

Notes on Practicing

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Constantly monitor your weaknesses and strengths, adjusting your practice accordingly. Focus on what you need to improve, without neglecting general fundamentals.

Refer to Claude Gordon's *Brass Playing Is No More Difficult Than Deep Breathing*.

Suggestions for a practice routine ... 5 - 20 minutes per section.

1. **Herbert L. Clarke** *Technical Studies*. Ease of execution and a feeling of relaxed strength are the priorities here. Never strain; you might feel occasional fatigue but you should feel like you could play all day on these studies. Play slowly enough to finish each exercise perfectly. Keep the little finger of your right hand out of the "octave key" on the leadpipe; even if you usually play with it in, use this book to exercise true finger extension, to keep your hand loose and strong.

Concentrate on Studies I through 8, at least one a day. In addition to slurring them, practice single and "K" tonguing. Strengthening the tongue in this fashion will make all playing more limber, relaxed, and flexible. And when these articulations are truly mastered, any multiple tonguing will be easy.

2. Long tones. These include single notes and sustained exercises that end with a long tone. Hold the last note until all air is gone, then squeeze the last bit out. Feel the stomach muscles clench; this is the only way to dynamically engage the torso muscles used in trumpet playing. Practice pedal notes in this fashion, too. Pedals require very deep breathing and will do wonders for the embouchure, stimulating a wider area of upper and lower lip vibration and encouraging the lower jaw to come forward a bit. This will help upper register power. Don't pucker the lips to produce these notes and don't "bark" from pedal C downward, trying to get these pitches in tune. Intonation will correct itself with patient practice and playing these tones too loudly will forfeit many of the benefits. Try to imitate the sound of a baritone horn.

Refer to these books: Schlossberg *Daily Drills*, Gordon *Systematic Approach to Daily Practice*, Glasel *Relaxation Techniques* (3 volumes), and Stamp *Warm-ups and Studies*.

3. **Lip Flexibilities**. These are really "tongue level" exercises - the tongue channels the air to produce every note. Approximate the feeling by whistling two notes, back and forth. In your practice, don't discount the value of simply slurring between two notes, hundreds of times. Emphasize the use of harmonic slurring through all seven valve combinations, so that the tongue does as much of the work as possible. These drills should develop a high degree of flexible strength, of limber power; they are ideal for ascending to our highest notes. Use Charles Colin's *Advanced Lip Flexibilities*, Earl Iron's *27 Groups of Exercises*, Gordon's *Tongue Level Exercises*, Walter Smith's *Lip Flexibilities*, and suitable sections from Arban's *Complete Method*, Schlossberg's *Daily Drills*, Gordon's *Systematic Approach*, and any other sources of these kinds of exercises.

4. **Articulation**. Emphasize single and "K" tonguing; multiple tonguing is a shortcut using these articulations and will really improve only when they are highly developed. The major hindrance to smooth triple tonguing is an inability to single tongue quickly. Since the tongue's mobility is directly related to our flexibility, intensive articulation practice will make us more limber all over the horn. "K" tonguing benefits command of the high register.

On middle C, single tongue sixteenth notes for one minute, breathing when necessary. Use the metronome. When you can sustain this minute at = 120, you will have eliminated any gap between single and multiple tonguing (If you have this gap, a conductor will find it!). Herbert L. Clarke did this exercise at = 152, after years of steady work on this drill.

Use etudes to practice single and "K" tonguing, even if they are marked slurred. Double and triple tongue sections of all the standard texts are also good for this. The possibilities are endless, but here are some suggestions: H. L. Clarke *Technical Studies* (the etudes), his *Characteristic Studies*, Charlier 36 *Etudes* (14, 16, 22, and 25), Goldman *Practical Studies* (1-4), Oliver Nelson *Patterns for Improvisation*, and Vizzutti *Advanced Etudes* (3).

5. Transposition. Use Sachse's 100 *Etudes*, each etude in as many standard transpositions as possible. Do one a week. After you have finished, which will take about two years, you will have no trouble transposing, and can easily maintain your skill.

Reading clefs and other "formulas" can help, but don't rely on them. **True skill, the kind that will stand up under pressure, is reflexive, learned by experience and repeated exposure.**

6. Excerpts. Learn these in sets of five or so, giving yourself plenty of time to study the scores and hear how they sound played by different orchestras, different conductors. Keep copies in a separate folder until you have built up a list of fifty or so major works. Be able to play ten to fifteen of the most standard by memory at any time. With as many as possible, learn on at least two different trumpets.

