Practicing

Principles of Practicing

Ideal	Real World
Schedule a time period for practice each day.	I'm sure I'll find time somewhere.
Meditate to clear the mind and focus thoughts. Do some rhythmic breathing and yoga to relax.	Drink coffee to stay awake.
Have a clear plan of what needs to be practiced. Know what you need to work on and why.	I'd better learn that lick for band.
If you can't think of some positive reason to practice, it might be better not to bother.	I'll just put in my time.
Do your warm-ups with great musicality and tone.	Well, maybe a few, just for the heck of it.
If you are rewarming-up, take some time to get things back together.	Just jump right back in there.
Use your tuner and metronome.	Where are those things anyway?
Check to see if you are really warmed-up. Play a lick or two, like part of a solo piece that you use, to see if you are warmed-up.	I've played for 15 minutes, I must be warmed-up.
Move on to conditioning and special skills. Do just a few minutes of double tonguing and lip trills each day.	I hate double tonguing. I can't lip trill.
Use Comparison Techniques to make sure you are doing things right. Compare: Long tones and legato tonguing. Long tones and short tonguing. Legato tonguing and short tonguing. Mouthpiece notes and horn notes. Loud tone and soft tone. Loud pitch and soft pitch. Anything you can't do with what you can do.	I'll take whatever I can get.
Use Repetition Techniques to maximise learning.	Hey, I got it once! Cool.
Even if you play something right, do it a few more times to get comfortable with it.	Maybe it will be better tomorrow.
Conceptualize. Enjoy your playing. Make beautiful music.	I sound terrible, time for a break.
Listen to great performances of the pieces you are doing.	How *does* this go anyway?

At the beginning of this book I said that perhaps this really was a book about practicing. Actually, I hope this book is a book about performing. After all, that is what we all want to do and do well. In fact, if you think of every note you play as a "performance," you will learn faster and be more ready to perform.

We prepare for our "performances" with practice. Our performances *should* be every note we play– especially those in public. Many of us forget that any time someone else is listening, we are performing. This includes lessons, rehearsals and even time in the practice room. You never know who might be listening. But just to frame this properly, I think that we also perform for ourselves in private.

Perhaps we have two parts of practicing. We have the part where we are breaking things down in order to learn them. We also have the part where we perform the lick or piece for ourselves, for our own enjoyment or evaluation. Actually, I don't want to spend a lot of time making these distinctions because they do overlap. I am, however, going to be spending a certain amount of time explaining the first or "breaking down" part, and I don't want you to think that all of this is just a lot of technical preoccupation at the expense of the musical or performance part.

Everything I do when I teach or practice is aimed at achieving musical results. The technical or fundamental aspect of our playing serves the music, not the other way around. We need all the fundamental techniques in order to achieve our musical ideals, just as a pitcher in baseball needs good "mechanics" in order to pitch a "masterpiece" and have a long, productive career. Practicing should include all aspects of our playing with the intention of bringing it all together to play beautifully. This concept and motivation is very important. We are inspired to play things by the intrinsic beauty of the music. We use this inspiration to find a way for us to play the music to express that beauty. If we must tear the passage down, it is with the motivation to find a way to accomplish our goal of expression. Use this concept to decide how to practice a given passage.

1. Schedule a time period for each day.

This is difficult, but realize that a daily regimen can be a positive thing, and even a little playing is better than none at all. You can't skip two days and then try and make it up on the third and expect to be a consistent player. Buzz your mouthpiece in your car if you have to.

2. Clear your thoughts and trust yourself.

Meditation and/or deep breathing can be helpful to quiet and clear your mind and body before you start practicing. Tai Chi can also be a great way to focus attention. Remember that a relaxed state is preferable to a tense or stressful one. I know most people don't do meditation, so the first part of my warm-up in this book can be treated as a kind of meditation. It is simple and based on focussing on the air flow, simple embouchure movements and above all, listening to the tone.

