Wycliffe Gordon's Unique Approach To Trombone Playing:

Sing It First

compiled and edited by Alan Raph

Contents

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Foreword

If you have purchased this book, you must be interested in jazz, big band or small combo trombone playing as opposed to, or in addition to, symphonic playing. This book explains jazz trombonist Wycliffe Gordon's approach to the trombone. This is not a "how to play jazz" book, but rather a book of trombone techniques (tools) that Wycliffe Gordon has learned to use to his advantage. Learning and using these tools will significantly advance your own trombone playing.

Wycliffe's approach is to hear the music before playing it, to sing the technique before perfecting it. It's a different kind of approach. It combines playing and singing to the degree that one blends into the other.

There have been (and are) a number of singing brass players including:

Trumpet - Louis Armstrong, Chet Baker, Jack Sheldon, Louis Prima, Bunny Berigan, Dizzy Gillespie, Clark Terry, Ghandi Burgess, Tom Harrell, and Jon Faddis.

Trombone - Jack Teagarden, Wycliffe Gordon, Emory Remington (who sang for his students), Billy Eckstein, Jerry Colonna, Bill Watrous, and Frank Rosolino.

Very often their singing reflects their playing.

Singing and playing is the most important aspect of this book. We want you to sing for yourself with your natural voice. If you feel you can't sing, lose the word "can't." I've never known a musician who couldn't carry a tune, regardless of their voice quality.

Sing It First isn't another book of sight singing exercises, although such a book can also be very helpful. It does suggest several paths to acquiring the ability to sing and to play what you sing. It discusses perfect vs. relative pitch and it covers developing a "taste" for every note that you play on the trombone. The trombone's general working register is within the vocal range of the average male voice. When trombone music goes beyond the player's voice range, 8ba or 8va works well.

Read the book first to see where it is coming from and where it is going. Then take the trip. You'll play better from the start and *much* better as you continue.

Alan Raph, 2011

Preface

Sing? I'm a trombonist. I don't need to sing. I just play my parts and am happy to do so. There was a time when I thought and felt this way about playing in the band. It was difficult to learn and memorize the words to songs because all I had to do was play the parts.

Little did I know that the greatest tool for developing every aspect of my playing and musicianship came in a little package called *me*. My voice, that is. "If you can sing it, you can play it" eventually became my new philosophy and rule to study and live by. Now I sing everything every day and in every way -- etudes, flexibility exercises, songs, inflections, range building studies, and breathing techniques, to name a few. What better way to learn how to phrase something than to ***Sing It First***? This concept is something that I teach and apply to every musical situation or idiom, from working on orchestral excerpts to big band parts to scat improvisation. It is one of the easiest things in the world to do with a little practice. Consistent practice, that is. No matter the style, if you can sing it, you can play it. I was fortunate to have a band director, Harkness Butler, who always told me, "You can do it Wycliffe." I never learned that I couldn't or can't do something. I felt that if I tried to accomplish something and wanted it badly enough, I could do it.

This is one of the main things that we'll address in this book. It might not necessarily be a new approach, but you know the jazz musician -- he or she always has a slight twist or something special that gives way to the development of their individual playing or singing styles, the thing that makes their approach to playing their instrument or developing their creative voice unique.

I hope that you will enjoy the forthcoming concepts and that you will be able to gain insight into your own development as a player and/or teacher. Remember: ***Sing It First***. It works for me.

Wycliffe Gordon, 2011

I'd like to dedicate this book to the memory of my high school band director and mentor, Mr. Harkness Butler, for his undying support through my developmental stages and his steady inspiration through "can-ness" that he gave me as a young musician. It has carried me thus far.

Introduction

Sing It First assumes that the reader/trombonist is at an intermediate or advanced level of playing ability and is playing regularly, has a two-and-a-half octave range with consistent tone in all registers, is able to play scales, arpeggios and etudes at an intermediate level (non-complex sixteenth note patterns), and has a strong desire to learn. A casual curiosity is o.k., too, but this is not exactly light reading. The suggested approach is that you read this like a book first, *then* study it.

Wycliffe Gordon goes his own way -- follows his own paths -- and has put his developmental skills and observations into this book for the serious trombonist. When Wycliffe plays he gives his all. He also doesn't hold back in sharing his musical gifts. This book with its unique approach goes deep into that sharing.

Background to *Sing It First*

I first met Wycliffe in 1997 when I played a week with Wynton Marsalis's Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. To say I was very impressed with his playing would be an understatement because his playing was overwhelming. He gave me a CD he had just completed which showed me other areas of his abilities. A few years later I played with John Pizzarelli in Savannah (Georgia). Through a travel mix-up, only half the band from NYC showed up and Wycliffe, who was appearing at the same jazz festival, played lead trombone with us. I was further impressed.

In creating this book, we met earlier this year and fell into a question/answer format. During these meetings he mentioned that he had studied from a book which I wrote with Bill Watrous called Trombonisms (it was a jolt to realize it was published 27 years ago). Wycliffe was accommodating, unassuming, and completely candid with his responses and observations. This book is a look at Wycliffe Gordon's unique approach to the trombone.

Alan Raph, 2011

Prerequisites

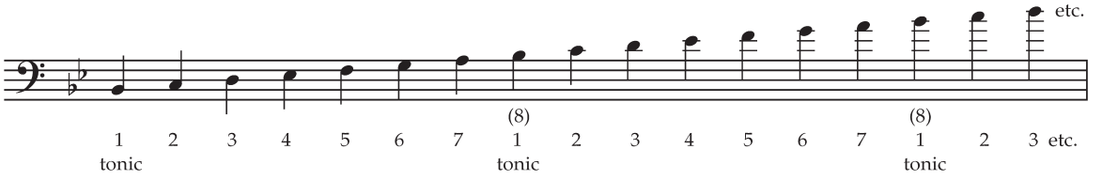
A Capsule Look at Scales and Chords

It will be helpful to brush up on the following:

Scale of Bb

Bb is the tonic (keynote), the first note. The eighth note of the scale becomes the first note an octave higher.

Example: Bb Major scale for approximately 2 ½ octaves



Scales continue in this manner for many octaves.

Sing a Bb scale using a neutral syllable (*da* or *la*). Sing as high as you can go. Also sing it backwards (high to low).

If you are not comfortable singing, make the effort. Get used to the sound of your own voice. Familiarize yourself with the sound of a major scale. Play it on the piano for accuracy of pitch.

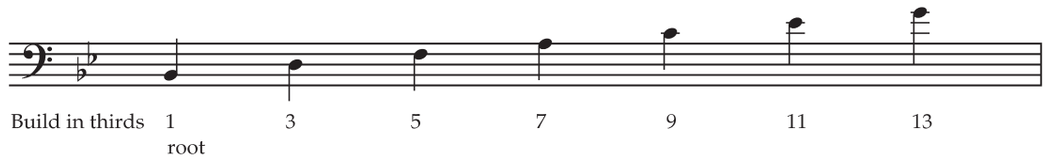
Learning and recognizing the sound of a major scale will be the quickest way to figure out the sound of successive notes in a tune or in an etude since most music relates to a scale.

Bb Chord

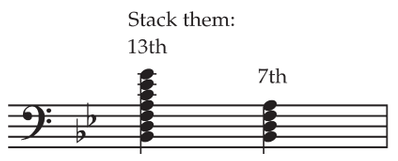
A chord is three or more notes of a scale, built by thirds. A third is an interval built from a scale by choosing a note, skipping the next note and choosing the following note. The interval of a third involves three notes: the lower note, the skipped note and the upper note.

Example:

A Bb chord (a chord built on Bb, the root): Once a chord has been built, its notes can be played anywhere, in any register. The following chords are in root position.



Stack them:



Chords start as triads (root, third and fifth) and then they are added to in thirds. The next note after the triad is the 7th, then the 9th, 11th, and finally 13th. A 15th would only be a repeat of the root note and therefore isn't used.

Chords are named by their roots, but their type is identified by the interval from the root to the top note of the stack. Some random chords are: Bb7, E9, and G13.

