

## **Trumpet Tips: Learn to Love the Process**

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A more in depth discussion of this topic will be published in the January 2018 ITG Journal. However, since that is a ways off and I would like to impart some of this information now. The origin of this topic is two-fold: the need for all of you to understand the importance and value of practice, and the recent, tangible result from Super Bowl LI where a team of players who have expressed they love to practice overcame a team that ran more on emotion than precision. Performances create great emotion, but without the love of practice as a foundation, too often the emotion is overwhelmed and falls away when turmoil strikes on stage.

Practice takes many forms, from time on the instrument, or listening to great performers, to studying music scores, or reading historical and pedagogical texts. It requires discipline to consistently follow through on each of these on a regular basis and reach a process where our thoughts are directed solely on our musical product and not about playing the trumpet. Three of the top items to stress when establishing the process are breathing, tuning, and performing. This is not intended to be a practice guide, but rather highlighting these three key areas for improvement, developing them through a process, and what is achieved in the form of a greater product.

High quality, consistent breathing is something frequently stressed to brass players. Too many players, however, focus on perfecting their first breath and do not consistently apply the process that got them a high quality first breath to their later breaths. This is like a wide receiver running a great first five yards of a route, but then doing their own thing after that. The quarterback knows where to throw the ball to the receiver initially, but after the five yards, has no clue. The receiver is then useless to the offense and may even cause a negative play from the quarterback holding the ball and taking a sack. If the trumpeter's initial breath is excellent, that gets the piece off to a great start. However, if each subsequent breath does not match the same standard as the first, they become increasingly useless and lead down a spiral of poor playing. This scenario frequently plays out in recitals when the emotions are high and the discipline to the process may be lacking. The reward for learning to love the process of developing a consistently high quality breath is a consistent product produced through the trumpet.

A process to accomplishing this is to take two good breaths away from the instrument, but acting as though preparing to play. Then, take the same breath and play the desired phrase on the instrument, stopping at the next intended breath. Take the trumpet away, take two quality breaths again, simulating the beginning of playing, then breathe a third time and play the next phrase. This continues all the way through the etude, excerpt, section of solo, or whatever is being practiced. This process should be repeated until the practicer is confident they understand and can consistently reproduce the product. That may be a matter of hours, or days, or even weeks. Discipline is key to reproducing consistent results. Repeat the previous process, but do

not stop the line for the second breath. Breathe to continue on and see if the second breath matches the first. Stop at the third breath and restart the process. Each time you feel confident you have mastered reproducible results, add a breath to the sequence. Just as the quarterback knows where to throw the ball to a receiver who runs excellent routes, the trumpeter knows how each note will begin off of a breath because of the consistent breath.

The best sounds come from those with the best intonation, and the best sections know where every note needs to be placed in a chord or unison. First, learn to use a tuner correctly for a brass instrument. A standard tuner is set for equal temperament. A tuner with a setting for **just intonation** is needed. There are numerous apps that quickly switch between equal temperament and just intonation. Pick an easy key, set the tuner for just intonation, and have the tuner play a tonic drone. Tune each note in the key, paying attention to what each interval sounds like against tonic. By learning the sounds of the intervals, it is easier to reproduce the results in all keys.

To not lose sense of the musical goal, set a tonic drone and pick different notes in an piece to stop on to allow yourself to verify whether they truly understand the musical relationship and the intervals. There is very little value in simply mastering technique without striving for a musical end, so always remember why the process is important.

The final process is knowing how to perform. Most of the technical parts of this process are accomplished by the first two. This mental side can be more complicated depending on the individual. Nerves, environmental conditions, health, and food choices are all among the external factors that can contribute to negative performances. It is important to practice slowly and diligently to develop confidence. And slowly means really slow. If there is an average daily increase of six beats per minute, in one week the tempo is increased by 42 beats per minute. Six is barely noticeable. 42 is dramatic. Trying to practice a piece and learn it near performance tempo does not allow mastery of music, or proper technique coordination. Discipline to take the time to learn the music leads to confidence in knowing how the end result will come out.

An additional challenge is to play one thing perfectly everyday. If a performer never plays anything perfect, then the only process being consistently reinforced is inconsistent performance. Start simple with, for example, a C major scale. Every few days, as confidence builds, up the difficulty level on what is being performed. Learn to expect the desired results, not hope for them.

Product is how musicians are judged, just as athletes are evaluated by fans on game day. They do not see the daily practice. Performances may feel more rewarding and be more memorable than daily practice, but to get to the point where performance does not require thought takes adherence to a process designed to accomplish that. Next time in the practice room, remember that loving practice, the process, is how those memorable performances get created.