Once your thoughts have quieted down and you are focused on the moment, it's time to conceptualize what you want to do on the horn at that moment. If you can think of it, your body will follow, and you don't want to get in the way of that process. I know that our culture preaches the attainment of control and perfection, but ironically, these are negative goals in the context of music making and French horn playing, and they don't really exist in nature, despite our desire to convince ourselves otherwise. Pursuit of them brings frustration and stress. Neither of those goals is attainable, and the more you can get away from that kind of thinking, the better.

A clear concept of what you are trying to do and the trust in your ability to let your body find a way to do it are the best places to work from. Horn playing is largely a subconscious process. You are in control to a certain extent, but you must trust your body to respond to your conceptualizations. This develops through practice and the confidence that is built on success. In simple terms, just play. Don't get caught up in a lot of intellectual analysis while you are playing. Analyze it later if you must. While you are playing, play. Go for what you want. The fundamentals we are working on in this book are designed to give you the tools to play the way you want to play.

3. Have a clear plan of what needs to be practiced.

Okay, we all have lessons we are working on or pieces that must be performed, but have you been over them enough to know exactly what parts need to be really looked at and what parts would take just a glance? It is important to look over the pieces for patterns and repetitions. Often we see a page that might overwhelm us until we take a closer look and see that much of it is repetitious.

Always ask yourself if you are playing your pieces at the highest musical level. Sometimes we need to practice relatively simple passages to get exactly the right musical effect. This is an important source of motivation and focus.

4. "If you can't think of some positive reason to practice, it's better not to bother."

I like this expression, but it would be better if you would turn it around to inspire yourself to look for something really beautiful and positive that you want to accomplish. There is nothing positive about just killing time practicing, but as a brass player, part of getting better is playing every day. This is where you need to find yourself just aching to practice something, because you want to get into the expressive qualities of the music.

5. Do your warm-ups.

"I hate the fact that I have to warm-up each day. I would love to just dive right into the good stuff, pick up where I left off the day before." Sorry, you're a brass player. Get used to it. Try to have some fun with it.

Read the warm-up section. Play everything with great musicality and tone. Try thinking of yourself as a great singer vocalizing. I don't know how many times I have heard people going through warm-ups backstage without any apparent regard for musical results. If you are not playing musically when you are warming up, it is going to be just that much harder to do it when you are on stage.

6. Create warm-ups using passages from the music you are practicing.

This goes under the general heading of saving time, but it can really take the edge off some difficult passages. If you have a scale or arpeggio or something that resembles a flexibility or long tone exercise, use a short segment as part of your warm-up, perhaps in place of similar things in your regular routine. Just don't violate the warm-up rules of playing to high, long or loud too soon in the warm-up session. This adds a little variety and creativity to the warm-up, too.

7. Check to see if you are really warmed up.

A good warm-up routine will tell you how your chops are doing on any given day. Don't assume, however, that if you have done your routine you will be at your best at that moment, without extra consideration for stiffness or fatigue.

8. If you are rewarming-up, take some time to get things back together.

Develop a "short" warm-up to use when you have multiple service days. Give your lips a break, don't just start wailing away.

9. Move on to conditioning and special skills.

Depending on how much rehearsal or concert energy you are going to need, you can work on conditioning exercises and special skills once you are warmed up. You know when you are doing conditioning exercises when you start to feel the muscles in your chops getting a workout. I have seen some "warm-up" routines out there that are actually conditioning routines. They require too much effort to be a warm-up and violate most or all of our principles.

10. Work with your tuner and metronome.

Small tuners with plug-in microphones that allow you to tune in a noisy environment are so inexpensive nowadays that everyone should own one. I have more to say about this in the "Intonation" and "Equipment" sections, but you should watch your tuner as you warm-up to get to know your tendencies. I, for example, usually start out a bit sharp (from slightly stiff chops) and gradually work down to my real pitch as my lips loosen up. As you are doing long tones you should check for the effects of fingerings and range changes. Don't "play the tuner." Don't get in the habit of adjusting to the tuner as you go along. See what your tendencies are and make sensible adjustments to your basic playing– such as learning to feel a note in tune by where it centers on your horn, rather than bending every note to the tuner. Learn to trust your "feel" of a note. See the "Intonation" section.