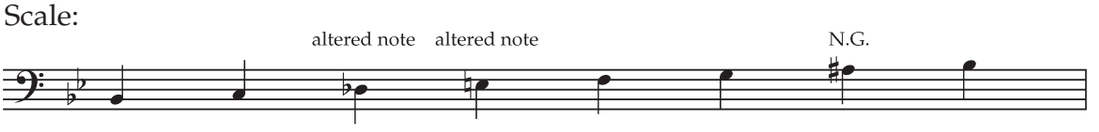
Unlike scales, the building of a chord takes place within two octaves. This is why there are 9th's, 11ths, and 13ths rather than restating those notes as the 2nd, 4th, and 6th notes of a scale.

Alterations

Any note in a scale or a chord may be altered by adding a sharp, a flat or a natural to it as long as the addition doesn't conflict with its neighboring scale-wise note.

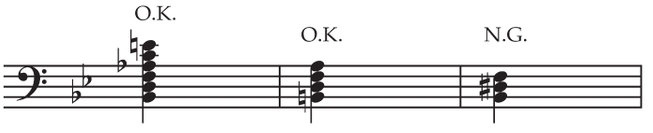
Examples:

Scale:



N.G. = not good. This one doesn't work because it conflicts with the next note (A# = Bb)

Chords:



The D# (Eb) is the next note in the scale.

As in any construction project, scales and chords are built from the bottom up, although once constructed they can be played from the top down as well.

Any melody note can be harmonized with a chord containing that note.

A scale may be devised from any chord. You can suggest the chord by playing the scale, or by spelling the chord as an arpeggio.

Chords give the melody color. Various musical color sequences are learned through chord patterns.

Diatonic = All or part of the seven notes that form a scale.
Chromatic = all twelve different notes within an octave.

Singing

Wycliffe Gordon started out by playing trombone. Later he started to sing what he played. Still later he began to *sing it first* and found that he could play whatever he sang. He still does.

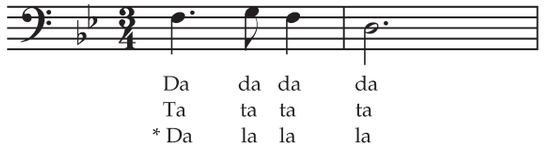
For our purposes *sing* means to produce an accurate melody with the voice. Sing with trombone articulations, not with lyrics.

Sing the syllable *ah* for the body of the note. Articulate the initial attack with any consonant since vowels don't work for articulated attacks. Possible consonants include T, D, L, H, K, F, G, and N (like D but less percussive). Of these, T, D and L (ta, da and la) are the most used. Consonants to be avoided are B, M, P, R, S, V and Z. S and Z tend to put air before the sound, and B, M, P and V tend to change the embouchure. R lacks definition.

The initial attack (the first note of a phrase) needs definition. *Ta* and *da* work best. For the rest of the notes of the phrase *la* works well for a very legato passage while *da* gives more definition.

By singing the song *Silent Night* using the neutral syllable *da* instead of the words, we get *Da-da-da-da* for the first four notes. Using *ta* (*Ta-ta-ta-ta*) would emphasize the attack of each note. By using *la* (or even better *Da-la-la-la),* the attack is de-emphasized and the rendition is smoother and more legato.

Example: The first two measures of *Silent Night* notated with syllables instead of words below the music.



* *Da* makes a better initial attack (than *La*).

Ta, da and *la* are articulations. They are the *consonants* of our music. The musical tone itself is the vowel; the articulation (or attack) starts it. Remember that our singing is to state the tune, not to perform it.

You don't need a good voice to sing. Go for accuracy of pitch, and later for articulation. If you stick with it, you will receive a bonus -- you will actually get to sing better than you ever thought you could.

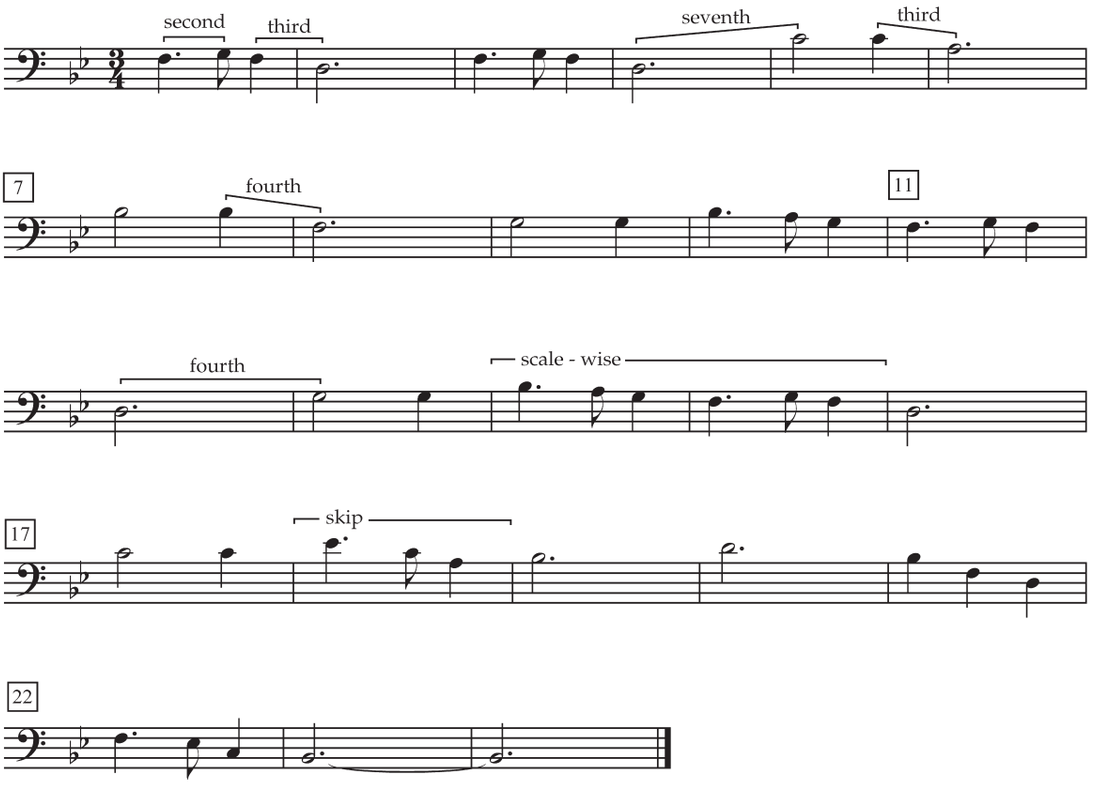
Wycliffe Gordon

Can't sing? Get rid of 'can't.' Wycliffe Gordon

Q. How do you develop sight singing?
WG: A good start is to listen to something while looking at the written music.

Let's go back to *Silent Night*, we'll use it as a study piece. Note the key relationship with the starting note. The key is Bb, the starting note is F. F is the fifth degree of the Bb scale. The tune starts on the 5th.

Relate the written note to the sound you hear. Note the intervals. Are they scale-wise or do they skip? If they skip, is there a pattern to their skipping; for instance, are they part of a chord? Bb-F-D in measure 21 is a chord (Bb-D-F).



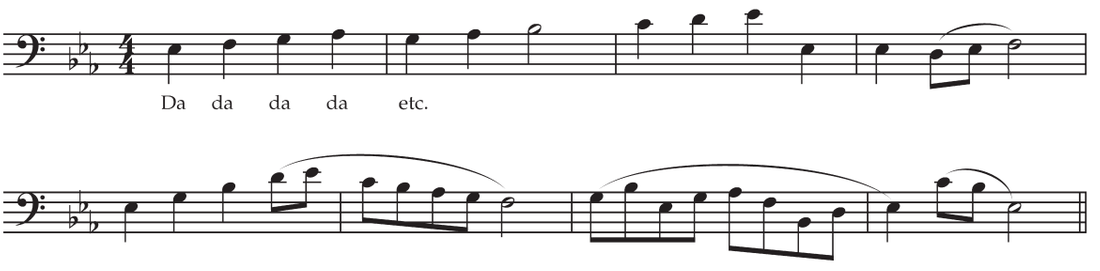
Work on analyzing *Silent Night* to get the note relationships down accurately. Play it on the trombone. Play it in other keys: start on G (key of C), start on Eb (key of Ab), then do the same with all 12 keys! Put in the time and effort. The process will carry over and the next tune you work on will be much easier and will take less time.

