

Slide Technique - It's not "ALL about the air"

Often I hear the phrase "its all about the air" followed by an inhalation and breathing demo. "Fill up from the bottom, fog a window, your diaphragm does this and your rib cage should do that, keep your shoulders down" - insert breathing bag, breathing tube, inspirometer, pinwheel or favorite resistance toy while motioning with the arms the inward/outward motion of the air stream.

The pedagogy of great breathing (inhalation over blowing) overshadows common sense technical ability unique to the trombone. The multitude of lip slur books in addition to our age old Remington long tone study help develop fundamental core in our tones and assist in flexibility but do little to promote efficient and thoughtful slide technique. My intent is to present a clear and concise approach to slide technique. I will provide a brief history of slide technique that has been passed down from master teachers and discuss the merits of these "schools." I will illustrate through video and performance the various schools of technique and finally, I will offer a relatively mainstream approach to developing quick, precise and relaxed slide technique through various exercises and demonstrations.

Symptoms of poor slide technique:

- Articulation inconsistency - attacks have a "burr" or unfocused spread sound
- "Dwaaaaah" or smear between notes in legato
- Approximate pitch in section playing
- Touching the bell
- Bell bounce - causing rigid or bump from note to note in legato
- Sympathetic air stoppage or pulsing
- Valsalva maneuver - due to slow slide in staccato
- Late entrances in tutti sections (middle school, high school)
- Pumping the slide on repeated attacks

Legato Technique Disclaimer

We cannot begin a conversation on slide technique without first outlining my philosophy on legato. Many of the exercises in this presentation will alternate between staccato and legato. There are basically two legato camps that exist in TX. The first advocates using a light legato tongue on every note while blowing with a continues column of air. The second camp teaches the use of natural slurs in legato when at all possible, only using the tongue in legato connecting notes slurred in the same partial. This camp (natural slur camp) practices lip slurs and flexibility in addition to soft legato tonguing in an attempt to "blur" the difference and create a seamless legato sound. There are benefits to both

- the "legato tongue" camp is an easy fix and often used in beginning band method because the second camp is considerably advanced and difficult to teach. The "legato tongue everything" camp does promote uniformity but has drawbacks in flexibility and limits, to some degree, the ability of creating a pure seamless lip slur. Your only as good as you can tongue softly.

- The "natural slur" camp promotes an evenness and purity similar to great valve slurring. This camp also demands impeccable slide technique as any early or late departure with the slide is immediately noticed where with legato tonguing there is an element of forgiveness.

My teachers were David Waters (late bass trombone of the Houston Symphony and student of Kleinhammer and Al Lube), Allen Barnhill (Houston Symphony principal) and Joseph Alessi (since 1999) - all of these gentlemen were proponents of the natural slur - this is what I teach at Baylor.

Two Schools of Slide Technique

Remington School

Emory Brace Remington (1892–1971) was a trombonist and music teacher. His unique method made him one of the most well-known and influential trombone educators in history. He was a member of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra from 1923 to 1949, and on the faculty of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY from 1922 until his death in 1971.

- Emory Remington, long time trombone teacher at the Eastman School of Music advocated holding the lower slide so that the wrist faces the player, with the fingertips on the slide cross brace. Students were instructed to “toss” the slide from position to position, using the wrist as a hinge for fluid slide movements
- Fluid slide technique, economy of movement in short slide positions
- "Tossing" the slide into position - create a circular motion corresponding to alternate positions
- Motion is as slow as the music will allow - "passing through" slide positions
- Potential problems with precision which can be limited because of the various "hinges."
- These "hinges" allow for a multitude of variables which can arrive at different times to the desired position.

Wick School

Denis Wick (born 1931) is Britain's most influential orchestral trombonist of the 20th century. He is also an internationally respected brass teacher and designer of brass mutes and mouthpieces. On retirement in 1989 he was awarded the International Trombone Association's annual award; he served as their president 2004-2006.

Denis Wick, retired Principal Trombonist of the London Symphony Orchestra, advocates turning the wrist down, effectively not using it as a hinge at all. This cleans up the floppiness found in many students of the Remington school who don't monitor their slide technique regularly.

- Cleaner slide movements from position to position, fewer hinges or “moving parts”
- Wick believed in the fore-arm moving in plane
- Wrist down - palm pointing to the floor
- Relaxation and fluidity are key
- Can become overly rigid and lead to tension, which supersedes any advantage that this method provides.

Introducing the "Indexed" - hybrid technique

- Precise indexing of each position
- Quick transition between positions, staying on each position as long as possible
- Uprturned palm, moving in plane
- Never touching the bell
- Grip is similar to holding a "key" - two fingers and thumb - ring finger and pinky are used in "reserve" to capture the slide in 6th and 7th positions
- Somewhat limited wrist movement

Holding the Slide:

1. The slide arm does not support the instrument. The trombone should be supported with the left arm, leaving the slide arm free to move easily.

2. The slide should be held with the thumb, index and middle fingers only, so that the thumb is on the slide cross brace, and the fingers rest on the lower slide tube below the cross brace. Ring and pinky fingers should be wrapped under and away from the slide.

3. Wrist should neither face the player nor the ground, but kept at a comfortable, roughly 45-degree angle from the body. This angle keeps the wrist from flopping, but also doesn't lock it in place to allow for fine-tuning between partials.

Moving the slide:

- ***Simple rule – wait as long as you can, then move as fast as you can.***
- Fast, precise slide movement does not mean jerky or tense.
- The fingers, wrist and lower arm should move as a unit, so that the wrist and fingers don't trail behind the arm or vice versa.
- Slide must be free of dents, aligned, and well lubricated.

