

# Introduction To Trombone Lessons

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1. **Instrument Maintenance:** It is vitally important to keep the trombone hand slide in excellent working condition. Extra friction in the slide creates extra forces pushing and pulling on the lips during playing, which makes everything harder, which leads to bad playing habits.
  1. Keep the slide lightly lubricated. Clean the slide with soap, water, and a cleaning snake at the very least once per week; more often if needed. Some environments are tougher than others. Too much lubrication does not help, and can make the slide stickier. Experiment to find the “sweet” amount. Do not mix different kinds of lubricants.
  2. Buy a trombone stand. Placing the trombone on a stand does an excellent job of protecting the instrument from inadvertent damage in crowded environments like band rooms.
  3. The smallest dent in the slide tubes will cause the slide to respond inconsistently, leading to pushing and pulling on the lips while playing, making everything harder, leading to bad playing habits, etc. A knowledgeable instrument repair technician can repair minor slide dents in 5 minutes, if you happen to catch them when they're not too busy. Repair this kind of damage ASAP.
  4. Damage to other parts of the trombone usually is not a big deal. Dents in the crooks of the instrument can affect the instrument's playing characteristics, but small dents generally can be ignored until there is time for a repair technician to have the instrument for many days.
  5. Do not stick pencils or other debris in the trombone. A knowledgeable instrument repair technician will be able to remove just about anything. But, they will also be completely justified in charging you a significant fee and laughing at you for doing something so stupid.
  6. Brush your teeth in-between eating and playing. Sometimes, this isn't possible, but if you don't, pretty nasty molds and bacterial films growing in the instrument will just grow that much faster.
  7. To give the trombone a thorough cleaning, I recommend using a non-scented dishwashing soap like Dawn, lukewarm water (extremely hot water can melt some lacquers), and a long cleaning snake; and make sure you get the entire bore of the instrument cleaned, including the crooks. Make sure the cleaning snake has no sharp metal sticking out that can scratch the soft brass the slides are made of. Dry cheesecloth on a long cleaning rod (similar to a rifle cleaning rod) makes an excellent material with which to give the inner bores a good, final cleaning. It's non-abrasive, lint-free, and porous enough to pick up a lot of debris.

2. **Practicing:** The specifics of what a student practices often varies based on what they need to accomplish at different times of the year, how quickly they progress, and how their priorities change. However, playing any musical instrument requires lots of discipline, and the discipline is rewarded over time by greater enjoyment of playing music.
  1. Calisthenic drills must be played through every day, and cannot be substituted by other kinds of playing. These will be very repetitive and often very boring. Of course, they will change over time (generally becoming more demanding) depending on the needs of the trombonist. They are designed specifically to strengthen and coordinate the muscles in the embouchure. Embouchure muscles are small and take a long time to develop. Have patience, and understand that it will take years of focused calisthenics to develop the strength and coordination to play the trombone at a high level.
  2. Practicing smarter, not harder, produces results. More shorter practice sessions with short breaks are generally more beneficial than fewer longer, grueling marathon practice sessions. A fairly common division of practicing is 15 minutes of music, then 5 minutes doing something non-musical, looped for the duration of the practice session.
3. **Performing:** Music is at its heart a community experience. As much as is feasible, get out and rehearse, jam, perform, and generally have fun with family, friends, and other musicians. The practice room is very important, but sounding good in the practice room only is not the goal of making music.
  1. Performance anxiety can be very hard for some people to deal with. My best advice is twofold: the more you perform, the easier it gets; and the better you really know the music you're to perform, the less there is to be worried about.
  2. Marching bands are a time-honored performance venue for trombonists.
    - Use a cheap student instrument instead of a high-quality instrument because of the much higher chance of damage.
    - Holding the trombone forward, parallel with the ground, can create embouchure problems if not done correctly. In general, the angle of the mouthpiece on your face should be the same when playing while marching as when you play sitting down, and for some people this angle is not even close to level with the ground. This is not something that should be “corrected” through changing embouchure mechanics. Tilting the head back may work if the adjustment is small, but some people may need a special mouthpiece with a bent shaft to level the trombone.

4. **Listening:** Learning a musical instrument involves a great amount of imitation and inspiration. I greatly encourage parents and students to attend live, professional performances which includes trombones in some capacity. Finding great recordings can also be a lot of fun, but consider this rhetorical question: “What would you find more engaging: a recording of Kenneth Thompkins performing a trombone concerto, or going to see Kenneth Thompkins perform a trombone concerto in front of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra? And having a chance to go say hello to him and say that you play the trombone, too?”
1. Listening in this context means actively listening to music and **not** doing anything else to distract your attention from it.
  2. Listening becomes an active part of study for advanced students, especially in jazz. But, don't wait until then. Start seeing what's possible on the trombone right away. And don't limit your listening to just trombonists. Inspiration can come from anywhere. That said, here is a very incomplete list of trombonists whom I consider well worth seeking out:
    - John Allred
    - Joseph Alessi
    - Ray Anderson
    - Jimmy Bosch
    - Gunhild Carling
    - Tommy Dorsey
    - Duke Ellington's famous trombone section: Lawrence Brown, Sam Nanton, and Juan Tizol.
    - John Fedchock
    - Carl Fontana
    - Curtis Fuller
    - Marshall Gilkes
    - Al Grey
    - Wycliffe Gordon
    - Urbie Green
    - Slide Hampton
    - Randy Hawes
    - Carol Jarvis
    - J.J. Johnston
    - Andy Martin
    - Bob McChesney
    - James Morrison
    - Frank Rosolino
    - David Steinmeyer
    - Jack Teagarden
    - Kenneth Thompkins
    - Alain Trudel
    - Charlie Vernon
    - Fred Wesley
    - Jiggs Whigham
    - Scott Whitfield
    - Kay Winding