A metronome is a must for any musician. Use it. You must develop your own inner beat. This comes from working with a metronome. A metronome that can split the beat (such as Dr. Beat by Boss) is best, because it can help you feel the inner pulse of subdivided beats. These have become quite reasonable in price. If you don't have such a device and you need to hear the subdivisions, just set the metronome at twice the tempo if possible. Even playing your warm-ups with a metronome can be very beneficial. Learn how to flow with the beat rather than reacting to it. As you progress with your practice, check phrases and then whole pieces with the metronome. The goal is not to sound like a machine but to learn what your tendencies are and to develop your inner beat. You may start out working with a metronome just trying to keep up with it, but the goal is not to just keep up with the metronome but to anticipate it, to feel the beat it is feeding you.

You may be playing a concerto very well, except for a couple of spots you are not aware of that you are playing in a different tempo. It happens all the time. Check your tendencies. Nothing will get you out of an audition faster than bad rhythm. Use your metronome. It's your best friend.

Practicing Strategies and Techniques

In the Introduction I stated some of my favorite rules of playing. These rules, along with some key concepts, will help you get the most out of your practicing. Lets review the rules.

It's not what you play, but how you play it that counts.

No exercises will make you a great player without your attention to the purpose of each exercise. Take flexibility exercises, for example. I often hear players working all over their horns without much regard for the sound they are producing. You may be the most flexible player in the world, but if it doesn't sound good, no one wants to listen. And if you are practicing something, you are *learning* something. In this case, you are learning to play with a bad tone. You can't just turn on a good sound if you spend all your time practicing and ignoring the sound, in place of other things like range, dynamics and technique. The same goes for rhythm. It is not sufficient to just "get the notes." So as you play the exercises in this book, read the comments that go with them. These are just as important as the exercises themselves.

Always play the most beautiful music you can at any given moment. Get the style going from the beginning.

I don't think I can state this strongly enough. If more people took this approach we would have a lot more beautiful playing. Also, *if you follow this philosophy, you will progress much faster than someone who doesn't.* The sooner you can grasp this concept, the better. I have found, however, that young students often have trouble with this. They just want to get something out. This is normal and to be expected. As a teacher though, you should keep reinforcing the beautiful playing that they do and play for them to give them something to aspire to. Recordings are good inspiration, too.

When you are practicing, the goal is not just to "get it right." The goal is to make the passage as beautiful as possible in the appropriate style. And if it isn't a particularly "beautiful" passage, you still have to portray the intention of the composer. You have to feel that you are translating the intentions (probably the feelings) of the composer in every note you play. You must ask yourself, "how does this fit in the piece?" and, "am I getting this across with my playing?"

When you practice, use whatever technical means necessary to achieve the musical result. But once you have found the technical way to play the piece, you must *focus solely on projecting the musical qualities*.

Always work from what you can do to what you can't do.

Every chapter in this book employs this principal to achieve the best results. When you grasp the basic concept of something presented and are able to translate that into just one note or phrase, you have made the most important step in bringing that concept into your playing. You then apply this golden rule and work from that one note or phrase into all the other notes or phrases you play.

How, for example, can you have a beautiful tone on all of your notes if you can't get that wonderful sound on just one note? Once you find that sound, perhaps using some of the methods in this book, you can move that sound into all of your playing. Sometimes you have to do it note by note; sometimes more of it clicks into place at once, but you have to start with something you can do right, whatever that might be. Sometimes I get a student who cannot play even one note with a resonant sound. We have to go back to basic buzzing and breathing concepts just to get one note to sound beautiful. But once we achieve that note, we can make another right next to it and so on.

