

# Brent Mead

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## Trombone Techniques for Band Directors

### Tone Production

- Air passes through the aperture in the lips to create a buzz. Place the tongue where the teeth meet the gums to provide diction, or articulation, to each note.
- Three Variables to the perfect tone
  - Dynamics = Air Volume
    - More air, louder sound
    - Less air, quieter sound
  - Pitch = Air Speed
    - Faster air, higher pitch
    - Slower air, lower pitch
  - Vowel Shape/Tongue Placement
    - This is the third variable in tone production but is less dogmatic. A higher tongue creates less space in the mouth, which creates a faster air speed. Think EE for a smaller oral cavity and AHH for a larger oral cavity.
    - In general, higher and quieter notes need a smaller oral cavity and lower and louder notes need a larger oral cavity.
- This assumes a perfect, relaxed release of air and an efficient embouchure
  - The air should move freely from the body. Students will often ‘meter’ the air either with their throat or lips. Exercises will be discussed to practice or monitor these difficulties.
  - An efficient embouchure is one that allows the freely moving air to pass through without unnecessary tension. The biggest problem I see in students is they are pressing their lips together vertically too much. This prevents the air from passing through the lips and creates a pinched, buzzy tone. I prefer to teach my students to create a hole in their lips and change the size of that aperture. I find this method to be preferable to the ‘press your lips together’ or ‘say Mmm’ beginning exercises to form an embouchure.

### Tone Equation

Air Speed \* Air Volume \* Vowel Shape = Tone

### Tone Troubleshooting

- Practice ways to manipulate the above variables off the instrument. Blowing a sheet of paper in front of your face can help control air volume. Placing your finger in front of your mouth and creating a higher or lower pitched sound creates a higher or lower velocity of air. Long tones or singing while changing the vowel sound (EE II AA UU OO) can help students learn how to change this variable.
- Too fast of air will create a bright, brassy sound. Too slow of air will create a diffuse, unfocused, lazy sound. Students often use too slow of air.
- Too much air creates an overblown (very loud), blasty, tone. Too little air creates a shy, quiet tone.
- Too small of an oral cavity creates a pinched, small, dense and often sharp in pitch tone. Too large of an oral cavity creates a diffuse, unfocused, wide and often flat in pitch tone.
- As previously stated, tightly pressed lips will create a pinched, closed tone.

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## Hand Slide: Pitch & Technique

- As the only instrument in the band that uses a fully chromatic method of changing pitch, great care must be taken for the instructor to teach this skill.
- In a perfect world, trombone students would spend time matching pitches with another musician. In 1-on-1 lessons, I spend time with students playing long tones and having them match me. I often will use quarter-tones or horribly out of tune notes just so they can match me. Something to emphasize with your students is that the pitch is always right, not your slide position. A common struggle is students rely too much on visual cues to know they're in tune; this just cannot be true. "Do you listen with your eyes or ears?" is a question I often ask of students.
- That said, here are some tips:
  - When you warm up the band, take the time to be picky with pitch. In the hundreds of band rooms I've visited, I've noticed the directors that are demanding with the warmup (instead of using the first 5 minutes of playing as a habit) have ensembles with better pitch.
  - Become familiar with the Remington interval exercises. These are crucial for building fundamentals of intonation in brass players, especially trombonists.
  - Please refrain from relying on using visual cues for slide positions. They're useful in the beginning but the more you can emphasize listening and slightly changing the slide position to be in tune, the more you and their future band directors will appreciate it.
  - Please don't let your students place their fingers on the bell in 3rd/4th positions. This reinforces the 'listening with your eyes' idea and will be difficult in faster moving passages.
  - I use the phrase 'adjust with your fingertips' to make slight pitch adjustments.
  - If your students are struggling to adjust their hand slide or match pitch, make sure they've oiled their slide. Students should use slide cream on their slide every week. I like to use water and a soft towel to clean off old gunk before applying new slide cream + water.
- Concerning the technique of moving the slide, trombonists should be encouraged to keep their slide on each note as long as possible. If their playing and articulation is messy, try encouraging students to move their slide 'later on in the note.' I find that sometimes the message 'move your slide faster' gets students to change the tempo or rhythm.
- If there is a rise or dip in the sound at the end of the note, they are tonguing too late or moving their slide too early. If there is a rise or dip in the sound at the beginning of the note, they are tonguing too early or moving their slide too late.

