

# Leading with Sound:

## A Practical Approach to Your Daily Warm-up

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The value of a thorough and efficient warm-up routine is pounded into our brains from a young age, but too often, the warm-up becomes a mundane set of exercises we automatically do without any discipline. Most warm-ups are structured with variations of Long Tones, Slurs, Tonguing, Lip Flexibility, etc. but we often overlook the most basic – and most important – aspect of the warm-up: **SOUND**. It is my intent to “reprogram” your trombone brain today to think of sound as always leading the way.

SOUND is the direct result of AIR, so a natural place to start a warm-up is with some simple breathing exercises. Many books have been written on how to breath, but the basic fact is that *we do it constantly!* Over-obsessing with the breath can lead to misplaced mental focus while performing, so remember to keep it simple. I like to combine breathing exercises with a bit of stretching to make the most efficient use of my time. Stretches can be of your preference, but generally try to limber up your torso and arms, since those do most of the work in trombone-playing.

### **Breathing/Stretching Exercises** (set a metronome on $\square = 60$ )

1. In for 4, out for 8 paired with Arm Circles.
2. In for 3, out for 12 paired with Arm Across Chest Pulls.
3. In for 2, out for 16 paired with Torso “Tea Pot” stretch.
4. In for 1, out for 20 paired with Shoulder Stretch (arm behind head).
5. In for  $\frac{1}{2}$ , out for 24. (feel free to increase length of exhalation).

Now that the lungs, torso, and arms are limber, let’s get some sound going. Remember this rule: ***Your sound is a direct reflection of your breath.*** If your breath is not full and easy, neither will be your sound.

*(At this point, you can also insert some simple mouthpiece buzzing to limber up the chops. Simple sirens, scales, or melodies are ideal.)*

### **Smears**

The first exercise I do everyday on the trombone are smears. It sounds silly, but we only have one thing on which to focus: **SOUND**. Take a full breath, and just enjoy making sound in a flowing, liquid fashion while maintaining ***Sostenuto***. Blow across partials as if you are playing one very long slide. Another benefit of this exercise is that it gets your embouchure stretched out. Continue this exercise descending as low as possible.

**Easy and Fluid** ♩ = 60

Trombone

Continue descending chromatically

### Air Attacks

Continuing with the concept of Air = Sound, let's explore the "poo" attack. The tongue is unnecessary in making Sound, but too often, players rely on the tongue to start notes rather than the Air. Try this without your trombone: take a breath, form embouchure *making sure your lips are sealed together*, and release the air through the chops without buzzing. You should get a "poo" syllable. This is the impact and immediacy of Air that is required for starting Sound. Now try the same thing, but this time, let your lips buzz. Do it again, adding the mouthpiece. Finally, add the trombone. Make sure you master each step before adding the trombone.

Notice the pattern of this exercise. Start in the mid-register, and widen the range by half-steps in either direction. Continue higher and lower until you reach your limit.

### Slurs

Slurs may be *the most* important exercise for brass players. Slur exercises are key for note accuracy, air flow, and embouchure strength, just to name a few. At this point in my daily warm-up, I use slur studies from many different sources, including my own imagination, varying them on a day-to-day basis. As long as I'm covering a variety of slurs, it doesn't matter which exact ones I'm doing. Plus, keeping it varied makes it interesting. A mundane warm-up means your brain checks out and you're just wasting your time. Keep using the "poo" attack as you execute your slurs.

I highly recommend the following resources for your “Slur Library”. Make sure to cover all registers, starting from the middle and expanding higher and lower. Also, start with slower slurs and move towards faster flexibility.

Brad Edwards – Lip Slurs  
Robert Marsteller – Basic Routines  
Eric Klay – Daily Exercises  
Michael Davis – 15 Minute Warm-up

Charlie Vernon – The Singing Trombone  
Peter Ellefson’s website PDF’s  
Emory Remington – Daily Routines  
Max Schlossberg – Daily Drills

### Articulation

Now we introduce the tongue into our warm-up, but we must remember to *Lead with Sound*, which means to rely on the Air!! When engaged in rapid tonguing, make sure to focus on the resonance and tone of your sound, rather than the mechanics of the tongue. Too often players lose the great sound they established up until this point by just hammering away with the tongue. Remember, Air drives the Sound, and the tongue is a slave to both. It is possible to play *sostenuto* and articulated simultaneously – just keep blowing air!!