Take another tune that you know well, sing it, then play it on the trombone. Play it in all keys.

Develop spontaneity by picking up the trombone and playing something. Don't just noodle, have something in mind: a tune, a pattern or even an interval. Do this often.

Look at the following piece of (unfamiliar) music in the key of Eb.

- Play an Eb scale in both directions, then put the trombone down. "Hear" the first note in your mind in relation to the scale you've just played.
- Figure out the pitch of the rest of the notes from the first note and from other notes on the way. This will help you develop good relative pitch.
- Try to sing the example, perhaps two measures at a time. Check your pitches on a keyboard or on the trombone.
- Learn it little by little by singing it first, then play it on the trombone.
- Now look at it again and hear it in your mind.
- Sing it.
- Once you can sing it through, play it on the trombone.



When you sing, relate it to the trombone.

A good part of your daily practice can be accomplished through singing. Hearing something in your mind is a major part of learning to play it.

Singing is like having your instrument with you wherever you go. Wycliffe Gordon

You can even develop perfect pitch by feeling (tasting) notes on the trombone. Each note has its own taste, which is a combination of hearing the note in your mind and feeling it in your embouchure.

Relative pitch is probably more useful since it deals with the relation of one pitch to another, either step-wise or by interval (2nd, 3rd, 5th, higher or lower). Look for common notes. Remember the pitches you sang because they will help you relate to those coming up.

Learn to sing a chromatic scale. Buzz a chromatic scale with the mouthpiece. Play it on a keyboard and listen to it carefully. Get the sound of it in your ear. There are only 12 different notes -- you've already learned the alphabet, which has more than twice as many letters. Note the relationship of one note to another. Learning the chromatic scale will also help you count up or down to an elusive interval when you sightread a piece of music.

When sight singing, look at the written music. Scan the rhythms first, then the pitches. Work the tune thoroughly. By putting in the required time and effort on the first one that you try, the second one will come easier. Remember the very first step is monumental. It takes a great deal of concentration. Successive steps are largely repetitive. Soon the process will become a way of life, and you'll be on a higher musical level.

The instrument is an extension of the voice. Try singing a trombone part, switching octaves when needed. At a certain point, your singing and playing will come together.

Trombone Basics

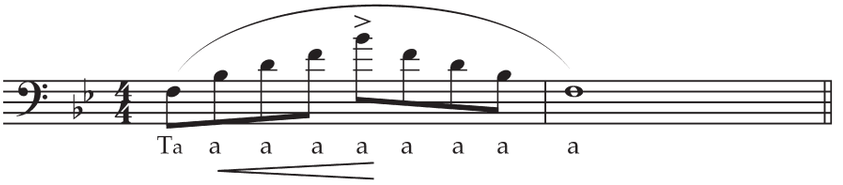
Learn to control the instrument. Learn to use alternate positions. Scales in all 12 keys should be worked out first, then work within the overtone series (see the Appendix on page 36 for the note sequence). Finding alternate slide positions for the notes will help lock it all in.

Be able to tongue and slur scales and arpeggios. Listen to all kinds of instrumental music, preferably brass instruments. Imitate and experiment. Get an idea of tone, projection, phrasing, etc. from what you hear. Put in the time, take out the benefits.

Learn the trombone in all 12 keys. Concentrate on one key each day by playing scales, arpeggios, patterns and tunes in that key. Continue this until music in all 12 keys becomes accessible.

When singing the overtone series, start the first note with *ta* or *da*, then use *ah*. When singing articulated music, use *ta* or *da* throughout.

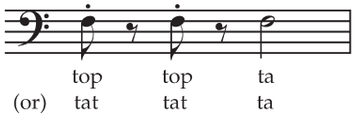
Example: A warm-up on the overtones.



Play this also in 2nd-7th positions.

Short notes: Pronounce *top* or *tat*. Close the end of the note abruptly and conclusively with the lips or the tongue.

Example:

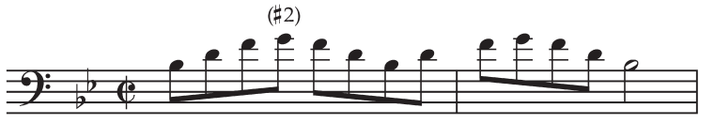


Aside from deliberate lip slurs, every note on the trombone should be articulated (remember *ta, da, la*). Articulate when you sing also.

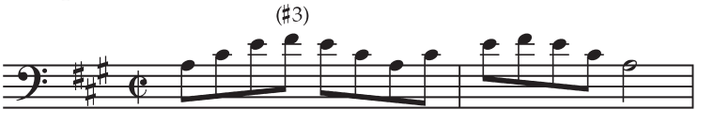
Overtone-related Exercises

Lip slur first, then articulate (double tongue):
Ta-ka-ta-ka
Da-ga-da-ga
Da-dle-da-dle

1st position:

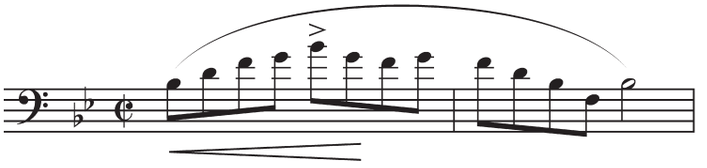


2nd position:



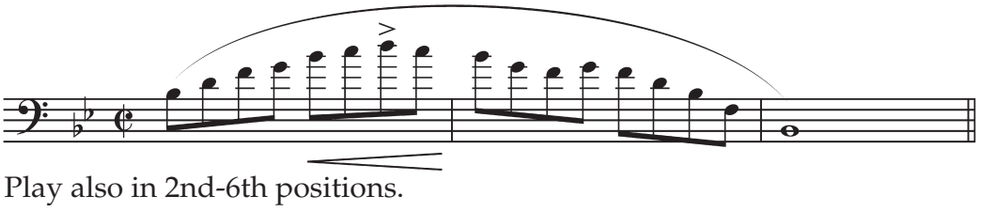
Play also in 3rd-6th positions.

When this sounds consistently good, expand it:



Play also in 2nd-6th positions.

Continue expanding:



Play also in 2nd-6th positions.

Perhaps you have heard the expression "be as one with the instrument" or "your instrument should be an extension of your body," singing warm-ups, exercises, etudes, improvisations, etc. using trombone articulations will help close the gap between playing the trombone and playing music with the trombone.

Develop the ability to sing a passage or tune or exercise. This is not a detour to learning the trombone. It is a path. Wycliffe Gordon

Below are a few well-known tunes. Sing them with neutral syllables (*ta, da, da-dle,* etc). Learn them, remember them, play them in all keys and play them an octave higher/lower.

1. *Amazing Grace*
2. *All Through The Night* (good for scale fragments)
3. *Scarlet Ribbons* (good for interval jumps)
4. *Star Spangled Banner* (good for arpeggios)
5. Any other tunes that you know (hymns, folk tunes, children's tunes, etc.)

When working on developmental exercises and etudes, it will help to alternate your playing with singing. The singing can be done while resting from playing.

If you can sing it, you can play it. Wycliffe Gordon

In time, your singing and playing will come together. Working on one will help strengthen and advance the other.

Summary

When learning an instrument we acquire "tools." We then use the tools to build and create. We learn:

- how to produce a sound and how to refine it.
- how to extend the range.
- how to play melodies.
- how to attack and release notes.
- how to articulate notes.
- how to play loud and soft.
- how to play fast and slow.

