

TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION

INTERMEDIATE INSTRUCTION SERIES



TROMBONE

ALLEN CLARK
CLINICIAN

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FOREWORD

The primary focus of the annual Convention of the Texas Bandmasters Association is providing opportunities for professional growth for its members. Your attendance at the clinics offered in the Beginner Instruction Series which began in 1995 has encouraged the Board of Directors to continue with a second series of clinics which addresses the needs and instructional strategies for second-year band students. Our clinicians are chosen from the ranks of superior music educators in our state, and they represent a wide diversity in geographic location as well as school size and setting.

This year clinics are scheduled for bassoon, low clarinet, saxophone, trombone, euphonium, tuba, and membrane percussion. Each person attending will receive a companion booklet in which you will find suggested materials and pedagogical strategies which our clinicians are so generous to share with us.

We appreciate the extra effort of the clinicians who prepared these clinics. We also acknowledge Jim Hagood, TBA Past President, whose initiative got the series started, and both Bob Brandenberger and Mike Olson who continued to move forward with the project.

This series is respectfully dedicated to the many band directors, both past and present, who have worked so hard to make our students' experience in band music such a rewarding one.

Bob Parsons, President, Texas Bandmasters Association

ALLEN CLARK

Allen Clark received his BM and MM degrees from Sam Houston State University, as well as a Professional certificate in Supervision and a Mid-Management Certificate from the University of Texas, Brownsville. Mr. Clark is currently the Administrator for Fine Arts in the Brownsville Independent School District overseeing fine arts instruction for approximately 40,000 students. Professionally he is a member of TMEA, TBA, and Phi Beta Mu.

INTERMEDIATE TROMBONE

Allen Clark

Steps to Becoming a Great Player

Among young students trombone is not always considered to be the coolest instrument in the intermediate years. Most of the time other instruments have the melody and the trombones are called on for the horsepower sections. Students are quick to judge this inequity and decide early on that the trombone is not an important instrument in the band structure. This problem must be addressed first.

MOTIVATION TO PLAY TROMBONE

The constant message to the intermediate trombone player should be one of importance, uniqueness, and high esteem from the director. Self esteem plays a big role in the success of trombone player. The student must know his/her importance to the group.

Beware of downplaying the need for trombone players:

- Trombone players are necessary to the school band program... good players can make or break the chances of success for a competitive band
- It takes great ear-training to produce a player that can play with a good sense of intonation
- 0 The difficulty level of playing trombone will require dedication and practice, sometimes in excess of time requirements of other instruments
- Parents often see a trombone as difficult to manage for younger students, and may discourage bringing it home after school

Encouragement answers all these problems.

METHODS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Air Stream: A consistent, hot air stream is necessary for good tone on any brass instrument but it is especially critical for trombone tone production.

1. Breathing must be addressed to reflect a deep breath filling the middle part of the body first.
2. The breath should be taken with a wide open throat, giving a quiet "0" sound when exhaling.
3. The quantity of the air intake should slightly exceed the need.
4. Planning for the breath is necessary. Decide where breaths should be taken and mark the phrase for consistency.
5. Developing the diaphragmatic muscles for support and projection is a lifelong goal.
6. Airstream must be controlled. A good technique is to play through the passage by blowing on the palm of the hand, noting the inconsistencies in the air stream.
7. Practice at all volumes. Too often there is only one practice volume which limits skills at different volumes.

ARTICULATION: While legato tonguing is usually the most difficult concept to teach a young player, forms of marcato and staccato playing must be practiced also. All articulation requires a consistent air stream,

Legato: **“Lightning fast, smooth as glass!”** Timing the tongue with the slide is the ultimate goal. Playing legato style requires a smooth air stream with a very gentle “da” or “tha” syllable. Exercises to practice this technique should include twelve to sixteen beats in a moderato tempo, moving to distant slide positions, using a legato syllable. Emphasis should be on the continuity of the airstream and the gentle interaction of the articulation. Placement of the tongue should be above the front top teeth about one quarter inch from the gum line. Difficulties in legato tonguing is easy to diagnose and remedy. If the articulation is too harsh simply move the tongue back further in the top of the mouth.

Marcato: **“Separated but not too short”** This articulation is often the overlooked skill. Students often exaggerate the shortness or assume the length to be longer than it actually calls for. Most often students will decay the sound before the end of the note in this articulation. The syllable is a “tah” with a hot air stream behind the articulation. Be careful that the sound is not stopped with a “T” articulation.

Staccato: **“Short, light, and bounced”** describes the staccato articulation. This articulation can be applied too often. It is easy to master, requires little effort, and does not need too much air. The syllable is “ti”, “tu”, or “toh”, depending on the register. Again, be careful of the “t” release... a definite no-no.