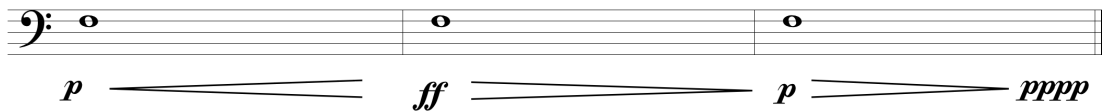


The image contains five staves of musical notation for articulation exercises in bass clef. Each staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth-note patterns. The first staff has a key signature of one flat. The second and third staves have a key signature of two flats. The fourth and fifth staves have a key signature of one sharp. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns such as eighth-note runs, dotted eighth notes, and sixteenth-note groups, all designed to practice tongue articulation while maintaining a steady air flow.

Continue starting on alternatingly higher and lower notes until you cover your entire range. Incorporate other patterns or scales, as well. Consult some of the aforementioned publications for additional ideas. Remember, **Lead with Sound!!**

## Long Tones with Swells

Were you worried there have been no Long Tones yet? Well, here they are, with an additional flavor. We can maximize efficiency by combining dynamic control with tone and pitch stability. In this exercise, set your metronome to a slow speed, perhaps  $\square = 50$ . Use a tuner to assure pitch stability, and challenge yourself to play as soft and as loud as possible. This exercise develops not only your control, but your embouchure strength as well. Use one breath per bar. **Keep the Sound full and resonant at all dynamic levels!**



Continue this exercise throughout your entire range, or focus on different registers from day-to-day. Some ideas for progressing forward are by scales, Circle of 4ths/5ths, chromatically alternating up and down, or at random intervals.

## Range & Embouchure Stability

We are always trying to increase our range, but in an effort to get the notes out, it is tempting to resort to improper embouchure placement. In this section, our purpose is two-fold: (1) increase our range in both directions, while (2) maintaining a uniform embouchure setting. In the following exercise, keep your “middle register embouchure”, and don’t worry if the high or low notes don’t want to pop out. **Developing range takes time, patience, and discipline.** Use a mirror to make sure you are keeping your embouchure as stable as possible.

This exercise may appear as extreme, but you can tailor the range to your own needs (start lower; end higher). Stretch your comfort zone every day to increase your range. Keep the dynamic *mp* – *mf*, and play each arpeggio in one breath.



Continue descending keys chromatically until.....



Again, this exercise takes significant discipline and patience. The key here is to focus on the **Method** rather than the **Result**.

### ***PPPP***

The final skill I focus on in this warm-up is **soft playing**. Playing softly on a brass instrument takes efficiency, embouchure strength, control, and a full, resonant sound. Too often, players will starve the sound of its key ingredient – Air -- yielding an airy, fuzzy tone. Soft playing is a most commonly undeveloped skill of young players, but perhaps one of the most important for success in your career!

In this exercise, we use a simple Arban's book study at a relatively slow tempo and with legato articulation, slurring wherever possible. Buzz a few bars of this exercise first, with a stable embouchure and ample air support. Try different registers, scales, etudes, and tempi each day to maximize your development.



## **Closing Comments**

By this point, you will surely feel tired and perhaps more than “warmed-up”. That is totally normal, as it took me at least a month to adjust to doing this routine every day. Remember to pace yourself, and if you don’t complete each section in it’s entirety, that’s OK! Many of these concepts are surely new, so be patient and allow yourself the time to assimilate the information. If you find yourself losing focus, put the trombone down and go do something else. Anything other than 100% focus can yield undesirable or even damaging results.

Should you have questions, concerns, or comments, please contact me through the methods below. I am always open to explaining myself further or helping you through a ‘roadblock’.

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