

NEC trumpet class Routine Fundamentals

Making a trumpet player into an artist – it all begins with a solid foundation of technique.

Having sound technical facility is not only about having good dexterity. Additionally it is the ability to consistently produce a beautiful sound (even throughout the ranges), clear articulations, accurate intonation, and rock-solid rhythm. This leads to overall control of the instrument and is of utmost importance, regardless of what is being played. However, if technique is a player's only focus, they will lack all musical interest. It is much more valuable to think of technique as a means to an end – the goal being to develop into a musically interesting player. Take for example Charlier #4, m. 16, the 16th notes. These may be interpreted in many different ways. If one is unable to play the 16ths absolutely in time, consistently, it will be very difficult try to play it however one hears it in their mind. A lack of control will make produce erratic results and make it impossible to consistently produce a particular interpretation. Of course, the idea isn't to play it the same way every time, but to **be able** to.

In orchestral playing, conductors often ask for interpretations that are off the beaten path. Having control and consistency will allow you to play things many different ways. This will make your life much easier and your career longer.

Think of technique in terms of a digital camera – if you have a 1 megapixel camera, you can take decent pictures, but the resolution is too low for very fine photos. A 5 megapixel camera takes photos that have a much larger capacity for information, allowing more intensely detailed photos. As a trumpet player, the more complete your technical training is, the more consistently you will be able to present imaginative musical ideas.

The following is a sampling of exercises (in no particular order) I do as often as possible to maintain good overall control of the instrument.

***A note about the use of tuners and metronomes: use them sparingly. If they are used constantly, it is very easy to cheat. For instance, try using the tuner in the following manner. While tuning a "C", turn on the tuner, close your eyes and play the note until your ear says it is in tune. Then open your eyes and see what the tuner says. This way, you can be more honest with yourself than if you play the note while looking at the tuner and just bend the pitch to get the needle to go to the right spot. With a metronome, play the passage without the metronome and take note of possible problematic places. Then play it again but with the aid of the metronome. You will quickly be aware if your problem spots occur in places other than where you thought. Turn off the metronome and play the passage one more time and your additional rhythmic awareness should be evident.

Arban: I use most of the book, but in particular these exercises. Keep in mind that Arban was French: “Tu” is pronounced “tiu” – a pointed articulation is needed. Once this articulation is mastered, move on to other more rounded or differently weighted articulations. The suggested tempo markings should be considered a goal towards which one works – not a starting point.

- Pg. 20 #46 whole note = 90 *mp*
- Pg. 21 #47 (variation: change articulations – slur two, tongue two, etc.)
- Pages 28-36 as printed or down an octave where possible to work on pointed articulations in the lower register.
- Pages 32 & 172 one breath, all tongued (through rests) and in different keys.
- Pg. 44 #22 for flexibility. Make sure to get through all ranges.
- Pg. 46 #27 very challenging to play perfectly evenly
- Pages 59-74 SCALES (and scale studies) in all keys. As fast as possible (with metronome) with single and double-tongue.
- Pg. 79 Same as above. Add different articulation patterns and different dynamics: slur two, tongue one; tongue one, slur two, etc.
- Pg. 91 Crisp and as fast as possible. This will require a great deal of flexibility. For variation, try the last note up an octave.
- Pages 138-141 – for evenness of varied articulations and slurs.
- Pg. 142: for evenness of range. Don't let the high notes screech or the low notes woof. Maintain the same sweet sound throughout the registers.
- Pg. 150 #56 – in one breath for breath control, evenness or sound through the ranges and endurance. As I prepared to go to Aspen as a student, my teacher at the time, Michael Sachs made the point that, if I could play through this in one breath at 9,000 feet, I was in good shape!

The Clarke and Gekker books cover similar material and are valuable in their entirety. Some favorites are:

Clarke:

- For dexterity: The First Five studies – as fast (under control) as possible *mp*. Mix up the articulations and dynamics. A little of these every day will go a long way.
- Second study #27-31: in addition to building up speed, play these very slowly and deliberately articulated for work on lower range control. Second study etude in one breath.
- Third Study and etude – go for the smoothest changes possible between notes that are lip slurs and maintain an evenness of sound in high and low registers.
- Fourth Study –for practicing trills, as fast as possible and smooth.

Just as important is to practice this study slowly (breath where necessary but not at the top of the scale) for smoothness between notes. In this case, omit the accents. Concentrate especially on the scales and the leaps that follow them. Focus your attention on the range starting from “C” in the staff and up, where it can be particularly challenging (especially on the C trumpet) to slur notes without blips or burrs between them. This kind of practice can, for instance, greatly improve the slurred passages in the Ballerina Dance from Petrouchka

Gekker Articulation Studies:

The introduction outlines an excellent exercise for improving the speed of your articulations as well as promoting relaxed playing.

• Mr. Gekker makes good suggestions throughout the book for alternate articulations. In general, the exercises are short and promote agility, dexterity and control. There are very few that I have not found useful for every-day maintenance and specific issues that come up from time to time. For instance:

- 3rd Study – once the single tongue has been used at a high speed, try double-tonguing these to work on the K stroke, which can be particularly awkward after a leap.
- 11th Study – as is and then make the descending leap a sixteenth early, so in the first exercise, the first 4 notes would be: F#, D#, D#, D#, etc. This puts the K tongue (when double-tongued) in an awkward place.
- 16th Study – excellent for practicing going through ranges quickly.
- 24th Study again with the single and double-tongue.
- 29th Study – excellent for attacks, agility, and range.
- 30th Study – vary dynamics on each entrance – will build confidence where attacks are concerned.
- 33rd Study – single and double tongue – focus on lighter articulations. Stay light on your feet and do not be concerned if your low register isn't as warm as it usually might be. The focus in this case is to keep a very compact and efficient embouchure.
- 34th Study great for helping players with multiple embouchure sets (i.e. one for each range) develop and maintain one set.

In closing, while listening to a virtuoso soloist, one is awed by their playing. It is not only how fast they are able to play certain passages, but how they are shaped and sculpted into beautiful phrases. Without the foundation of incredible technique, their musical ideas would remain internal, unable to be expressed. Many trumpet players are most concerned with playing higher, faster, and louder, all of which are certainly tools of the trade. However, it is the trumpet player who is able to turn the elegant phrase with the most beautiful sound who achieves the greatest degree of success. In order to do that,

their technique must be at the highest level. Building and maintaining that technique by utilizing a practice routine emphasizing fundamentals is crucial to a trumpet player's training and musical development. Without it, success will be hard to achieve.

April 2003; Brass Player Journal Spring 2004