Scales and arpeggios are a means to an end. They are our vocabulary.

Attitudes

Bringing a positive attitude to the study of an instrument involves approaching it with:

- a desire to learn.
- a desire to participate.
- a desire to increase and refine skills.
- a sense of exploration.
- a desire to perform and to showcase skills attained.
- a never-ending desire to grow.

More Basics

We need to speak a common language so we can form and communicate our thoughts. We need to be in touch with the world before we go in our own direction.

We need the basics.
We need to learn to fly before we can soar.

Therefore, remember if you can sing it you can play it.
If you can taste the notes (hear plus feel) you'll never miss.

Some problems like range and endurance never go away. They need attention on a daily basis.

Learn scales and overtones. Find alternate positions. Nurture them and trust them.

In his formative years Wycliffe Gordon worked hardest on articulations and mastering slur and lip flexibilities. These can be controlled, developed and expanded during the warm-up session.

Warm-Ups

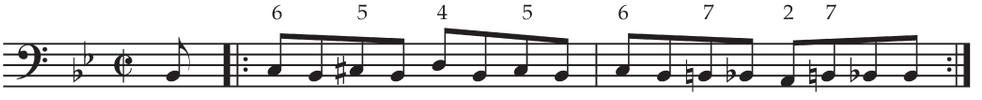
(technique builders)

Q. Are techniques best handled by incorporating them into a daily warm-up routine?
WG: Yes, absolutely.

Warm-ups are indeed the best time to develop and increase techniques. Develop or find exercises for different techniques. Memorize warm-ups and expand them when appropriate.

Correct mistakes en route. Stay in motion, don't bog down. Don't become complacent -- make each note or passage better than the previous one. If you become satisfied with your present status and begin mindlessly repeating patterns, you will not advance. In fact, you'll start going backwards.

Example: Rapid slide movement



Practice slowly at first, then gradually increase the speed. Always challenge your status. If a particular warm-up starts sounding good consistently, it's time to go for more (higher/lower, faster/slower, louder/softer, longer/shorter, etc.). Make your repairs en route. If something doesn't sound good in 1st position, repair it when you do it in 2nd or 3rd position.

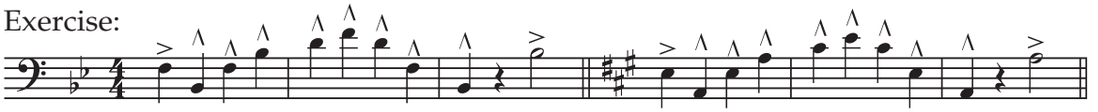
Turn technical problems into warm-up exercises. Once things start coming together, refine them by using them in context.

The following warm-up exercises address various techniques. Use them as a guide to developing your own. Learn them, change them to better suit yourself, perfect them, and expand them.

Memorize your warm-ups as soon as possible and play them from memory. Try to make each note better than the preceding one.

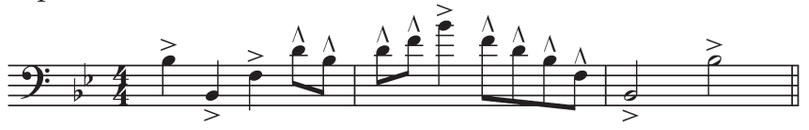
Technique: Middle register attack

Exercise:



Play also in 3rd-7th positions.

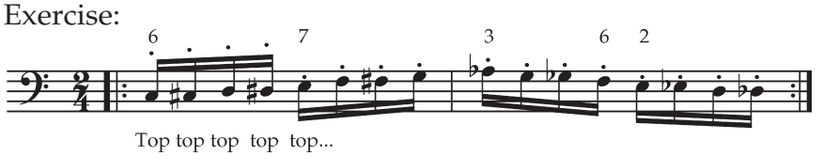
Expand:



Play also in 2nd-7th positions.

Technique: Playing very short notes while moving the slide

Exercise:



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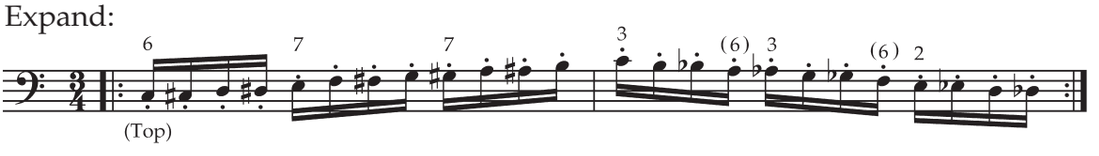
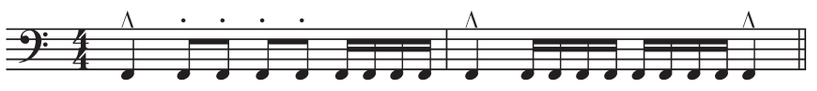


Start in 5th position and play the same sequence (Db to Db).

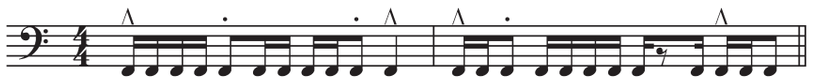
Technique: Fast tonguing of low notes

Exercise:



Play also on E, F#, and G.

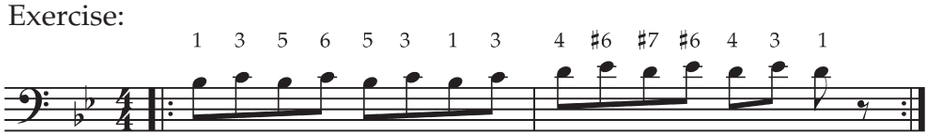
Expand:



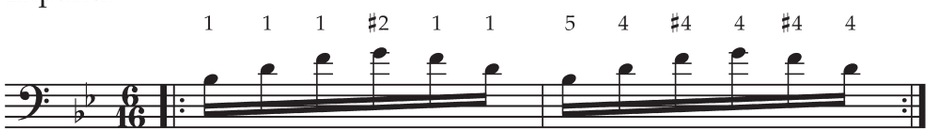
Play also on E, F#, and G.

Technique: Alternate positions

Exercise:



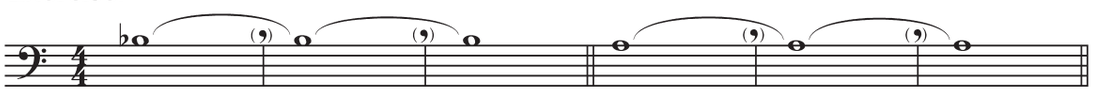
Expand:



Play the sequence starting in 2nd and 3rd position.

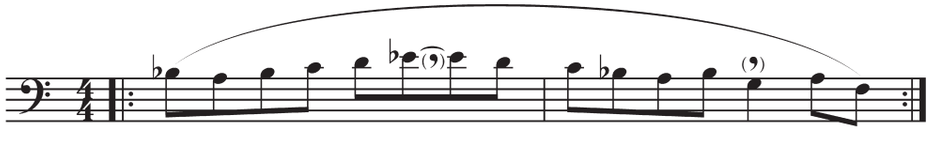
Technique: Circular breathing

Exercise:



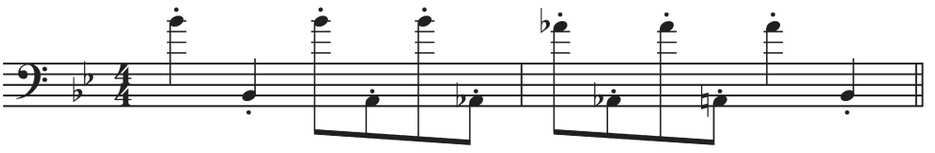
Start on other notes in other registers

Expand: Play slowly at first



Technique: Wide interval skips

Exercise: Positions 1-3



- start on A (positions 2-4)
- start on Ab (positions 3-5)
- start on G (positions 4-6)
- start on Gb (positions 5-7)

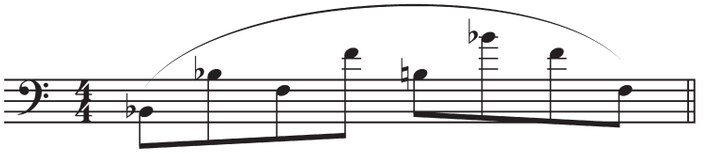
Expand: repeat all of this 8va and 8ba.

