by ear almost always struggle. Playing from memory and by ear are great skills, but they aren't substitutes for reading.

An Important Caveat

This guide is only a starting point. I never do it the same way twice because every student is a new riddle. You will develop your own routine (performance?) over time as you discover what works for you and your own unique style of communication. I'd say the single most important thing to remember is to treat the children with respect, and to take the things they say seriously. What they are feeling (intellectually, emotionally, and physically) is of crucial importance to establishing how they approach the instrument. Try not to interrupt or command. Respect them and they will respect you. Be a partner in learning rather than a superior.