

Perfecting Your Practice for Peak Performance

Introduction

*It was a dark and stormy night and the stage was cold. No, it was a perfectly sunny day and the crowd was waiting. No, it was the premier performance evening and the audience was all dressed up. No, it was my senior recital and my friends were eager to hear me. No, it was an audition and the committee was getting ready for me to walk out on stage. That old familiar thought was racing through my mind, "**Am I ready for this?**"*

This is not a method book, but rather a "guide book." Starting around 1973, after many years of formal study, I bought everything available for trumpet in the Robert King Catalog. I realized it was important to be aware of everything that had been published. A goal I set for myself was to become familiar with all the literature for the trumpet. I purchased all the method books and "started over" in my quest to become the best I could become. I bought all the text books and self-help books I could find. Some had strange and unusual titles; one even promising triple high C's. (I never got there!) If I gleaned only one new insight from an entire book I thought it was worth the money. What I learned in the last four decades is that all those books helped me in some way.

*This book offers you some of the most important things I have learned during my years of studying, striving and playing. It is NOT, however, a substitute for reading and working with the many other fine books now available. I encourage you to buy, read and study with all the time and energy you have. **I have become my own teacher, and you must do the same!** This is something I stress at every lesson with my students; I am their guide, but ultimately they are their own teacher. I can show a way that has worked for me, but I cannot do the work for anyone else. You must teach yourself.*

Although you may already be familiar with some of the ideas I present perhaps my explanations and accompanying exercises will help you better understand and apply these concepts. The sooner you memorize these exercises and patterns the quicker you will experience the results. By memorizing them (or your own variations) you will be better able to focus your attention on your sound and the physical things happening as you play. I hope you will be encouraged to write some exercises of your own which will help you on the way to becoming your own teacher.

Mick's Ascending Bending Exercises

The first staff shows three measures. Measure 1: C4 (0), B3 (123), C4 (0). Measure 2: C#4 (0), B#3 (13), C#4 (123). Measure 3: C5 (13), B4 (23), C5 (13).
The second staff shows three measures. Measure 1: C#4 (23), B#3 (12), C#4 (23). Measure 2: C5 (12), B4 (1), C5 (12). Measure 3: C5 (1), B4 (2), C5 (1).
The third staff shows three measures. Measure 1: C#4 (2), B#3 (0), C#4 (2). Measure 2: C5 (0), B4 (23), C5 (0).

Play using designated fingerings but bend the 2nd note to match the pitch of 1st note. When bending the notes make it a **fast bend**, no gliss between "bent" notes and normal notes. The pitch and sound will never be as good on the bent note as the correctly fingered one. The movement of the lips and tongue playing the bent note is what the exercise is all about. You will probably find it easier to bend lower notes compared with higher notes, noticeable around middle (3rd space) Bb-C. Much benefit will be gained by practicing bending from middle C up to G above the staff.

As you play this exercise notice that your tongue probably **moves upward** in your mouth in order to make the bend. This is similar to the movement of your tongue when doing upward lip slurs. Also notice that your lips probably need to "pucker", similar to a kiss or a light peck on a cheek. In other words they move **slightly forward** towards the mouthpiece. This is similar to the motion your lips should do as you ascend while playing, and most prominently when doing upward lip slurs.

The main purpose of **Ascending Bending** is to train the lips in this forward motion. Use this motion when moving to the higher register. Always use when playing upward lip slurs and ascending passages of music. I liken it to having a bigger pillow of lip between my teeth and the mouthpiece. This larger lip pillow helps counteract the excessive pressure we sometimes generate with our arms while pressing the trumpet and mouthpiece against our lips and teeth. **This excessive pressure cuts off the blood supply and oxygen to our lip muscles** and makes us tire.

Continue this exercise as high as you want, but at least one octave. Play slowly: the benefit is in playing the "bent" note.

Once this becomes comfortable and your default way of playing, extend the exercises in as many variations as you want. Using the I chord and IV chord as found in the Clarke Technical Study #3 will help reinforce this concept. Start each exercise with bent half notes or quarter notes of the key you are playing. For example, in the key of C, start with my first measure above and then go directly to Clarke #52. Maintain the thought process and mechanics of **Ascending Bending** as you play the exercise.

This exercise and the consequent results, if done properly, addresses the bad habit of "smiling" while ascending on a brass instrument. This smiling embouchure is one of the most pervasive bad habits of trumpet playing. If young students were taught a different way of playing from the very beginning many embouchure problems would never happen.

I encourage you to try this new way of playing.

Scales With Trills

Play Slowly

The image displays ten staves of musical notation, each representing a scale with trills. The scales are arranged in pairs, with the first staff of each pair showing the ascending scale and the second staff showing the descending scale. The keys and directions are as follows:

- Staff 1: C major, ascending.
- Staff 2: C major, descending.
- Staff 3: D major, ascending.
- Staff 4: D major, descending.
- Staff 5: E major, ascending.
- Staff 6: E major, descending.
- Staff 7: F major, ascending.
- Staff 8: F major, descending.
- Staff 9: G major, ascending.
- Staff 10: G major, descending.

Each staff begins with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The ascending scales consist of eighth notes, and the descending scales consist of quarter notes. Trills are indicated by a 'tr' symbol above a note. In the descending scales, the final notes are marked with '8^{vb}' and a dashed line, indicating an octave below. The key signatures are indicated by sharps and naturals at the beginning of each staff.