No-No's:

Avoid the urge to touch the bell with the fingers to find third position, or the thumb to find fourth position. Tune with your ears, not your fingers. If a player is habitually sharp on third and flat on fourth position notes, this is a likely culprit.

The index finger is the key to artistic slide technique:

“Nothing of great feel is done without the tip of the index finger leading the way; an artist, violinist, a surgeon - they all use the tip of the index finger to lead the way. When we point, taste, tie, sew or write, we engage the index finger. We focus our feel to one hand and to the index finger specifically, with the thumb adding stability. In this case, tradition has sold us short and everyone is captive.” - *Golf's Sacred Journey - Seven days at the Links of Utopia* - David L. Cook

- Great slide technique has to do with accuracy - accuracy is enhanced by the straight line forearm motion also referred to as tracing. The slide angle is in one plane - not raising or lowering up and down positions.
- Accuracy is built in or programmed by "compartmentalizing" direction changes in the slide.

- The wrist stays neutral but buoyant - acting as a shock absorber for rapid "see-saw" slide motion.
- The "hybrid-indexed" technique emphasizes one joint, one arm movement thus simplifying and eliminating any variables induced by excessive wrist movement.
- When the slide is gripped properly with the palm up, index finger and middle finger carefully matched with the thumb on the slide brace and the bottom two fingers disengaged or neutral until 6th and 7th position, accuracy and consistency become engrained.

Brent Phillips is Associate Professor of Trombone at Baylor University. Prior to his position at Baylor, Brent was assistant principal trombone of "The President's Own" US Marine Band in Washington DC for nine years and is currently principal trombone of the Waco Symphony Orchestra in Waco TX and the Abilene Philharmonic. Prior to moving to Waco, he was principal trombone of the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra for fifteen seasons.

Mr. Phillips was a frequent soloist with the "President's Own," performing on over thirty separate occasions on national concert tours and chamber orchestra performances in Washington DC and Virginia. He performed as a soloist on numerous occasions during his tenure as principal trombone with the Harrisburg Symphony and has premiered works for solo trombone and orchestra with the Harrisburg Symphony and "Pershing's Own" US Army Orchestra. In addition to his national concert tours and recordings with the Marine Band, Mr. Phillips enjoyed a brief stint recording trombone tracks for the Discovery Channel while living in Washington DC. For several years, he could be heard performing all of the trombone tracks to Shark Week, Celebrity Shark Week and O'Shea's Big Adventure.

He has performed with the Delaware, Maryland, Fairfax, National Symphony, Alabama Symphony, San Antonio Symphony, Houston Symphony, Austin Symphony, Richmond Symphony and performed the 2015-2016 season effectively as acting second with the Dallas Symphony. He performed on bass trumpet with the DSO and Houston Grand Opera on Wagner's Die Walkure, and will again be performing the Rite of Spring with the DSO this summer in Vail Colorado.

Mr. Phillips currently has two solo CD's on the Potenza Music label and two trombone quartet CD's with the professional trombone quartet "Stentorian Consort" on the Albany Records label. He looks forward to recording his third solo CD with Potenza and his very excited to embark on a recording project with his current 2017 Baylor Trombone Studio and Alumni!

He was an invited soloist, giving a full recital at the International Trombone Festival in Columbus GA in 2013. Most recently, Mr. Phillips performed full recitals and was on the faculty as an invited clinician at "Trombonanza!" - a weeklong internationally renowned trombone festival and workshop in Santa Fe Argentina. He spends his summers teaching at the Round Top Festival Institute and serves as a wilderness guide with his two sons leading father-son backpacking trips in Colorado through "Voice of the Wilderness" programs.

Brent Phillips studied with David Waters, David Kirk, and Alan Barnhill of the Houston Symphony and earned both his Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University.

BAYLOR TROMBONE STUDIO

SLIDE TECHNIQUE DRILLS (02/09/17)

EX. 1: SAME TECHNIQUE UP AND DOWN



EX. 1A: COMPARTMENTS - REPEAT - SLURRED, THEN TONGUED

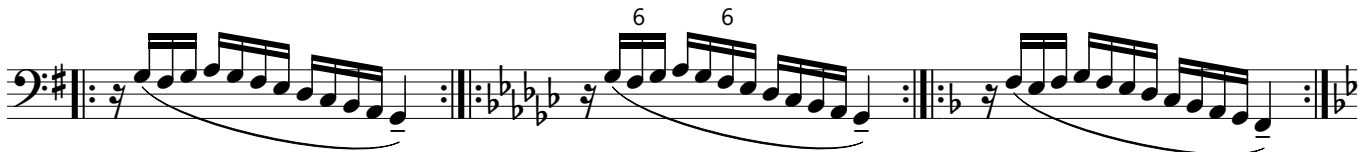


REPEAT EACH COMPARTMENT 1ST TIME SLURRED, 2ND TIME TONGUED
MAKE SURE THE TIMING/ COORDINATION AND INDEXING OF THE SLIDE IS THE SAME

REMEMBER - QUICK, PRECISE, BUT RELAXED!!

KEEP THE BELL STILL

EX. 2: "SLUSH PUMP" PRACTICE



EX. 2A: COMPARTMENTS - SLURRED/TONGUED - DESCENDING IN ALL KEYS

EX. 2B

EX. 2B - "BP CLASSIC"

EX. 3 - SLIDE WAIT! WAIT UNTIL THE LAST POSSIBLE SECOND BEFORE MOVING THE SLIDE.

EX. 4 - SLIDE GO! SAME EXERCISE AS ABOVE; "SHOOT" TO THE NEXT POSITION IMMEDIATELY AFTER ATTACK

EX. 5 - BRAHMS 4 APPLICATION

EX. 6 - SAINT-SAENS APPLICATION WITH SUBDIVISION

p

poco cresc.

p etc.