Another area is range. Work from the range you can play easily and well into the ranges that trouble you. Build a good foundation of notes that you really enjoy playing and work from there.

It is always more positive to be working from a position of success rather than failure. This builds confidence and allows you to be self-directed in your practice.

Another example of this principal is very important in preparation of any passage or piece:

Find a tempo at which you can play the passage or piece all the way through.

By "play" I mean that you can negotiate all the technical passages, ornamentations, leaps or anything else that might throw you out of rhythm. This is often a tempo that is much slower than the intended tempo. This will give you a clear idea of how much work is needed on certain passages. The main reason for this is, however, to ensure that you don't "practice-in" any glitches into your piece. You need to get the feeling of playing the piece through, but you do not want to be continually making adjustments for parts that you cannot play at full speed. And you do not want to "practice-in" a feeling of insecurity. Playing through at a slower tempo, no matter how slow, gives you the feeling that you have accomplished something very positive– you have learned the passage! Now you just need to speed it up. It is much easier to speed it up if you have not been "practicing-in" fingering glitches or other problems. If it turns out you need to use an alternate fingering to make the passage work at a faster tempo, you will have to make that decision at some point, but at least you will have put in a lot of disciplined practice that will allow you to make small changes that will flow right along with your practice of the whole passage.

Now I don't mean by this that you should practice a whole piece every time at this slow tempo, only. What you should do is pick out the passages that need improvement and move them up in tempo using this method. Once you have the difficult passages worked out to a certain degree, you should try to put them into context with the easier passages– but only at the speed that you can play the most difficult ones easily and correctly.

This brings me to one of the key words in my rules of practicing:

Comparison

Practicing is, after all, basically comparison. We compare our own performance to an ideal performance. This is pretty obvious, but if we take this further we can see how the "*concept of comparing*" can guide us through most every practice situation. After all, when you play in public, whether it's an audition, a rehearsal, or a concert, your playing will be compared, either with another person's or a certain standard of performance. But rather than delving into the more esoteric aspects of this concept, I would like to give some examples of what we should be comparing as we practice. When you read the comments that accompany the exercises, you will find that many of them have to do with comparison.

What do we compare? Anything we can't do or aspire to do with what we can do. There are always things to compare.

1. Tone.

We compare the best sound that we can make, with sounds perhaps in other registers or dynamics, that aren't as good. If you can make a beautiful sound on just one note, you can "move" that sound to other nearby notes until your whole range has a great tone. As we do a long tone exercise we try to start with a great sound and continue through the exercise with that sound. This is the real point of the practice. Just playing long tones isn't enough. We must compare the sounds.

2. Long tones and Slurs.

If you can play a beautiful single long tone, you can move that tone to another note, via the slur. This is usually accomplished by keeping the vibration going, and with a good flow of air and just the right amount of lip adjustment, moving to the other note without tonguing. There should be no change in the sound quality. Higher notes should not be "pinched" in sound. Lower notes should not "disappear." A good comparison here is with notes buzzed on a mouthpiece. Using the glissando methods discussed in the "Buzzing" section, you can hear whether the sound is changing or not. We also compare the feeling of playing on the mouthpiece with the feeling of playing the notes on the horn. This can be *very* helpful.

3. Long tones and Legato tonguing.

If you can play a beautiful long tone, you should compare that sound with the sound that you get when you do legato tonguing on the same note and then different notes. Many people stop and start (or perhaps increase and decrease) their air as soon as they begin tonguing sequences. As slight as some of these stoppages or drops in air speed are, they will detract from a perfect legato tongue and degrade the overall tone. Compare the ringing sound (or simply the actual volume) of a held note with that of a series of legato-tongued notes. You should still hear the ring continue as you tongue, with no separation except the next actual attack. It is very important to master this. You should be able to graduate the tongue down to almost inaudibility.