## Equipment Suggestions and Notes

- Trombones
  - Here are some of my favorite brands to recommend. Any of the student models listed here will be fine: Bach, Conn, Getzen, Jupiter, Yamaha. Some of my favorite intermediate trombone models include the list above but also include: Shires Q Series, King 3BF or 4BF, and Courtois 260 or 280. When buying a step-up trombone, I always suggest buying used. The quality difference between

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buying a new and used F-attachment trombone is not worth the drastic price difference.

- Budget an extra \$150-300 for a slide repair/touch up when buying a used trombone. The biggest indicator of the quality of a trombone is the quality of the slide. Don't be concerned if a trombone has dents in the bell section. Most dents in the bell and tuning (not hand) slides can be removed easily. Don't be concerned with lacquer loss. Be wary of a used trombone that has copper-red circles that look like a bullseye on the slide. You will often see this on the bottom crook of the slide near the waterkey. This is red rot and can mean you'll need an entirely new slide.
- I usually suggest students buy a larger trombone when they are consistently overblowing their student trombone and their technique is mostly stable. Buying a step-up trombone will almost always be bigger and this will cause some challenges for a few months. If the student is invested in trombone and is stable in their fundamentals, I suggest to the student to buy a new trombone.
- Mouthpiece
  - There are two different sized trombones: small shank and large shank. This affects which mouthpieces can be placed in each trombone. Some of the measurements will be different for each sized shank but each trombone will be detailed as either small or large shank. In general, a bore size of under .547 (.525, .512, .508, .500, .481, etc.) will be small shank and the only large shank trombones you will see are .547 or .562(bass trombone). Most of your students will have small shank trombones unless they are playing on a professional level F-attachment trombone.
  - Each mouthpiece maker has their own way to designate mouthpieces and the differences between them. In general, the only thing you should be concerned about is cup depth and rim size. I usually don't suggest equipment changes until high school. Rim size affects how much of the lips enter the mouthpiece. High school students with larger lips can be encouraged to get a mouthpiece with a larger rim. Cup depth affects the brightness of the tone: a shallow cup is brighter and a deep cup is darker.
  - Beginning mouthpieces:
    - Yamaha 48S, Bach 7C. You might also see Bach 12C in a beginner kit. Those are fine, but can get small for middle school students.
    - I consider moving students that have their fundamentals down and have larger lips (or maybe playing on an intermediate F-attachment) to a slightly larger mouthpiece like a Bach 6.5A or Bach 5G.
- Accessories
  - Slide cream is better than slide oil. Use Yamaha slide cream (purple bottle), Slide-O-Mix: Rapid Comfort is black and white or Classic Mix is 2 bottles with red caps; or Trombotine. Superslick or Bach trombone cream do not work. No slide oil is good for the slide.
  - I use slide cream with several sprays of water.
  - Hetman rotor oil can be used on trombone valves. Rotor valves can be oiled similarly to a valve on a french horn by placing a drop of oil underneath the cap

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and on the rotor arm on the opposite side of the valve cap. Please consult online videos for how to oil other, more unique trombone valves.

- Students should be able to move their tuning slide freely. Tuning slide oil can be used if a tuning slide is stuck. Hetman Tuning Slide is my favorite slide oil and has different models for how thick of an oil you want. #4-5 are great for valve slides that need to be moved quickly while playing. 6.5-7 are good for brass tuning slides. 7.5 can be used for loose fitting slides. 8 is usually too thick, but would also be used for tuning slides. I teach all low brass instruments and usually keep all of these available.
- A slide snake brush is a great tool to monthly flush out the gunk that collects in the inner slide. Use with cold or lukewarm water if desired. The same can be done with the outer slide.
- A mouthpiece brush can be used to clean out the inside of a mouthpiece. Regular cleaning with lukewarm water and a mild dish soap without bleach can help sanitize and flush out the mouthpiece.