Technique: Lip slurs

Exercise #1:

Play also starting in 2nd-5th positions.

Exercise #2:



Play in 2nd-5th positions.

Expand:

Start in 2nd-4th positions.

Create your own warm-ups. Keep them simple but challenging. Focus on obtaining, nurturing and expanding your technique.

Finding a Teacher

Learning or realizing a concept is immediate, like a sudden flash of insight! This should be followed by consistency and refinement.

We all learn something when the right path to it is opened and recognized by us. We need to relate to the path. It needs to coincide with our experience.

A good teacher is a pathfinder. Once shown the path, we then need to follow it. We need to make it our personal path and explore as we go. We can wear it smooth, and we can build on it. We also need to note any side paths to explore later.

If we learn by imitating, why do we need a teacher? Sometimes the approach to a technique is not always apparent and we need a push in the right direction.

For instance:

Extremely High Notes: Squeak them first, then develop accuracy, sound and endurance.

Da-dle (doo-dle) tongue: See **Articulation** section for further study.

> **Explanation #1**: The *dle* part is generally underplayed by the student. This often produces the less effective articulation of *da-l da-l* rather than the preferable *da-dle da-dle*. The *d* in *dle* needs to be pronounced even though the air is going out the sides of the tongue.
>
> **Explanation #2**: Say the word *didn't*, then analyze it (*di-dn-t*). We say *di*, then we combine the end of *did* with the beginning of *nt* and we get *dn*. Then we conclude it with *t*. If we say it wrong we get *did-nt* or *di-dint*. We've all heard people pronounce it in these ways.
>
> **Explanation #3**: Say the word *waddle* or *bottle*. The first syllable is easy. The second syllable needs to "come off" the first syllable. Ignore the repeated letter (*d* or *t*). Pronounce the first syllable of either word, use the third letter to start the second syllable and don't over-pronounce it. *Wadl* or *botl* thus becomes the pronunciation. Say the word several times in a row. Now say *dadl*. You're on the path.
>
> **Explanation #4**: Say the name *Donald* several times in a row, then change it to *dadle* and repeat several times.

A good teacher is a pathfinder. A creative student is also a pathfinder. If someone plays something that you like and you want to learn to play it, start out by listening carefully, asking them questions, and then listening carefully again.

Style

Listen and imitate, then develop your own style. Be wary about trying for style first with an underdeveloped vocabulary or too few tools. This will stunt further development. There are too many players with severe limitations who call their inabilities "style." You want to be able to choose, not settle for.

Embouchure and Aperture

Embouchure = lip muscles: Strength and support of sound, range, endurance.

Aperture = lip opening: Size of sound (narrow or wide). A smaller aperture helps make high notes possible and even limitless. A wider aperture makes for a larger, more massive sound.

True or False?
1. Tighter lips = high register
2. Looser lips = low register
FALSE

1. Smaller aperture and air intensity develops high register.
2. An open mouth, while keeping the embouchure muscles firm, will help develop strong low notes.

Wycliffe Gordon's main focus is on the air.

Practicing without the Instrument

When playing a trombone is not convenient (sitting in a car, etc.), buzzing into the mouthpiece is a productive alternative. The mouthpiece controls the buzz, centers the sound and engages the right areas of the lips.

Without the instrument you can also practice slide patterns with fingers and wrist using reduced wrist motions. The back and forth position practice will carry over to the trombone slide when you actually play.

Look at music, then sing it to yourself silently. Hear it in your mind's ear.

Q. Is music with you all the time?
WG: It is.

Practicing with the Instrument

In developing a technique don't pick it to death. Instead grasp the basic idea and start using it. Refine it further by using it in different situations. Once you latch onto the concept, put it to use.

Etudes: Sightread them first, then work them out. In the sightreading phase play through them without stopping, then do it a second time to pick up some of the pieces. Then work it out. Spend all the time you need to get it right. After working out an etude, play through it again to make sure it's learned.

Warm-ups advance your technique. It is the only time that you are alone with the trombone without the distraction of reading music or improvising.

Be creative. Try things in different keys, 8va or 8ba, fast/slow, loud/soft, etc.

Articulations (Attacks)

Refer back to the **Singing** and **Finding a Teacher** sections for further articulation study.

Double and Triple tonguing:
Loud and strong = *ta-ka* and *ta-ta-ka*
Faster and lighter = *da-ga* and *da-da-ga*
Fastest and most fluent = *da-dle* and *da-dle-a* or *da-dle-da*
Short = *top* (or *tat* or even *pop*) - a chunk of sound, hard and loud like a gavel.
Hard breath attack = *fffff* or *whooo* - full sound, helps endurance.

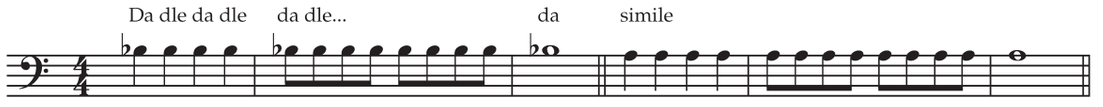
Legato tonguing:
Initial attack = *da*
Subsequent notes = *da* or *ra* (with a tongue flip like a Spanish "r")
Tongue everything. This will make interval skips more accessible and allow for a clear, well defined legato.

Doo-dle (Da-dle) tonguing (see also the **Finding a Teacher** section):
The *dle* part is generally underplayed by the student. This results in a less effective articulation of *da-l* rather than the preferable *da-dle*. The *d* in *dle* needs to be pronounced even though the air is going out the sides of the tongue.

It's like speaking. Often when learning a foreign language we tend to shy away from certain pronunciations which require sounds that we are not used to making. We should instead try to master these strange sounds.

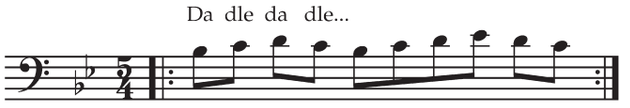
Exercises:

1.

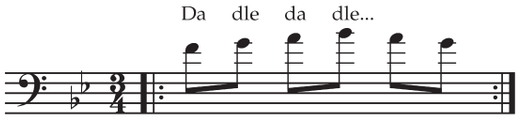


Play on other notes in other registers.

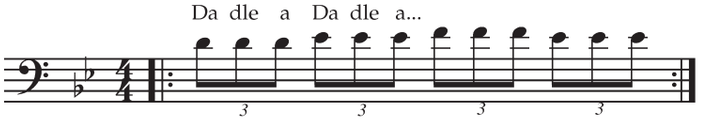
2a.



2b.

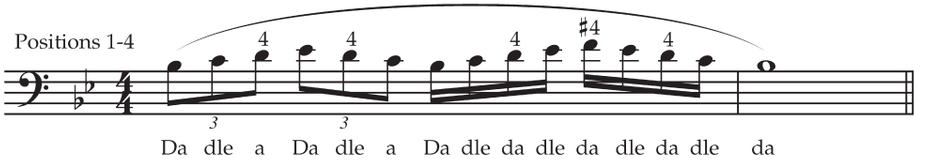


2c.



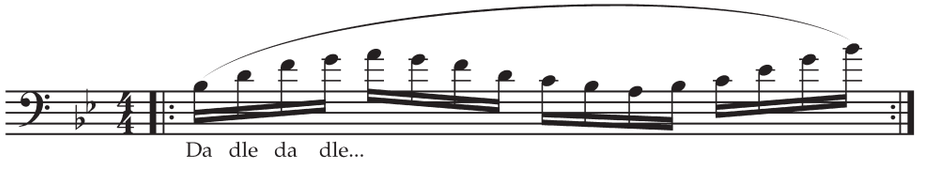
Positions 1-4

3.