7. Etudes. Make concentrated, quality work your goal. One etude a week, done with careful hard work, is plenty. Spend some time working on one phrase at a time, even one measure at a time when necessary. An etude properly studied should be almost memorized, if only temporarily. Here are my recommendations:

Arban 14 *Characteristic Studies* Reynolds 48 *Etudes*

Clarke *Characteristic Studies* Nagel *Studies in Contemporary Music*

Charlier 36 *Etudes* Goldman *Practical Studies*

Boehme 24 *Melodic Studies* Gates *Odd Meter Etudes*

Duhem 24 *Melodic Etudes* Falk *Atonal Etudes*

Brandt *Orchestral Etudes* Getchell *Practical Studies* (2 volumes)

Bitsch 20 *Etudes* Vizzutti *Advanced Etudes*

Also rewarding is the study of transcribed solos by great improvisors such as Clifford Brown, and the etudes written by Yusef Lateef in his *Repository of Scales and Melodic Patterns*.

When working in the more traditional collections (Boehme, Duhem), emphasize the etudes with four or more sharps or flats.

8. **Dynamic extremes.** Exceed the demands made upon you in this area. Devote some time every day to playing extremely softly, softer than you would ever be asked to play. Once or twice a week, play louder than you have ever been asked, but for very short periods, resting more than you play. The soft practice will improve your sensitivity and give you confidence in touchy performance situations, and the loud "bursts" will condition your body and mind to relax in fortissimo passages, improving your tone and accuracy.

9. Piccolo trumpet. Practice softly, **keeping the embouchure fresh.** Include louder playing only occasionally, Develop and strive for a concept of a warm, vocal sound. Play soft scales and arpeggios into the high register. Hold out the upper notes, building up the reflexive memory of those notes on your whole system. When not performing on the piccolo, do this once or twice a week for 5-10 minutes.

10. Solos. Memorize from the last movement or page to the beginning, even if you use music when you perform. This way you will always get stronger and stronger as you perform the piece from the beginning. Find the most difficult passages and make them your priority in practicing; when they become relatively easy, your inner feelings about performing the piece will undergo quite a change.

Concept is most important: when doing Haydn or Hummel, listen to great Mozart and Haydn performances by other instrumentalists and singers, and when doing Halsey Stevens, listen to various Copland recordings, and so on. Almost every piece is written in *a language*, and we should immerse ourselves in that language to gain a fundamental understanding, from which true originality can evolve. If possible, study musicology and composition, or at least search deeply into each piece you are interested in performing, learning all the parts and how they fit together.

11. Improvising. Study Louis Armstrong and Clifford Brown, whatever your concept might be. Learn to articulate at fast tempos, and also how to create motion within long notes. Learn piano to study harmony, but also study harmony on your horn, learning to outline harmonic progressions by yourself. Record and study your own playing, constantly working for clarity regarding how you want to sound.

These are only suggestions. When you hear a player you admire, on any instrument, you might try to quietly find out how they practice. Learn how your teachers practice (or practiced). Write exercises and etudes dealing with problems you have. Write solo pieces that show what you do best, even if you will be the only audience.

If you have a heavy rehearsal and performance schedule, complement the demands being made upon you. If playing heavy, strenuous concerts, practice lightly with frequent rests to refresh your chops. If performing light repertoire, even if it is fairly constant, include some very **loud drills** in your practice, though not daily unless you find that this agrees with you. Even then, be careful about practicing very loudly more than two or three days in a row.

When I am playing all day long, I'll still try to do a Clarke study, a few long tones (squeezing all the air out), several lip slur patterns through all seven valve combinations, and a few minutes of intensive single and "K" tonguing. If I have time to really practice (1-2 hours, though this time is usually in two or three segments), I will occasionally write down what I plan to practice, perhaps loosely organized like the sections listed here. Personally, I prefer to work in fairly intense periods of 10-20 minutes, resting about 5 minutes between each. Now and then, I will play for 30 minutes with only very brief rests; this is above all a test to see if I am playing loosely, without unnecessary tension. A few times a year, I'll keep a practice diary for a week or so at a time, This always give my practice a boost, an added sense of purpose and energy.

