

Warming Up

One of the most important events in the day of a brass player is the warm-up period. A track man would never think of changing into his track suit and immediately running the hundred yard dash. No more should a young brass player pick up his/her horn and begin to play vigorously in the extreme ranges of the instrument.

A brass player is, in essence, no different from a track man when it comes to warming up the muscles in preparation for action. As an instrumental teacher I need to convince my students that an adequate warm-up is essential.

Particularly during marching season we should require players to warm up properly before going outside to play and march vigorously.

Important Muscles

Four basic sets of muscles are used in brass playing, and all must be limbered up. They are as follows:

The embouchure muscles used in producing lip vibration.

The diaphragm and chest muscles used in breathing properly.

The tongue for its function in articulation.

The finger and arm muscles in controlling valve and slide action.

All of the muscles must be warmed up in proper relation to each other. Often players think that they have an adequate routine, but a close examination by the teacher will reveal that one or more of the basic principles has been slighted. It is my aim to sell the student on the idea that there is no secret method or short cut to success. He/she must be made to realize that careful planning of practice routines is the only way to establish the fundamentals of good playing.

Each player should have a long-range goal toward which they are working. He/she must be convinced that day-to-day and week-to-week accomplishments are the only foundation for achieving this goal. Steady progress in the development of the basic tools should follow from day-to-day. You must be aware of your playing and quick to encourage yourself on the little accomplishments you make.

With regard to specific warm-up, I feel that there is no set way in which to start. However, it is important to begin in the easy range of the instrument and mix the various techniques; that is, long tones, slurs, tonguing, chords and scales. Basically, warm-up is the process of limbering the muscles by slow degrees so that finally they are ready for fast action. Gradually the range should be increased until the entire playing range of each individual has been covered. An adequate warm-up could consume minutes or even an hour.

It is of utmost importance that the player keep in mind one essential fact: *If the muscle tissue is bruised or tired before or after the warm-up has been completed, check the content and the routine very carefully.* Although all warm-ups should contain the same type of exercises, the amount of time spent on each may differ with each individual.

Warm-Up Procedure

A warm-up can include the following:

1. Long tones to develop facial muscles and diaphragmatic control.
2. Slurs to develop lip flexibility and general wind control.
3. All types of tonguing and attack to aid the tongue in developing a muscular or kinesthetic memory. This can come about only by practicing all types of articulation and thinking seriously as the process continues.
4. Chords and scales necessary to coordinate the mind and the fingers.

It is best to start softly so as to insure flexibility and not to bruise the lip. Before the warm-up ends, all levels of dynamics should have been covered. Since most students spend only ½ to 1 hour a week under my supervision, it is necessary for you to analyze and to think of the obstacles which confront you. The more intelligently you are able to analyze your problems, the more quickly you will be able to progress.

Listed here are some of the points which may help you to practice more effectively:

1. Facial muscles have control over lip vibration.
2. Excessive tiring where the mouthpiece makes contact with the lips is a result of too much pressure against the lips.
3. Since the upper lip is the primary vibrator, it cannot also serve as the main support for the mouthpiece. A careful examination of the lower lip reveals a "meaty" tissue. It, therefore, is better able to carry what little pressure is to be used against the lips.
4. Think of the mouthpiece cup as the receptacle of lip vibration. Try to eliminate the "death grip" for the higher range. Let the breath and the tongue level do the work.
5. The volume of breath used will determine the dynamic level.

6. Think of blowing *through* the instrument rather than into it or at it.
7. The diaphragmatic action is the same whether playing a long tone or tonguing a passage of 16th notes.
8. To maintain a steady tone with full resonant quality, one should feel as though they are playing a slight crescendo. In other words, the breath is continually moving throughout the duration of the sound.
9. Think of the tongue as the starter of tones only.
10. The player must be ready with the right articulation at the right time. This is not a matter of chance but the result of carefully planned practice periods which are followed faithfully.
11. ***You must learn to be your own best teacher.*** You must think fast and practice slowly. An exercise or an etude played through once correctly is better than an hour of satisfying your ego with easy tunes.

Effective instrumental performance only comes about through the use of consistent practice habits. A daily warm-up can be the first stepping stone toward that goal. Slow concentrated effort on fundamental concepts of brass playing will yield consistent improvement.