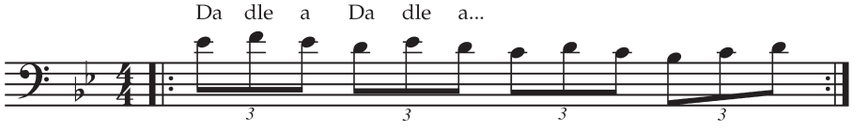
Play also starting on A (2-5), Ab (3-6), and G (4-7).

4a.



Play the same pattern starting on: A, Ab, G, and Gb.

4b.

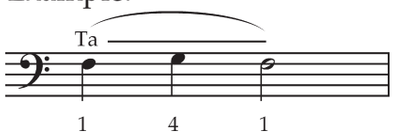


If difficulties occur, go back to the basics.

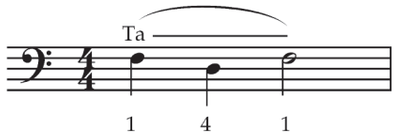
Pronounce *da* in the normal way and then pronounce *dle* with the sides of the tongue, keeping the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth just in back of the top teeth. The *d* in *dle* needs to be pronounced with the sides of the tongue. Otherwise we get *da-l*. Try enunciating the words *waddle* or *paddle* several times, and note how the *dle* part feels. It's the same as *da-dle*.

Besides allowing for great speed of articulation, *da-dle* evens up the "lip break" notes with the "glissando" notes.

Without an attack, the G becomes a “lip break” note.
Example:



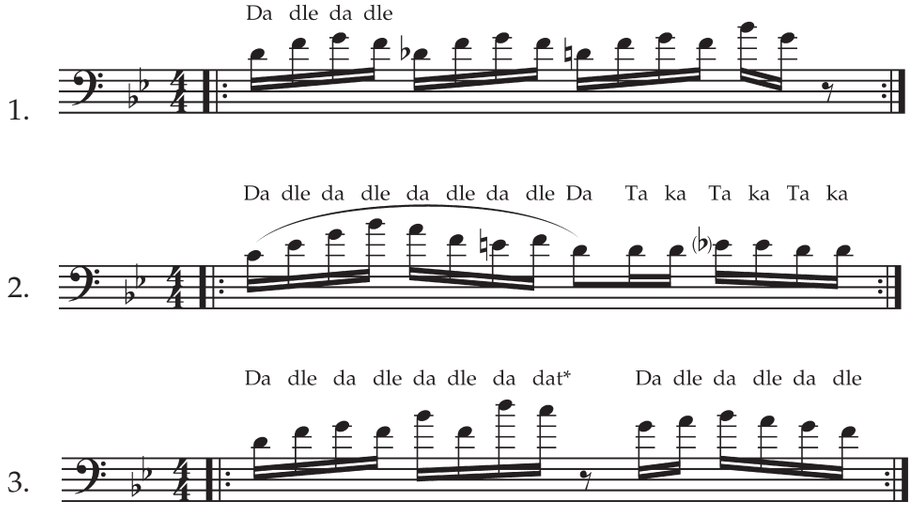
Without an attack, the following F-D-F would be a glissando or smear.
Example:



Practice the articulations in the upper register first so as not to be burdened with excessive slide motion. The vowel sounds favor *ee* and *i* for the upper notes and *ah* and *aw* for the lower ones (from high to low *di-dle dee-dle da-dle daw-dle)*.

Many players refer to this as doodle tonguing. This is a bit misleading, like the *tu-ku* articulations in the Arban book. Pronouncing an *oo* sound tends to purse the player’s lips and distort the embouchure. The *a (ah)* sound works better. Regarding the Arban book, the short pronunciation of the letter u (as in *uh*) also works better.

Exercises: Upper register (minimum position changes) figures.



* note the closing *T*

Breath attacks *fffff* or *whooo* (as opposed to *ta*). Try them in the upper register (F to high Bb), hard air attacks or bursts of sound. Go for a steady tone.

Special Articulations

Flutter tongue (Spanish "r"): The tip of the tongue is placed firmly behind the upper teeth and the air is forced out while holding the tongue position.

Whole tongue flutter: A harder sound (something like a pneumatic drill). The whole tongue is pressed against the roof of the mouth and air is forced through. The effect is striking. Due to the larger amount of air required, the duration of sound is shorter than with the regular flutter tongue. With concentrated practice this can be turned into a controlled attack allowing for individual notes with each tongue hit.

Growl (French "r"): Similar to a flutter tongue but from the back of the throat using the uvula.

Throat hum: Humming while playing adds some funk to the sound and is effective for down-and-dirty styles of playing.

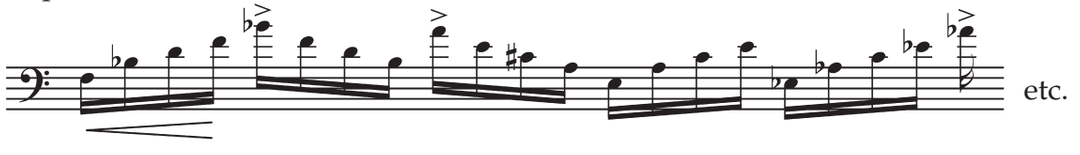
Multiphonics: Humming while playing opens the gate to multiphonics produced by humming a particular tone while playing another. Often the combination of the two tones creates a third tone.

Wycliffe's *da-dle* tongue is harder and therefore louder than many other players. Practicing it on different vowels has helped to bring this about.

Hard double tonguing, *ta-ka-ta-ka*, up and down the overtones can become another useful tool.

Example:

Expand:



Velocity

A trumpet valve travels less than an inch between notes. The trombone slide sometimes travels two feet between notes. By playing in the upper register where the positions are close together, and by using trombone articulation techniques, the player can learn to move quite rapidly. On page 25 there are some exercises in tonguing which were written to minimize slide movement. The following is a closer look at some of the factors involved.

The Work Register

In the trombone's work register (approximately 2nd-line Bb to 4th-ledger-line Bb), the trombonist makes use of double and triple tonguing and alternate positions that minimize the distance the slide must move in order to play fast.

The skills needed for fast playing involve:

1. Tonguing notes while the slide is in motion. This is accomplished by using a smooth, continuous slide motion and playing short notes (think of saying *top* for each note).
2. Using alternate positions to maintain slide direction. Changing slide direction on a downbeat whenever possible makes long position reaches much more attainable.
3. Becoming familiar and comfortable with alternate positions. This minimizes awkward back-and-forth slide movements.

Play a Bb scale fragment starting on middle Bb and go up five notes to F, then down again to Bb (nine notes total).

a. Use normal positions: 1, 3, 1, 3, 1, 3, 1, 3, 1
b. Use an alternate position for the D: 1, 3, 4, 3, 1, 3, 4, 3, 1
c. Use more alternate positions: 1, 3, 4, #6, 6, #6, 4, 3, 1

Now use the (c.) pattern and tongue the notes while keeping the slide in a smooth outward motion. The slide direction reverses on F and the exercise concludes with the slide moving in.

- Listen carefully and fine-tune the intonation, especially in positions #6 and 6.
- Now play it with lip breaks, tonguing only the lowest and highest notes.
- Now play it with the articulation ***da***-*dl-da-dl-****da***-*dl-da-dl-****da***, accenting the 1st, 5th and 9th notes.
- Loop it (play it several times in a row).
- Fine-tune it and build up some speed.

You have been using positions 1-6. Now do the same thing in positions 2-7 using an A scale fragment: A, B, C#, D, E, D, C#, B, A (positions 2, 4, 5, #7, 7, #7, 5, 4, 2). Go through the above steps.

Next start on D above middle Bb and play a D scale fragment: D, E, F#, G, A, G, F#, E, D (positions 1, 2, #3, 4, 4, 4, #3, 2, 1). Then do the same starting on Db (positions 2-5), C (positions 3-6), and B (positions 4-7).

All of this will open a path to increased velocity.