4. Long tones and Legato tonguing with Short Tonguing.

In the section on short tonguing I talk about the use of syllables and proper pronunciation for short tonguing. One of the first things I do with a student is to compare the sound and volume of a long tone, and later legato notes, with that of their staccato. The volume must remain the same to ensure proper air flow. This is a very important concept, as I have found that many players do not get enough air through on their staccato attacks and releases, causing a constricted or non-resonant sound on staccato notes. This lack of air can lead to problems of accuracy, especially in the upper range. When doing a careful comparison, most players feel they have to put more air through on the staccato to balance the sound of long and short notes. Is that because they are just used to dropping our air when they play short?

5. Tone at different dynamic levels.

I remember Arnold Jacobs telling me that my soft sound should just be a miniature of my loud sound. He believed, as I do, that it is easier to find a really resonant sound at a higher dynamic, first. This is because if you are really getting a good loud sound, your lips are relaxed and you are getting a good air flow. The soft sound should have that same relaxed resonance. Many players start to drop their air flow and pinch up when they play softly and lose that beautiful ringing sound. So we should compare those sounds and the way we get them in all registers and dynamics– another purpose of long tone studies.

6. Loud Pitch with Soft Pitch.

This is where we should be watching our tuners while we practice long tones at different dynamics. Actually, a tuner can help you learn to play loud because it teaches you to relax your lips as you play louder, because, if you don't, the pitch will go up. Often, we get used to the pitch going up as we play louder as just part of the way we sound– like getting used to certain fingerings that are really out of tune. Watch the tuner as you do crescendos and diminuendos on different notes.

7. One Long Tone and an Actual Phrase.

One of my favorite things to do with students is to have them play the first note of a phrase as a sustained note for the exact length of the whole phrase, often while I attempt to sing the actual notes. This demonstrates the way the phrase should be supported with the air. You can feel it in your body. Sometimes you need to use a note that represents sort of the median pitch of the phrase, especially if it is up high. You can feel the air-flow without worrying about the notes. One place to use this is in the "Tonguing Efficiency" section. Tonguing needs to feel like one long tone, with just very efficient attacks making the definitions you want. Use this on an excerpt like the solo in Tchaikovsky 5 to get the feeling of the phrases. This will increase your chances of making it through that solo with the least amount of effort.

These are some of the comparisons that are important in basic playing. Of course we should also use this technique any time we can to improve our playing. We can also compare our playing to great artists on all instruments. How do they make a great legato or a great phrase? Is there one great artist you prefer over another? Listen and compare.

This brings me to another of my favorite maxims:

You ear is your best teacher, and, you can "educate" your ear.

I often tell my students that I could still teach them 90% of what I do even if I were blind. What I mean is, by very critical listening you can tell almost exactly what a player is doing, right and wrong, including whether their embouchure is good. The sound that I hear tells me what is working and what isn't. Tone, tonguing, intonation, range, phrasing– all right there. What it boils down to, is that you must listen carefully to what is coming out of your horn. Does this seem obvious? I can only say from listening to everyone from beginners to auditioning professionals, that players are often in various states of denial about what they sound like. I know that if I can get them to listen a little more closely, they will improve dramatically.

I was lucky that the first two horn records my mother bought me were the Dennis Brain recordings of the Mozart and Strauss concertos. Although I know that many of you would take issue with the "Brain sound," especially on the Strauss pieces, I can only say that his playing inspired me. Brain's tone may seem "small" to some people, but he always had a beautiful resonance on every note. I didn't know much about anything musical at age 10, but that was beautiful playing to my ears. I almost wore out those records. We all need something to aspire to.

