

Thoughts On Teaching Legato

Sequences for Introducing Trombone Slurs to Beginners

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Preface: This is the sequence that I personally used to teach slurs/legato tonguing to my beginning trombone students. There are **many** more ways to do this, and I would encourage you to find your own method, but this is what worked for me and my students.

Context: My classes were always combined beginner low brass classes (trombone, euphonium, tuba). If you have the opportunity to teach a beginner class full of just trombones you might find this pacing to be a bit slow for your students.

Step One: Getting a Good “Siren” Buzz

- Once students are able to get a solid buzz on the mouthpiece with good note shape it’s time to start “sirens”
- Start with having students use a combination of air speed, aperture size, and tongue position to get a clean glissando between two notes – encourage them to “get every note in between”
- Once they are comfortable with moving around the mouthpiece start adding defined pitches
 - Have students “siren” from F-Bb, E-A, etc

Step Two: A Solid Lip Slur

- I know I say this is step two, but this step is by far the most important and takes a **long time**
- Encourage your students to do the same thing they did on the mouthpiece but now on the instrument
- Make sure there is no gap between the notes. The air stream should be continuous
- Make sure the note is not “bumped” or “sagged” as they change notes
- **Use MANY different combinations and patterns of slurs – have fun with it!**

Step Three: Introduce Legato Tongue

- **Pre-Requisite:** Make sure you are truly pleased with the students’ ability to use the “too” syllable (this was usually the end of December/early January in my classes, **don’t feel rushed**)
- Introduce legato tongue by having students use the “doo” syllable – do this on one note first but then have them move to different positions
- Challenge your students to play “legato style” on songs in the book that they already know
- The key here is tongue/slide coordination – don’t allow sloppy slide technique

Step Four: Introducing Natural Slurs

- The last step is to introduce **natural slurs** – I do this with the “air and lips” exercise
 - Have students play a legato passage without using any tongue – you will get a very “glissy” effect. Have them practice this and try to minimize the gliss. Keep very **consistent air** support and move the **slide quickly**.
 - Once the gliss is barely heard, have them add a “doo” articulation wherever there was a gliss – all the rest of the notes do not need to be tongued because they are **natural slurs**
 - This can be a lengthy process for students – be patient with them. With time this will become much more natural.
 - I recommend them encouraging students to practice their scales this way to help get the coordination down.