The one factor not mentioned above is *time*. Time is more than important, it's vital. Exercises that help develop speed are all time-related. If you haven't felt a pulse playing the above exercises, think of the nine notes in each one as two groups of four 16th notes culminating on a short 8th note followed by a rest. Looping it creates a continuous eight-note pattern until the final note. Play it again. Count carefully or use a metronome. Start moderately (quarter note = 68-72). Work it out, then gradually increase your speed. Be mindful of tonal clarity and intonation along the way. There is no limit to the speed you can attain. Staying within a time frame means staying in control.

The Upper Register

Whereas the work register of the trombone requires arm movement, the upper register where notes are closer together focuses more on wrist movement.

The study of rapid upper register playing is the study of positions 1 through 3, with an occasional dip to 4th. It is also a study of the upper partials (overtones) which, in the high register, offer an almost unlimited amount of harmonic possibilities. And finally, lacking the valves of the trumpet, it requires the trombonist to develop very rapid articulation skills.

The use of da-dle tonguing is the suggested path (refer to the **Articulation** section of this book). Da-dle tonguing is easier in the upper register where the air stream is narrower and the notes are closer together.

Rapid notes in groups of four are articulated *Da-dl-da-dl Da-dl-da-dl Da-dl-da-dl.*

Triplets are best played *Da-dl-a Da-dl-a Da-dl-a Da-dl-a.* Once again the release of the *l* in the *dl* syllable gives the attack for the *a* sound. A stronger articulation would be *Da-dl-da Da-dl-da Da-dl-da Da-dl-da.*

The above articulations, while presented as *da-dl,* may also be played using *ta-ka* and *da-ga* with one exception: the triple tongue syllables *Da-dl-da* will become *Ta-ta-ka* and *Da-da-ga*.

These are your tools. Learn to use them and you'll be able to build anything.

Endurance

Building and maintaining endurance requires consistency. Playing on a regular basis starts the process. You will be building and using muscles. If you should stop playing for a few days or weeks, you'll have to work to regain your muscle strength.

Once trombone embouchure memory and slide placement is learned, they are always there with you, no matter how long you might lay off the instrument. You can even come back to the instrument after not playing it for a very long time and be able to hit some high notes with good accuracy for about 15 seconds. After that, you'll collapse! The endurance will not be there. Most of us can always run a few steps, but how about a few blocks? One needs to be in and stay in shape. Endurance is the first thing that goes when you lay-off.

If you want to develop good endurance you need to commit to consistent playing on a regular basis. In other words, use it or lose it.

The best way to develop endurance is to rest. Wycliffe Gordon

Rest *before* you actually get tired. Play an exercise or etude and, as you approach tiredness, stop and rest. This is the best way to build endurance. If you play until you are too tired to play anymore, you've already done damage. You will not resume playing on a fresh lip and fatigue will come again very soon. Stopping short of actually needing to stop will keep the lip fresh. The period of rest will allow the blood to flow and regenerate. Resuming playing, you'll last longer. Over a period of time you'll have strengthened your endurance. It's ongoing and limitless.

There are additional things you can do. Control of the air helps endurance. Practicing according to your playing demands also helps. If your trombone playing requirements demand loud playing, then practice loud and develop the endurance for it. Whatever you need to develop and/or maintain, practice that way. Put it into your warm-ups.

Very High Notes

Developing the extreme high register (double Bb and thereabouts) requires narrowing the air stream. For starters, just try to touch the notes. Short staccato squeaks are good. Do a few at a time; don't waste your lip trying over and over. Aim, squeak, then stop. Do five or six in a row, then rest.

You'll develop a taste for the notes before long. Remember that tasting means hearing a note before you play it and feeling it in your chops. Once you can taste the note, you will then go for accuracy by hitting the note in perhaps four out of five attempts. Then when your accuracy improves and you're hitting the note fairly consistently, try for a bit more volume. Work on this for a while and then try lengthening the note a bit.

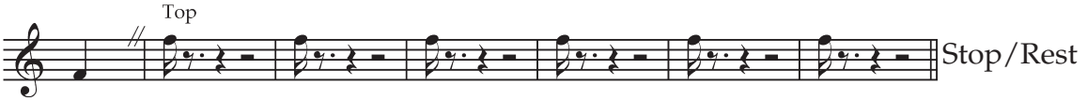
In summary, squeak the note first, next go for accuracy, then go for more power/volume, and finally lengthen the note. This sequence is important since squeaking saves the strength and power follows accuracy.

If high F is your goal you'll get it … then what? Wycliffe Gordon

Make your goal limitless.

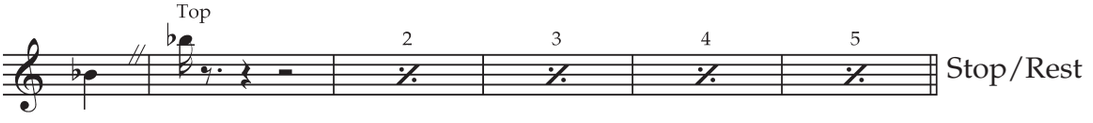
Try singing up there. It will help you focus on the register. Play high note exercises which minimize slide movement. If you can squeak it you can eventually own it.

Example: High F and Double Bb



Play first note for pitch.

Note: Treble clef.



Play first note for pitch.

Go on to something else.

Special Development of the High Register,
and a New Slant on Endurance

Even if I'm tired, I can always play a double high D. Wycliffe Gordon

Playing in the high register is a special kind of feeling. You breathe differently and blow differently when you are playing up there. It's a world unto itself. It is governed by aperture and air. Singing also helps bring it about.

The last thing you probably want to do when your lip is tired is play high notes. But like Muhammad Ali's comment about his intensive roadwork, you can work through the pain. So practice playing high notes when you are tired, but realize that they take special care. Use the air to save the muscles. Narrow the aperture and work the air.

Sing up there as best you can and imitate your voice with the trombone. You can do many things with your voice that perhaps you have never tried.

Play the high notes by "sitting" up there. You will need to get used to playing in this register by breathing, controlling the air, relaxing and overcoming tension.

Once you can produce the extreme high register, try playing fragments of tunes. The first four notes of *Silent Night* would be a good way to start. Keep your sound narrow and focused. As you develop the ability to play in the extreme high register, you can then set about widening your tone and increasing your volume.

Perfect & Relative Pitch

You can develop perfect pitch by tasting notes on the trombone -- remember that tasting is a combination of hearing the note and feeling it (noting the tightness of the embouchure and the resistance of the note) before you play it. Each note has its own unique taste.

Once you consider the way a note tastes, imagine playing that note on the trombone before you've actually played on a given day. See how close you can come to the actual pitch when you play it. Middle F or Bb are good notes to start on.

Think the note before you play it, and try to remember how it sounds and how it feels on the embouchure. Then play it and see how far off you were. Narrow the focus from day to day until you start getting a few. As with very high notes, try to increase your accuracy each time you do it.

When you play a note, remember it. Relate all upcoming notes to it and to each other. This will help develop relative pitch.

Relative pitch is probably more useful than perfect pitch since it deals with the relation of one pitch to another. It requires your awareness of intervals and chords as you play -- a major or minor second, a fifth, an octave, up a fourth, down a fifth, major chord, minor chord, etc. Look for common notes in the phrases that you play. Remembering the pitches you played will always help you relate to those coming up.

Time

Steady time is not a given. It needs to be developed. In Wycliffe's formative years it was an area that he worked on especially hard.

Wynton Marsalis used to drill his smaller ensembles on keeping time. When horns are unleashed from the rhythm section, fast tempos tend to slow down and slow-to-medium tempos tend to speed up.

Think of dancing to obtain the groove of time. Dancing requires keeping constant time.

Feeling time together as an ensemble requires an awareness on everyone's part. Feeling the time develops a sense of playing as part of the rhythm section rather than just playing on top of it. Work on feeling the time. Use a metronome.

Practice singing and playing with and against the time. Do things in tempo. Respond to the count-off emotionally and intellectually.