For the advanced student in this age group it is not too early to investigate the multiple tonguing techniques. Just remember; all tonguing is reliant on the air behind the tongue. The syllables must be equally produced and result in an even, consistent tonguing pattern, no matter how fast it goes.

TIMING THE SLIDE MOVEMENT:

“Timing is everything!” Slidework seems to present the most difficulties. Holding the slide is generally done with the opposing thumb and at least the index and third finger. Good control of positioning is a matter of practice time to build good habits. Always insist on quick slide movement. Almost no flaw is more obvious than the slow note changes that create smears.

There is some debate about whether slide technique should look graceful or jerky. My suggestion is to close your eyes, see which one works best for the student. Use that one. Dragging in tempo to accommodate slide changes is unacceptable. Alternate slide positions can quickly improve awkward position problems. Insist on good rhythm, no one said it was easy, just necessary.

Great slide work should sound like the instrument has valves!

BUILDING THE CHOPS !

There is no substitute for time on task. A practice session should start with long tones in the middle of the comfortable register, using a mirror to monitor the embouchure. Breathing is practiced as well as tone. Simple articulations should then be incorporated into

the long tones. After a two minute pause it is time for ascending/descending lip slurs, all with a consistent air stream. No tonguing after the first note! Practicing specific skills should center on the needs of the player. There are a wide array of intermediate etude books that address common problems for young trombone players. Toward the end of the practice session the player should practice something that is fun to play. Playing the trombone should be enjoyable. Make sure the player has plenty of appropriate literature to play. Include some easy duets to encourage "buddy practice".

LEARNING TO PLAY IN TUNE

Like the violin, trombone must be learned using a well developed sense of intonation. The first step to good intonation is a good tone and a consistent slide position, including fourth and fifth positions. Insist on getting the slide in the right place every time. Listen to make the small adjustments necessary. Train the ear to hear the difference. Practice the awkward distances for slide accuracy. Alternating eyes open/closed practice can add to confidence in correct positions. Trombone players should pair up with another player to learn to match pitch. Unisons, octaves, and intervals can be used to train the player to listen and adjust.

CONCEPT OF PLAYING

Nobody wants wimpy trombone players. Good low brass sections must feature trombones who can play at all volume levels, with good control, and perform all styles proficiently. A young trombone player should practice in a full, clear volume. Parents must understand that the practice session is not as quiet as other instruments. Contrast of volumes must be rehearsed, with no drop in quality of performance. It is easier to get a young player to play softly than it is to get him to play loudly with good control. Remember, the horsepower comes from the low brass, and there is no substitute for maturity of sound. Practice sessions should include a mirror to monitor the embouchure. "Flat chin, corners in" holds true for most brass embouchures. Too much pressure on the mouthpiece can really inhibit the development of the young player.

BUILDING SKILLS

Great expectations usually result in great accomplishments. A young trombonist needs to play major, minor, and chromatic scales. More than any other instrument the trombone requires the player to learn the patterns of the different scales for reading and intonation purposes. Articulation and timing of the slide is another area of skill building. A daily regimen of awkward position drills will develop good playing skills. Playing melodies in a variety of styles will enhance phrasing, breathing, and articulation. Practicing articulation studies will develop skill in different styles. The keyword here is daily practice. My favorite slogan is: **"Practice only on the days that you eat, if you don't eat, you don't have to practice."**

INSTRUMENT CARE

Taking care of the trombone is a matter of common sense. When the instrument needs to be cleaned use the same methods you would to bathe a baby: Tepid water

temperature, mild soap, soft cloth for drying... no abrasives anywhere. When the tuning slides need cleaning I use a product called Never-Dull. It is an impregnated cotton product that is non abrasive and cleans oxidation really well. Wash out the slide weekly with clean water, wipe the slide dry with a paper towel. If your instrument has a rotor oil it regularly. Apply tuning slide grease as needed. Don't let it sit for too long without lubricating the tuning slide.

SLIDE CARE

Slide care is essential. I prefer the prepared brand name products. Whatever your favorite is can be used as needed. If you use cream it must be applied sparingly to the enlarged part of the tube at the end of the slide. If it is a liquid use as needed. If it is a combination of cream and liquid be sure to clean the tubes regularly to avoid buildup. A water bottle with a spray nozzle makes a slide work great (and relieves boredom in a slow rehearsal). Take care not to ding the slide. There are commercial plastic tubes available for protection of the slide. These help the young player avoid accidents. However nothing beats good care and responsibility for the instrument.

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Make it clear to the trombone players that they are important to the success of the band. Theirs is a special mission. Get them to be proud of their effort and ask them to help recruit more trombone players. The world needs more trombone players. Say positive things when dealing with young players. Help them become good role models for others.