

St Andrews Music Participation

Learn the StAMP Way: Brass Playing Made Simple

The essential elements of learning and teaching brass

Music

Music is a universal human invention which is basic to our existence. It helps us to express who we are, individually and collectively.

Mind and body

The human brain is hard-wired into music. Music is at the roots of our humanity. Pulse, rhythm, sounds and melody flow from our bodies into our music making. Harmony arises from the design of those pitches. Especially making music together in a group. Whether composed or improvised. Immersion in music joins our minds and bodies as one.

Singing and playing

The human voice is the oldest musical instrument. We 'sing' to express our emotions. We 'play' a musical instrument to do the same thing. The concept of 'play' is essential to learning a musical instrument. 'Play' frees the mind and body. 'Playing' is fun. And having fun is seriously good. 'Playing' needs structure, work and discipline. However, imagination and freedom are its basis.

The Air

Air is in the atmosphere all around us. Breathing air in and blowing it out through the lips into the instrument is the engine of brass playing. Just as the moon goes around the earth, the tides in the sea rise and fall, the waves on the shore lap in and lap out, breathing in and blowing out are just as inevitable. It happens naturally without having to think. Relax and yawn to take in air with no effort. We get better and better at breathing and blowing through emptying and focusing the mind on our breathing.

The Sound

When air is breathed in and blown out through the lips into the instrument, the energy from the buzzing lips creates a wave inside the instrument. This wave radiates out from the instrument into the atmosphere all around us. The wave is picked up by our ears and heard, through our brains, as sound. Creating a sound is very personal and we all have our own special sound. Just like fingerprints are all different. The shape of our lips, mouth, throat, and upper body all add to our own special sound. The brain helps by thinking the pitch of the sound before we play it.

Melody

Almost as soon as we learn to play one note we learn to play two notes joined to one another. Two notes lead to three, and a musical phrase is born. Musical phrases need pointing and articulating with the tongue, as in talking, to make them interesting, and to form melody. Language and music have a lot in common. They are both fundamental forms of human communication. Playing a melody is an effective way to tell people how you feel.

The Feeling

Emotions underpin creativity. The *feeling* with which we play tells the story we want to tell through the piece of music. Music is an invisible force. It reaches deep inside our brains. Playing music requires focus, concentration, and becoming at one with yourself and others. This becomes part of you and who you are as you develop as a musician.

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Listening

Through making music we learn to listen. To ourselves. And to other people. The greatest fun in music making is playing with other people. Creating harmony together. We play as a musical team through listening. Human beings learn through listening. Listen and learn.

The instrument

A brass instrument is a tube. Filled with air. The air in the tube can be made to vibrate as one sound wave along the whole of the length of the tube. This makes the *fundamental* note sound. Or the tube can be made to vibrate in many smaller subdivisions. From 2 to 22 and beyond. These subdivisions are called *partials*. Altogether, these *partials* sound the notes of the *harmonic series*. The *harmonic series* gives brass instruments their melodic range. A natural trumpet has one tube and one *harmonic series*. Modern brass instruments make it possible to change the tube length quickly through the valves or the slide. This makes seven or more *harmonic series* possible on one instrument. This allows the player to play all twelve notes of the chromatic scale.

Create your own Practice

Practice is our approach to learning a musical instrument.

Practice is the active time we spend developing our relationship with our musical instrument in order to learn it.

Practice is the organized way in which we go about developing the know-how which underpins our skills.

Band Practice is a regular session which brass players join regularly to learn to play pieces of music together.

Practice shapes activities. Learning a musical instrument is an excellent way to learn focus and give added value to life.

Make your practice count

To make your *practice* really count, regular *practice* is best. Work it into your day, little and often. Keep the mind fresh. Choose a variety of different pieces. Interesting music makes for interesting *practice*.

Brass playing is good for all-round fitness and co-ordination. Follow the patterns of *practice* set out in the StAMP guide and use them as your roadmap. These patterns will help you find your way around your instrument and the music you play.

Rest as much as you play. Be gentle earlier in your daily *practice*, in order to maintain levels of technique and stamina you have already achieved. However, push yourself later on in *practice* as you will be surprised by how far you can go. This is how to make your practice count.

Develop your Practice

Plan, reflect, think about it. Manage your time. Be optimistic about succeeding. Make your instrument part of you and what you do. Make your own space for it every day. Planning brings out the bigger picture of your musical journey. The little-by-little over days and weeks becomes leaps and bounds over months and years.