Time first. Refine the notes and tone later. Always be aware of the beat.

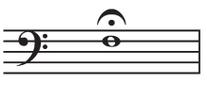
The better command you have of the instrument, the less you will have to focus on the basics and the more you will be with the time while you are performing. Time can be a deterring factor if you need to shift your attention to other technical matters.

Relating to the time puts everything else in perspective.

Long Tones

Practicing long tones is something all instrumentalists do. This works best when the long tone is played over a pulse rather than in isolation.

It's the difference between limited benefit and greater benefit.



Limited Benefit

Greater Benefit

The Plunger

When playing with a plunger, balance the trombone bell against the back of the palm of the hand to allow for open/closed movements.

Many trombone players use a small straight mute (pixie mute or a recorked trumpet straight mute) which they can fit the plunger over. The mute helps to even everything up, lessens the closed-to-open gap and makes it easier to "plunge."

With the open horn (no mute) the plunger enables changes in pitch as well as in timbre.

When using a plunger, closed to open creates a *wa* sound, and open to closed creates an *ow* sound. Variations between closed (+) and open (o) make up a large part of a jazz band's unique ensemble sound. Some arrangers prefer a half-plunger sound, especially during trombone section passages. Hold the plunger in front of the bell midway between closed and open.

Many soloists make use of rapid open/closed effects with the plunger. They also sometimes use a half plunger for a particular sound for the duration of their solo. Combinations of plunger and flutter/growl effects are also very effective on the trombone. Gradual open-to-closed and closed-to-open effects on longer notes are also effective.

A tight plunger against the open bell creates a buzzing sound. Some players put a small hole in the plunger to facilitate this effect.

Wycliffe has a *Plunger Warm-up* on his website which will be helpful to watch and hear. He also has several other solos of all kinds on YouTube.

Use of the plunger is best gained by watching, listening to and imitating soloists. Some well known plunger soloists are Quentin Jackson, "Tricky" Sam Nanton, Clark Terry, Al Grey, Joe Wilder and Art Baron.

Other things to put in or in front of the bell in addition to the variety of trombone mutes include:

- derby or top hat (hard plastic shell with a softer lining inside). This can be played while it's on its own stand or can be held by the player.
- felt hat, slit and placed over the bell, gives a mellow, French horn kind of sound.

The trombone is capable of producing a wide variety of sounds.

Miscellaneous

In a nutshell:
- feel the pulse
- taste the note
- sing the music

Become part of the music. Hear it and make your entrance en route as though you've already been playing it.

Embouchure = strength
Aperture and air = Range and intensity
Tongue = articulation

Q. Do you ever use slide vibrato?
WG: Occasionally, for certain things or on demand.

Q. Do you ever shake the horn?
WG: Yes, sometimes for effects.

Rapid high/low playing is best practiced slowly, pinpointing the notes. It can also be approached by singing accurately.

Note that many jazz trombonists generally work within positions 1-3 (4). Therefore, when you get it all together, you might like to move ahead of the pack. Go for the rest of the positions as there's an unexplored world out there.

Sound vs. tempo

Develop a good sound so as not to have to worry about it while playing uptempos, especially in the low register. Trying to open the sound and "pear-shape" the note in the heat of battle usually results in losing time (dragging the tempo).

Try things 8va and in different keys. Physical changes to your body (tiredness, weight gain/loss, dehydration, etc.) all affect the feel of the horn.

Appendix

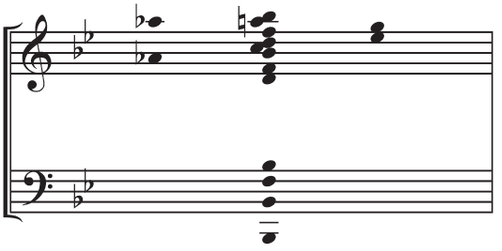
The overtone series is a natural sequence of tones.

Each sequence starts with a fundamental (pedal) tone and ascends in an acoustical pattern.

Pattern (from the lowest note upwards): fundamental • octave higher • 5th higher • 4th higher (fundamental note 2 octaves higher) • major 3rd • minor 3rd • flat minor 3rd (unuseable in 1st position, adjustable in the other positions) • (wide) 2nd (this is the fundamental note 3 octaves higher) • normal 2nd • slightly flat 2nd (useable on some trombones), etc.

Overtones on Bb (4 octaves):

- the notes to the left of the main column are flat
- the notes to the right of the main column are sharp
(the flat notes in 1st position are not adjustable,
all other notes ARE adjustable)



The overtones are always in the same relationship with each other. 2nd position A would be: pedal A - low A - E - A - C# - E - G - A - B - C# - D - E - F# - G - G# - A. The out-of-tune notes are the same as in 1st position, but all are adjustable and useable.

Learning the higher overtones in 1st to 3rd positions will give you most of your high note combinations.

About the Authors

Alan Raph

Alan Raph is a charter member of the American Symphony Orchestra (Stokowski), the Gerry Mulligan Concert Jazz Band, and for many years has been first call bass trombone in the New York City recording studios. He holds the NARAS (National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences) Most Valuable Player award.

He is the author (along with Bill Watrous) of *Trombonisms* (Carl Fischer), *Dance Band Reading and Interpretation* (Alfred) and is at present working on a complete revision of Rochut's *Melodious Etudes for Trombone*. Mr. Raph is represented by several instructional videos and trombone solos on YouTube.

Wycliffe Gordon

Musical ambassador and interpreter of America's music, Wycliffe Gordon experiences an impressive career touring the world performing hard-swinging, straight-ahead jazz, receiving great acclaim from audiences and critics alike. His unmatched modern mastery of the plunger mute and his exceptional technique and signature sound has solidified Gordon a place in musical history known as one of the top trombonists of his generation. Jazz Journalists Association named him "Trombonist of the Year" in 2001, 2002, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2011, and he is a past recipient of the ASCAP Foundation Vanguard Award, among others.

In addition to an extremely successful solo career, Gordon tours regularly leading the Wycliffe Gordon Quartet, headlining at legendary jazz venues and performing arts centers throughout the world. Gordon is a former veteran member of the Wynton Marsalis Septet, Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and has been a featured guest artist on Billy Taylor's "Jazz at the Kennedy Center" Series. Gordon's extensive performance experience includes work with many of the most renowned jazz performers of the past and present.

Gordon's recordings are a model of consistency and inspiration, and his musical expertise has been captured on numerous recordings, including fourteen solo CDs and seven co-leader CDs. Wycliffe Gordon is also a gifted composer and arranger. He is commissioned frequently by renowned jazz groups and organizations and has an extensive songbook of original compositions that span the various timbres of jazz music. His music is performed throughout the world by musicians and ensembles of every caliber.

Gordon is one of America's most persuasive and committed music educators, and currently serves on the faculty of the Jazz Arts Program at Manhattan School of Music. He was awarded an honorary doctorate in 2006 from the University of Scranton for his tireless dedication to the field. His work with young musicians and audiences from elementary schools to universities all over the world is extensive, and includes master classes, clinics, workshops, children's concerts and lectures — powerful evidence of his unique ability to relate musically to people of all ages.

Wycliffe Gordon is a Yamaha artist. For additional information visit www.wycliffegordon.com or contact Brumfield & Associates, info@brumfieldassociates.com.

Wycliffe Gordon Discography

The latest discography information can be found at www.wycliffegordon.com

As a Leader

Hello, Pops (2011)
The Word (2011)
Cone and T-Staff (2010)
Boss Bones (2009)
Bloozbluzeblues (2007)
Storyville (2006)
Cone's Coup (2006)
In the Cross (2004)
Dig This (2003)
United Soul Experience (2002)
What You Dealin' With (2001)
The Gospel Truth (2000)
The Search (2000)
Slidin' Home (1999)

As a Co-Leader

I'm Glad There Is You (2010)
You And I (2008)
We 2 (2007)
This Rhythm On My Mind (2006)
Flowers for Juilli (2004)
Head to Head (2002)
We (2002)
Bone Structure (1996)