When any of us are playing well, we commonly feel that we are playing from a "center" where we feel well-grounded, with a strong, secure presence behind every phrase. Conversely, when things are not going well, there is often a feeling of being jittery, off-balance, out of touch, a kind of emotional high center of gravity. As much as possible, our practice should connect us with that center which is our base for playing well. Experience will teach us what works, if we really use our experiences to learn. This calls for a kind of relentless self-criticism balanced with a healthy enjoyment of what we are doing. Many players are too easy on themselves in the practice room and rehearsal hall, and too hard on themselves in performance on stage. Reversing this tendency takes time but can evolve naturally: often when we begin, in our

practice, to focus strongly on our weaknesses and demand more from ourselves, our performances become freer, more flexible, and more enjoyable for us and our audience.

Some additional comments:

1. Warming up is a personal thing; everyone will need to find what works for them. The Clarke *Technical Studies*, properly done, can work quite well, especially if they have been memorized so the player can concentrate on proper feel. Simply improvising scales, arpeggios, slurs, and different articulations is also good. The point is to connect with an easy, relaxed way of playing. Avoid relying on long, strenuous, rigid routines - there is plenty of hard work to do later, and we will benefit more from the required intensity if we are loose and relaxed.

2. When practicing "K" tonguing many players experience a tightening of the throat area, especially when this drill is rather new. Please continue if this problem occurs. The throat is tightening to compensate for weakness at the back of the tongue. When proper endurance has been built up, the throat (the whole upper body) will relax.

In all cases, try to achieve relaxation through strength, which means plenty of hard work combined with sufficient rest.

3. Consider that the limitation of not being efficient at transposition will handicap any player with professional goals. The investment of two years on completing the Sachse book allows one to simply forget the problem. The first three months will be the most difficult, but the weekly time investment gets smaller and smaller after that.

The Bordogni and Cafarelli books are wonderful and should be studied hard, but the transposition problems are too easy to solve by ear. Learning transposition from these methods will result in a shallow, easily rattled technique.

4. Use the metronome the way a track athlete uses a stopwatch: to learn pacing and relaxation under stress. Musically, it will help achieve the kind of rhythmic discipline from which we can develop a sense of true rubato. It is not just for building speed: playing slow solos (second movement of the Haydn Concerto or the offstage solo from *Pines of Rome*) with the metronome will often reveal flaws in our feeling of pulse. Many players leave auditions believing that they played well because they didn't miss any notes, but remember that errors in basic rhythm and subdividing are often only noticed by the listeners.

Use the metronome to make your practices harder than performance conditions, so the concerts will seem easier. Playing slow vocalises with the metronome on to prevent cheating is terrific practice. If you can manage the Brandenburg Concerto no. 2, practice the outer movements at ≈ 88 or so. This will make performance pace relatively easy. Similar sessions on any demanding piece will benefit all of us.

5. Every player, no matter how good, makes mistakes, but the very best performers do two things: they don't tolerate them in practice sessions, correcting the slightest mishap in an unhurried, determined manner (also practicing with concentration and slowly enough so that **mistakes** are not learned); and in performance, they react to any error by immediately raising their level of energy and concentration, staying loose and aggressive.

6. Endurance. Regular, consistent practice will give us most of the endurance we need. For particular performance situations, here are some suggestions:

A. Orchestral programs. For playing the big romantic and 20th century

works, we need to build up our tolerance for playing at full volume.

This loud playing should be as relaxed as possible so the tone will be warm and without strain. This relaxation can be achieved by pushing back our barriers of volume farther than we would ever be asked to play. Then we can perform within a zone of relative comfort. I suggest

3-4 20 minute sessions a week, similar to the dynamic contrast routine described later. Avoid all-out sessions on consecutive days, if possible. You may benefit for a while, but remember that no muscle in our body responds well over an extended time to high-intensity demands on a daily basis - some kind of breakdown is inevitable. Balance the loud practice with soft playing as shown. Realize that significant results from this kind of program will take six weeks or so, at least.

B. Solo and **quintet recitals**. The thirty-minute sessions of almost nonstop playing is what I recommend. See the routines listed. Two or three a week for four to six weeks is good; the intensity is similar (to me) to a hard two hour concert.

C. **Auditions and juries**. These are typically very intense 10-minute periods, perhaps as strenuous as any most players encounter. Very few players do their best. If you can play as well as you usually do, you will do very well because most players perform worse than their average. Experience will be necessary for most people to reach their potential, but I believe that the physical intensity involved is a big part of the problem. Many trumpeters start off well, but fade quickly after a few minutes; other get off to a slow start and lack the stamina to hang in there and recover. This can be solved by avoiding only long, moderately paced practice sessions where almost all the playing is at "practice room mezzo forte." Starting a few weeks before the audition or jury, include 4-5 very, very tough 10-minute sessions a week, drilling the required material at a pace that will make the audition itself a relatively relaxed experience.