I don't think it is important at all to sound like someone else. As Dick Oldberg, former third horn with the Chicago Symphony once said at a lecture at an International Horn Society Seminar: "None of you will ever sound like Phil Farkas, Dale Clevenger, Myron Bloom or Barry Tuckwell. So quit trying to be someone else." Did he mean that none of us would ever sound as good as those players? No, he meant that we should aspire to greatness but not to *be* someone else. We all incorporate the things we like from other players. That is good. They don't even have to be horn players. Listen carefully. Educate your ear.

Speaking of our ears. Tape yourself and listen. This is tough to handle sometimes. It is incredibly revealing. Do it once in a while, anyway. The actual acoustical sound of the tape may not be great, but you can really pick up on intonation, rhythm and just about everything else.

Repetition

Sometimes it seems students think that repetition is punishment. I know this by the looks on their faces when I ask for it. I know it, because if it wasn't thought of as punishment, wouldn't they do it more often? After all, if we get it right shouldn't we move on? Yes, sooner or later we should move on, but first shouldn't we stop and enjoy the moment? Repetition of correct playing should lead to enjoyment, or at least comfort. There's another word: **Comfort**. I love that word. But I think enjoyment is the key here. We repeat things so that we can be more comfortable playing them and hence we will enjoy them more.

Now I have to admit that I use a lot of repetition in my practice and teaching. I do not, however, use yardsticks, rulers or electroshock along with it. I do annoy my students from time to time with my insistence on repetition. Sometimes I use many repetitions to help a particularly analytical student to "get out of his head." He may even get mad at me, but he also may experience a truly subconscious, intuitive moment of expression in the process. He will also realize how much you can accomplish in a short period of time using it. Repetition sneaks into a lot of my exercises, often to facilitate comparison, but mostly it is there so your body can learn. There is such a thing as muscle memory.

1. Repetition is your friend!

As you repeat it gets easier! You get to experience better playing through repetition. You will get better faster if you use repetition. This is a good thing. Positive reinforcement. Comfort. Enjoyment. Linger and enjoy something that you have learned. Do it again. It's like having an extra piece of chocolate cake.

2. Don't do a lot of mindless, meaningless repetition.

Sometimes it is a very good idea to take your mind out of certain practice situations since a lot of motor movements are not stored in the brain, anyway. Iztahk Perlman says that he practices scales watching TV because scales are not, or shouldn't be, an intellectual process. They are muscle memory and lower brain function. This being so, we still shouldn't get in the habit of doing things over and over just for the sake of doing them. I know some people say to do certain licks 10 times a day, and some say it has to be 10 times in a row correctly, before you can stop or consider them learned. The problem is that if you don't put all your musical intent into each repetition, you are really just reinforcing mediocre, albeit accurate playing.

Breaking Down Difficult Passages

There are many ways to break down passages in practice and many possible orders of things. I'm going to give some examples of what I do and what I teach my students to do. (These techniques also apply to sight reading.) We lead busy lives. We need to be efficient with our time. Or we might be on a job, like a recording session, where we don't have much time to get it together and our future employment is on the line.

1. Scan for what looks hard or unfamiliar.

If you are a beginner, that might be just about everything, but even so, if you have learned just one note you have something to compare to. If you are a more advanced player, you have to find the parts that might give you problems and pay attention to them first. Of course while you are doing this, you are getting an overall view of the piece or lick, and you are judging tempi and trying to figure out the intent of the composer in terms of style and expression.

2. Look for repetitive sections.

Many passages and whole pieces have repetitive parts. Some are exactly the same, some are very close to the same. Scan through and see just how much new material you really have to learn.

3. Think of how the passage relates to your basic playing techniques.

Is it a “long tone” type of passage or is it really more technical? Many times, a passage can be related to (compared with) what you have worked on in the past. This includes scales and arpeggios, of course. If you have a feeling of how the passage as a whole should “feel” as you play it, this will help.

4. Look for the exceptions to the rules as well as the rules.

Often you can divide a whole piece into “rules”– scales, arpeggios, learned patterns, and “exceptions”– accidentals, modal variants of scales, broken patterns, say one or two notes outside a recognizable pattern. Key on these patterns.

