

BREATHING EXERCISES FOR BRASS PLAYERS

TO DEVELOP EFFICIENCY, FLEXIBILITY AND COORDINATION

Donald C. Little
Professor of Tuba, College of Music
University of North Texas, dlittle@music.unt.edu

Purpose:

The purpose of these exercises is to help develop natural and effective breathing habits for excellent brass playing. These exercises are intended to help develop efficiency, coordination and flexibility in your breathing, but not actual physical strength.

Breathe Naturally:

When doing these exercises, breathe fully and think of breathing simultaneously throughout your respiratory system. This means that you should not think of filling from the bottom up or the top down, but rather simultaneously throughout. Although huge breaths may sometimes appear to be partially regional (i.e. thoracic or abdominal expansion), it is generally not helpful for the brass player to consciously induce regional breathing. It is far better to simply focus on inhaling large quantities of air with good posture and to allow your body to function naturally.

Arnold Jacobs:

Mr. Jacobs made the following observation concerning breathing in one of my lessons, and this observation goes beyond breathing: “Our bodies are not designed to accomplish tasks through self-analysis of individual system parts and their related function, but rather through pre-conception of the ultimate goals or tasks to be accomplished, which in this situation is the movement of huge amounts of air. In summation, bodily activity should be a secondary phenomena and the movement of air primary.”

Conclusion:

Think about air movement, not body movement. Maintain good posture, concentrate on moving large amounts of air and allow your body to function naturally.

Acknowledgement:

Most of this information was learned through lessons with Arnold Jacobs in the basement studio of his Chicago South Normal Avenue home during the 1970's.

EXERCISE GROUP I:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FULL BREATHS

Inhale slowly and comfortably over five counts, then exhale similarly over five counts. This can usually be repeated several times as such slow respiratory activity will tend to avoid hyperventilation. It is not necessary to expel every last bit of air, but do take in as much air as comfortably possible. This will eventually help you to make better and more efficient use of your lung capacity. It is not actually possible to increase your lung capacity, called vital capacity, but most of us can easily learn to make better use of what we have.

Use the sound “HOE” for both inhalations and exhalations but without actually vocalizing.

Quarter note = 60 for all three exercises

5/4 **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**
Inhale - - - - - *Exhale* - - - - -

Repeat three or four times then rest for approximately 20-30 seconds before proceeding.

4/4 **1** **2** **3** **4** **1** **2** **3** **4**
Inhale - - - - - *Exhale* - - - - -

Repeat three or four times then rest for approximately 20-30 seconds before proceeding.

3/4 **1** **2** **3** **1** **2** **3**
Inhale - - - - - *Exhale* - - - - -

Repeat three or four times then rest for approximately 20-30 seconds before proceeding.

After successful repetitions of these exercises through many practice sessions (perhaps days or weeks depending on individual progress rates), this exercise may be practiced using two beats to take the air in, then two beats out. Ultimately this exercise should be practiced one beat (one second) in and one beat (second) out. Always keep in mind that all breathing exercises should be practiced using the least amount of physical effort required to move large amounts of air.

2/4 **1** **2** **1** **2**
Inhale - - - - - *Exhale* - - - - -

Repeat three or four times then rest for approximately 20-30 seconds before proceeding.

1/4 **1** **1**
Inhale - - - - - *Exhale* - - - - -

EXERCISE GROUP II:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AWARENESS OF AIR VOLUME AND QUANTITY CAPABILITIES

These exercises are to help you to develop improved consciousness of personal volume and quantity capabilities. Think and practice dividing your breath into sections, for example, halves, thirds or quarters. Experiment with various sections (volumes) of air inhaled and exhaled in a variety of sectional patterns.

I. THIRDS:

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. | <i>Inhale 3/3 (Fully)</i> | <i>Exhale 1/3 of your capacity</i> |
| 2. | <i>Inhale 2/3 of your capacity</i> | <i>Exhale 1/3 of your capacity</i> |
| 3. | <i>Inhale 1/3 of your capacity</i> | <i>Exhale 1/3 of your capacity</i> |

II. FOURTHS:

- | | | | | |
|----|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | <i>Inhale 4/4</i> | <i>Exhale 2/4</i> | <i>Inhale 1/4</i> | <i>Exhale 2/4</i> |
| 2. | <i>Inhale 4/4</i> | <i>Exhale 3/4</i> | <i>Inhale 2/4</i> | <i>Exhale 2/4</i> |
| 3. | <i>Inhale 3/4</i> | <i>Exhale 2/4</i> | <i>Inhale 3/4</i> | <i>Exhale 3/4</i> |
| 4. | <i>Inhale 2/4</i> | <i>Exhale 1/4</i> | <i>Inhale 3/4</i> | <i>Exhale 2/4</i> |

Develop similar exercises to continue to help you to have a greater awareness of your lung capacity.

EXERCISE GROUP III:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RAPID REPLACEMENT BREATHS:

The practice of rapid replacement breaths is most effective when the previous full breath exercises have been practiced and reasonably mastered.

Inhale and exhale fully for all of these rapid replacement breath exercises. Begin with a slow tempo that is comfortable for you, and then repeat with gradually faster tempi while maintaining efficient, comfortable breathing.

Strive to achieve a 100% replacement at each inhalation point. Experiment with a variety of tempi and eventually progress to the 7/4 and 8/4 versions of the exercise.

Practice each exercise several times with the same “HOE” sound. Also alternate “HOE” with “TOE” on exhalations.

Quarter note = 60 then gradually increase tempo

5/4 **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** (repeat several times in rhythm)
Exhale - - - - - *Inhale*
(also use “TOE” exhalation)

6/4 **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** (repeat etc.)
Exhale - - - - - *Inhale*
(also use “TOE” exhalation)

7/4 **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** **7**
Exhale - - - - - *Inhale*
(also use “TOE” exhalation)

8/4 **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** **7** **8**
Exhale - - - - - *Inhale*
(also use “TOE” exhalation)

With these and all breathing exercises, emphasize taking breaths freely and easily. These exercises are to help develop freedom of function, rather than strength or actual muscular development.

The ultimate goal of these exercises is to develop conditioned responses that facilitate the natural performance of music. Always think of breathing as being part of the music.