SAMPLE ROUTINES Rest at least 5 minutes between sections. Sections can also be done at different times throughout the day.

1. Clarke *Technical Studies*, 1st Study I - 7, 8x, slurred 8 -12, 4x, single tongue 13 - 19, 4x, "K" tongue 20 - 25, 8x, slurred continue pattern as high as possible, 2-x each
2. Schlossberg *Daily Drills*, #25. Very slow. Hold last note until all air is gone, then squeeze the last bit out. Continue pattern to pedal C, at least.
3. Colin *Lip Flexibilities*, #3, 9, 14, 21.
4. Goldman *Practical Studies*, #1 through 4, single tongue. Then #4 "K" tongue.
5. Clarke *Characteristic Studies*, #3. Sotto voce (soft practice). Each phrase several times, resting between each. Rest a few minutes, then straight through.
 1. Clarke *Technical Studies*, 6th Study 124, 125 single tongue. 126, 127 "K" tongue.
 2. Gordon *Systematic Approach*, Lesson 8, Part 1. Long last note, squeezing air out.
 3. Walter Smith *Lip Flexibility*, #1, 2, 9, 10.
 4. One minute on G, single tongue sixteenth notes, = 132. Breathe when necessary. One minute "K"

tongue, = 104. Arban *Complete Method*, p. 176, 177. Single tongue.

5. Piccolo (Bb). Soft scales and arpeggios to high E, F, F#, G. 10 minutes, resting often.

1. Clarke *Technical Studies*, 7th Study. Single tongue chromatic triplets, slur arpeggios.

2. Schlossberg *Daily Drills*, #82, very slow, long last note, continue into pedal register.

3. Gordon *Tongue Level Exercises*, Part 111, #3, 8, 10.

4. Oliver Nelson *Patterns for Improvisation*, #49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 56: Single tongue, = 120.

5. Charlier 36 *Etudes*, #25. Each section 3x, working from back. Then straight through.

6. Sachse 100 *Etudes*, on C trumpet. #72, in D, Eb, E.

7. Dynamic contrast practice, using excerpts.

A. Soft - warm up with Schlossberg #18, sotto voce, legato tongue, very slow. Then soft passages from *La Mer*, *Fites*, Shostakovich *Symphony No. 1*, and *Piano Concerto No. 1* (2nd mov't).

B. Loud - warm up with Schlossberg #30, building volume throughout. Then loud passages from *Ein Heldenleben*, *Ldhengrin*, Mahler *Symphony No. 5*.

Use both Bb and C trumpets for all excerpts, when possible.

30 minute "sets" - here are three types:

1. Clarke *Characteristic Studies*. Soft, **continuous playing, without** metronome. By resting 3-5 seconds every 30 seconds or so, do 14 in 30 minutes. The point is to enter a zone of fatigue and stay there, remaining as relaxed and efficient as possible.

2. Porret 24 *Etudes melodiques*. Using metronome, each one takes 4:20 - 4:45. Do six in 30 minutes, starting one every 5 minutes. These are middle range lyrical studies, but doing this routine will induce a deep sense of fatigue. Not recommended the day before an important concert.

3. Jim Maxwell *The First Trumpeter* (the Lyric Etudes). These have some high notes, arranged in phrases by equal amounts of rest, which should be accurately counted with the metronome on. At first, the indicated rest will make this routine seem easier, but the higher tessitura will eventually take its toll. Good for building strength.

As hard as any of us practice, it won't mean much unless we always keep listening, both while we play and also away from the horn, remaining open to new musical ideas and concepts. In performance, the most creative and interesting musicians, for all their study, ultimately play by ear, not simply reacting mechanically to what is written on the page. They are receptive to widely varied influences, like hornist Dennis Brain, as profound a brass soloist as we have seen in this century, who listened closely to the light, dear sound and phrasing of dance bandleader Tommy Dorsey's trombone. And the great jazz musician Charles Mingus, who often spoke of the heightened spontaneity he heard in performances by the Budapest String Quartet.

As John Coltrane advised a young musician seeking help, "Just start playing your whole horn, and never stop."