

Warming Up

By Ben Peterson
www.petersontrumpet.com

Warming up, whether it is a very brief set of exercises or an extended regimen, is one of the most important parts of a daily trumpet practice routine. Because warming up promotes a relaxed approach to playing, it can improve the work that you plan to accomplish through your practice session as well as help you to avoid bad habits. Using a thoughtful and effective warm-up can also help avoid trumpet-related injuries over time. An extended warm-up should address four areas: the breathing process, the embouchure, the fingers, and tonguing.

Like any other physical process, we use muscles to breathe. Virtually every muscle in your torso is involved in a complete breathing cycle. The most important large muscle groups are located in your abdominal region, your sides, and your back. It pays to be conscious of these muscles' involvement in your playing. Side bends, back arches, and toe touches are stretches that can set you up for less restriction and a more fluid breathing process. Once the muscles are relaxed, complete several breathing cycles, inhaling deeply and exhaling in a controlled manner, as if blowing out a candle. Make sure that your shoulders and neck are relaxed, your airway is open and relaxed, and that your abdominal area is expanding with each breath you inhale.

Next, focus on warming up your embouchure, the facial muscles and tissues that work together when you buzz your lips. A good way to get the necessary blood flowing to these areas quickly is to make "motorboat" or "horse" noises with your lips. Next, use your mouthpiece alone on some buzzing exercises. Through buzzing, you can hear the most basic level of sound production on your instrument. Make sure that even the buzzing sound is full and resonant. You might buzz notes along with a tuner, buzz the melody of a familiar tune, or buzz glissandos through a moderate range. Once you have finished buzzing, assemble the instrument and play long tones at moderate volumes using deep breaths. Begin in your middle or low register and hold the notes out as long as you are able to maintain a steady sound. Good notes for long tones are middle C and second line G. The next step is to play a few lip slurs. Lip slurs coordinate both your facial muscles and airstream as you move between notes with the same fingering. Begin simply, slurring from second line G to middle C and back again. Expand the slurs up to higher notes as you are able. Repeat these slurs on each of the seven chromatic valve combinations. Be careful not to warm yourself "out" as these can be quite demanding! In addition to

warming up, embouchure exercises are excellent tools for warming down at the end of a day. Warming down can improve how you feel the next day when you begin to play.

The fingers are often neglected in a warm-up, but they are a crucial component to any performance. Tension throughout the body often begins in the hands and arms, so a warm-up that includes attention to those areas can be of great benefit. You can stretch each wrist by extending your arm in front of you and gently pulling the fingers down. Alternately, pull the fingers upwards to stretch the opposite direction. When playing, keep your arms relaxed through the shoulder, maintain a gentle grip on the trumpet with your left hand, and form your right hand into a curved “C” position over the valves. Your finger pads should be directly over the valve caps while playing. Diatonic and chromatic scale patterns are great for fingering exercises, and should be done slowly at first. Focus on striking the valves with a quick and decisive motion no matter how slow the tempo. Gradually increase the speed without sacrificing accuracy.

Finally, warm up another neglected component: articulation of the tongue. With the help of a metronome, use the tongue to begin quarter notes at a slow tempo, such as 70 beats per minute. Begin with marcato, or hard articulations, which sound like “Ta” and progress towards legato, or soft articulations, which sound like “Da.” Increase the speed gradually, and incorporate double and triple tonguing when you are able.

A warm-up can be as long or short as a player likes. Generally a warm-up like the one presented here will take between 10 and 15 minutes, but can easily be extended or abbreviated to suit the needs of the player on any given day. Throughout the process, however, the player should maintain their focus on producing a good tone throughout all ranges of the instrument in a relaxed manner. Playing only after a proper warm-up can help to avoid early fatigue in your practice session and benefit your understanding of sound production, lip flexibility, and air control. Over time, those benefits will make you think of your warm-up as one of the most important parts of your daily trumpet practice routine, too!