Look for fingering patterns outside the norm.

Get in the habit of checking to see if you can come up with a better fingering. This usually involves an issue of speed, but it can also be intonation or just comfort. Don't stay with a fingering that makes you uncomfortable (and hence is unreliable) at a fast speed if there is a better one available. Besides, you want to keep using your creative mind, don't you! I'm not against practicing difficult fingerings until they are mastered, because I know that sometimes there are no alternatives and that it is just a good challenge to take up as you learn. Spend your time practicing those passages and then at some point you may decide to improve them with different fingerings.

1. Look for patterns that stay on one horn or the other.

This is not just for the pattern of fingerings, but for the fact that when you are going fast it is often better not to change horns any more than you have to. There is a difference in resistance, and sometimes this can throw one off a little. Just the act of using your thumb can be an issue on some horns with thumb valves that are slightly uncomfortable or have a long throw. Your hand is actually out of balance for a moment. The less of that the better.

2. Look for patterns that repeat.

Even a short passage might have a repeating fingering in it. Make note. Go over it a few times. Key on it.

3. Look for ways to minimize “cross fingerings” in fast passages.

Anytime we go from 12 to 23 or 1 to 23 we call that a “cross” fingering, because it feels like our fingers almost cross over when we do that. It's awkward, especially at high speeds. My teacher, Verne Reynolds, used to make us do exercises for our weaker fingers, and that's a great idea, but sometimes you just need to find another fingering. Don't get me wrong though, there are cross fingering exercises in this book.

If you can minimize the awkward fingerings, you can spend more time working on the ones you just can't get around. You can also key on the "exceptions" as you play, making you less likely to miss them. You really don't have time to think of much when you are playing a long technical passage. You don't want to be thinking about much anyway because it will just get in the way of your technique. There are, however, always little keys (usually exceptions) in a technical passage that you can be thinking about while the rest of the "rules" fly by, courtesy of your subconscious and practicing!

A personal note here. I have observed over the years that horn players seem to be amongst the most reactionary in the orchestra when it comes to alternate fingerings. It seems that some people, mostly amateurs, think that if you are not using your regular fingerings, you are somehow cheating. This attitude, from people who would otherwise seem to be among the most intelligent in the orchestra, is pretty funny to me. Do violinists, pianists, flautists or anyone else take this attitude? No way. So why do so many of us? It's just silly.

4. All this having been said, make sure your alternate fingerings are in tune and sound good.

If you are playing something super fast you might be able to get away with a slightly out-of-tune fingering, but you should be doing everything you can to minimize and disguise that fact. Usually, by practicing a passage that may have a slightly out of tune alternate fingering in play, you will get used to putting it in tune if you are thinking about it.

Phrasing and Musicianship

1. Get to the phrasing right away.

Don't decide that you are going to learn the "musical stuff" later. Get into it right away. The musical intent dictates how you are going to perform the piece or passage. *Any technical decisions must support the musical style and phrasing.* Dynamics can at least be noted, although I sometimes wait to play extreme dynamics until I feel have put the rest of the elements together, because I want to save energy for my repetitions.

2. Play phrases and parts of phrases out of context.

Playing the phrases and mini-phrases separately and out of context (out of time with each other) can be an excellent way to start to learn a piece or to break down a piece even if it has been learned before. Note how the phrases (or parts of phrases) feel individually, and then start putting them back together. This really reinforces things like pick-up notes and weak-to-strong-beat phrasing right from the start. If one phrase or part of a phrase needs work, stop and work on it. Slow it down. Decide if there is some part of your basic playing that you need to emphasize to make the phrase work. This will also allow you to assess how your fingerings feel and make other basic adjustments without being distracted by a long phrase. Sometimes you can phrase with the fingerings or switches between horns. This helps you remember the fingerings.

