

Virtual Trombone Workshop – July 17, 2020

The First Lesson for New Trombonists

Jeff Dunn

Tips for an efficient and effective first lesson:

- **Goals for the First Lesson:**
 - Safely assemble and disassemble the instrument.
 - Sit with proper posture and hand position.
 - Produce a characteristic sound.
 - Create a practice plan to prepare for the second lesson.

- **During the First Lesson:**
 - Keep instruction succinct, and make it active!
 - Refrain from long explanations, philosophical parts of playing
 - Make the student do everything as if they were alone, with your guidance.
 - The student should handle the case and instrument themselves, and be responsible for assembly. You are there to guide.
 - The student will likely have to practice alone for a week afterwards; prepare with this in mind!
 - By the end of this lesson, the student should be have a routine for getting themselves prepared for practice, and doing so.
 - Be sure to explain what practicing is, show how to practice, and set your expectations for how long.
 - A practice log can be beneficial for some students and families.

- **Posture, Breathing and Counting:**
 - Begin here, before setting up the instrument.
 - Keep posture explanations simple, and model for the student.
 - Sit on the edge of the chair, feet flat on the floor.
 - Head over your shoulders, which is over your waist.
 - Don't invite any excess motion into the breath.
 - The breath does not have to be audible.
 - Some like to use words to help shape the mouth: Oh, How, etc.
 - Use the student's method book for rhythmic examples.
 - Some have rhythm appendices in the back of the book.
 - Can start with counting, and later move into saying "Tah."
 - Use terminology from school, when possible!
 - Especially with counting systems, this can be very helpful.
 - Being able to use systems the student is familiar and comfortable with will keep lessons efficient.
 - Lots of repetition and review!
 - Don't be afraid to bounce back and forth between topics.

- **Handling the Instrument**

- Address every detail of setting up the instrument.
 - How to properly carry, and handle the case.
 - How to set the case down to open it. (The brand label often faces up!)
 - Which part do you pick up first? Which hand do you use to pick up the part of the instrument?
- Holding the instrument
 - The teacher can put the instrument into the correct position the first time.
 - Left hand out for a handshake (thumb up), and place the crossbar in the right place.
 - Then show how to wrap the fingers around properly.
 - Do not touch the student, unless absolutely necessary, and ask permission first.
- Slide Technique
 - Using the “Spock” technique helps to incorporate wrist motion to maximize efficiency:
 1. Two fingers on top of bottom slide tube
 2. Two fingers beneath bottom slide tube
 3. Thumb behind crossbar
 4. All using the pads of the fingers to hold the slide
- Practice disassembly too.
 - If lesson time is very short (under 25 minutes or so), there may not be time for repetition of this.
 - In that case, be methodical at the end of the lesson, in an effort to create good habits.
- Those who prefer to start with buzzing should do so before the instrument is set up.

- **Making the First Sound**

- Sigh through the instrument to reinforce the relaxed exhale: no excess tension!
 - This can be done through the mouthpiece first, then the horn.
 - All leading towards making a sound.
- Provide a model for sound, as well as a pitch reference.
 - Audiation is important; encourage the student to connect the sound in the mind to what comes out the bell. Connecting with the imagination is more important than any attention to the lips or muscles.
- “Mmm” Embouchure
 - Very natural position
 - Chin flat, set corners
 - No need to labor discussion of muscles
 - We don’t want to let the student become tense!
- Low Bb and F are great first notes.
 - If either of these notes come out, let it be, and work with it. Either one can be successful.
 - If notes are not centered, or the student is stuck on a partial much higher, find ways to bring them to the 2nd or 3rd partial.

- I require all of my students to have a notebook or binder where we write down information and assignments.
 - A handout with general information can be helpful too, but this can be limiting when additional information is needed.
 - A discussion about practicing is needed before the end of the first lesson.
 - Define what practicing is, and HOW to do it.
 - Set clear expectations for practicing at home. Communicate this with parents/guardians as well.
 - Everything from the first lesson needs to be reviewed next time!
 - This includes all details of handling the instrument and case, posture, and counting.
- **Tonguing and Style**
 - As noted before, don't labor introducing the tongue.
 - Tah (Dah) is sufficient!
 - The crucial part is to make sure the air is constant, the tongue retracts quickly, and the tip touches the back of the top teeth.
 - Insist on tenuto style at first.
 - Notes "that touch." Don't accept choppy playing.
 - Much easier to add space later!
 - This sets the student up to be able to perform legato in the coming months.
 - Check out my legato article at www.tromboneguide.com.
 - A good first exercise is 4 tenuto Fs.
 - Students should work to have the tongue retract quickly and not impede the air.
 - Try this with other notes as well.
 - Then introduce the slide.
 - Add E, Eb, D, C, etc.
 - Start with small distances, then increase. But still insist on connected notes!
 - If the student has difficulty performing these exercises, try:
 - Wind Patterning
 - Blow air against your hand, and tongue the rhythm
 - Feel the student's air, and have them feel yours. Do they feel the difference?
 - Paper on Wall
 - Blow air to keep a paper against the wall.
 - Play the exercise, and then tongue the rhythm while keeping the paper on the wall. Return to the music and evaluate any change.
- **Equipment**
 - Smaller equipment is better for young students starting out, if possible.
 - Yamaha YSL-354, or comparable size is ideal. (.500" bore)
 - Mouthpiece: Bach 6.5AL (Yamaha 48) is a good size, or smaller for very young students. A Bach 5G is too large to start on for young students.
 - Upgrade when the student is ready.

- For those who want a large bore horn (with F-attachment), students are often ready in about 7th or 8th grade.
 - This can be a big change, and I often encourage students to start with a 6.5 mouthpiece for a bit to smooth over the transition.
 - If the student's school does not have instruments to provide, this can come down to the family's financial investment.
 - The reality is that equipment makes a difference in a student's experience.
 - Students and families may be inclined to purchase very cheap instruments, but they will often break, have strange intonation tendencies, and impede progress.
 - Your relationship, as the teacher, is important. Build trust with your families, and guide them to the best decision for their student and situation.
 - "Don't buy an instrument at the same store you can buy groceries and tires." – Band Director, Tomball ISD
- **Literature for Young Students**
 - Technical Studies
 - 50 Recreational Studies by Sigmund Hering
 - 32 Etudes for Trombone by Sigmund Hering
 - First Book of Practical Studies for Trombone by Gerald Bordner
 - Second Book of Practical Studies for Trombone by Gerald Bordner
 - Legato Studies
 - Introductory Melodious Etudes by Ferdinand Sieber, arr. Alan Raph
 - 55 Phrasing Studies by Jaroslav Cimerá
 - Method Books
 - The Intermediate Trombonist: Building Blocks for Tone and Technique by Brad Edwards

View the presentation online: <https://prezi.com/view/N5k2rVKcF1yCsU32rGcY/>

For more information, contact:

Jeff Dunn, trombone

Email: JeffRDunn@gmail.com

Web: www.jeffdunntrombone.com