I have been using this technique more and more with my students when they first read a concerto or excerpt. It seems extreme, but I have found that they learn the piece faster and they are naturally using good phrasing technique right from the beginning. For short examples of this, see the end of this chapter and the end of the "Tonguing Efficiency" section.

Some Basic Rules of Phrasing.

1. Work from the weak beats to the strong beats.

If I could just pass on one rule of phrasing it would be to phrase, or lead, from the weak beats (or parts of beats) to the strong beats. Strong beats always, or almost always, get their due, but the weaker off-beats, pick-up notes

and notes of short duration tend to disappear. This is a very bad thing because the weak beats are generally the real expressive elements in music. Pumping the strong beats also leads to very crude, boring music and often contributes to things like rushing or other rhythmic anomalies. Think of building a brick wall. If you just stack bricks one on top of another, you not only have a very odd looking structure but one that you could probably push over with your hand. By overlapping the bricks we not only get aesthetic appeal, but more importantly, we achieve intrinsic strength much greater than before. The off-beats and pickup notes are like the overlap in the bricks. They hold the music together. If you are paying attention to the weak beats and smaller notes you are also less likely to rush through something in an unmusical manner.

2. Articulation does not equal phrasing.

I don't know how many times I have heard conductors say "phrase it this way" when what they really meant to say was to articulate something a certain way. I've even encountered teachers at the university level who teach their students to phrase according to the articulations, only. Actually, most great composers– no, most composers in general– use the technique of phrasing against the articulations as an expressive gesture, an important expressive gesture. Phrasing comes from the underlying rhythm of the line. It comes from the direction of the melody, or, in lieu of a melodic line, the rhythmic pulse of the phrase. And, although there are composers who have tried to remove any semblance of musical phrasing from their pieces, we must certainly work to be ready to supply the right phrasing when it is called for, because it is a lot easier to just leave it out if that is what is appropriate.

When you are learning a piece look for the phrasing without the articulations. After all, composers like Mozart rarely indicated articulations in solo parts, leaving that to the soloists as part of their personal expression. (He did write articulations in the orchestra parts, presumably to set a tone or style for the orchestra.) With a melodic composer like Mozart you can easily feel his use of weak-to-strong-beat phrasing. Your articulations do not necessarily need to follow the rhythmic phrasing and are often better working slightly against it as another sort of "brick wall-like" overlap.

3. Know where you are leading to in a phrase.

To continue with Mozart for a minute, I don't know how many players I have heard who are constantly playing the last note in a phrase with the kind of emphasis that would suggest it is the high point or goal of the phrase. In other words, they make it the loudest note. Rarely does Mozart intend this in his music. Most composers do not either. Have a clear idea about the arch of the phrase. If you cannot figure it out, get some help. It doesn't even have to be a horn teacher. In some of the exercises and examples, I have indicated simple phrasing or motion by the use of arrows.

How Much Should I Practice?

So far I have said nothing about the length of practice sessions. Since most young players don't practice enough, I figure that if you follow what I have been talking about above, you will probably end up putting in more time than you are used to if you aren't practicing enough, and perhaps less time than you are now spending if you are practicing too much. If you are a serious student of the horn, that might be one hour or more a day in high school, up to three or so in college. As you will read in the "Endurance" section in "Tips and Tricks," the most I ever practiced on a regular basis was when I was in college– about three hours a day. On days when I had rehearsals it would be less. Those hours were carefully structured so that I would accomplish what I needed to do over the course of the week. If you are becoming a practice maniac, and I would consider more than three hours a day heading into this category, you should consider how efficient you are in your practice methods. After all, we are trying to accomplish very specific things with our time, not just putting in hours and trying to "do it all" in one day. I think one of the healthiest things about being a brass player is that we just don't benefit from marathon practicing. Fatigue takes care of that. You can spend the time you are not practicing enjoying other things in life and thanking your lucky stars that you are not a piano player. Don't waste the best years of your life in a practice room.