

SOUND THE TRUMPET

HOW TO BLOW YOUR OWN HORN



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CHAPTER 5 - FAST FINGERS

Success is following the pattern of life one enjoys most. —Al Capp (1909-1979)

This Chapter Covers:

- Finger Technique
- Hand Positions
- Changing Notes
- Finger Exercises

Terms to Know:

dexterity: Skill and ease in using the hands.

metronome: Your best friend. It will keep your sense of timing sharp and precise. Buy one! Use it! To learn more, see “How to Use the Metronome” on page 76, and “Metronome: Your Rhythmic Best Friend” on page 221.

sixteenth notes (♩♩♩♩): Four notes per beat, foot tap, or metronome click. The count in $\frac{4}{4}$ time is “one-ee-and-uh, two-ee-and-uh, three-ee-and-uh, four-ee-and-uh.”

Finger Technique?

Believe it or not, there are actually correct and beneficial ways to use your fingers on the trumpet. You already know how to hold the horn, so that part is already taken care of. What we’ll be dealing with in this chapter is moving from one note to the next, finger patterns, and finger exercises to get your fingers more nimble.

As with every other aspect of the trumpet, the key to fast fingers is staying relaxed. The looser you are, the faster you’ll be able to go. The practice of staying relaxed is something you’ll monitor for as long as you play the trumpet. Always check in with your posture and level of relaxation to be sure you stay upright and loose.

There are a few left hand techniques you should be aware of, but most of what we’ll cover happens in the right hand, so we’ll start there. If you happen to be one of those rare individuals who works the valves with your left hand, like Buddy Bolden, the first jazz musician, then apply what follows to the correct hand.

The Right Hand



To refresh your memory, the right hand thumb should rest between the “valley” of the first and second valves, just under the lead pipe, or underneath and pointing back along the lead pipe, like jazz trumpeter Brian Lynch. The pinky finger rests on top of the finger ring, NOT in it. This is because that finger ring is very easy to pull on, and this will hamper finger speed, hurt your sound and probably your face, too. Fingers are curved like you’re holding a tennis ball.

Changing Notes

The thing to remember is that you *must* practice these movements *very* slowly at first so your body learns them correctly. Start slowly and monitor your performance so you know each finger is perfect, then gradually speed up as fast as you can. Keep your fingering clean and correct at all speeds.



USE A METRONOME! This is *so* important. You want that rhythm in your fingers and the best way to do this is to practice finger patterns with a metronome. Whether you're just doing the patterns without the horn, playing scale patterns, or playing music, practice with the metronome so you know your rhythm is perfect. *This will help your finger accuracy more than anything else you could do!* To learn more, flip ahead to, "How to Use the Metronome" on page 76.

Two paragraphs ago I said practice slowly. This means slowly from one note to the next. However, the valve motion itself should be as fast as possible. Pound the valve down while you keep the air moving. This allows for a smooth transition from one note to another.



It's especially important to slam your valves when you're playing a slow song. Because the music is slow, you'll want to move your valves slowly too, but don't give in to the temptation. If you move your valves slowly, you won't get a clean change between notes. If your air is moving and you pound down the valves, your note changes will be clean and clear and beautiful. If you move your valves slowly you'll get another interesting effect we'll talk about in Chapter 15.



When fingering notes which use more than one valve, be sure to press all the valves down at the same time. This will help you avoid chipped or missed notes (also known as *kacks* or *clams*).

Keep your finger tips on the valve buttons even when they're not pressing down on a valve. Look at the picture on the previous page to see where your fingers should be all the time. This is a difficult technique to achieve when playing fast, and especially when using only the first two valves. Keep that third finger down on the button if you can. The closer your fingers are to the valve, the quicker they can react. If your fingers are high above the valve buttons, it will take more time to react and push the valve down.

The Left Hand

The main thing to remember about your right hand is to keep it loose and relaxed. Try not to grip the valve casing tightly because eventually you'll need your ring finger and thumb to work the slides. We'll get to that later.

Example 5.1 The left hand. Keep it loose. You're not holding the horn so much as you are letting the trumpet rest in your hand. Don't squeeze.

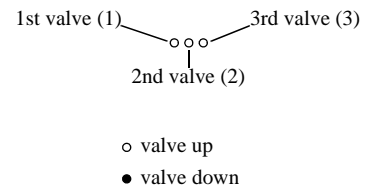


Exercises For Accuracy and Speed

These patterns can be done anywhere. Try tapping out finger patterns on the pad of your thumb. Curl your fingers and practice fingerings on a flat surface like a table top. Hold a pencil with your left hand, put your right thumb underneath the pencil and do fingerings on the top of the pencil. If you're really ambitious you can find a junker trumpet and use a hacksaw to cut off the valve casings so you have a portable set of valves to practice on. It's kind of fun to chop up a trumpet like that.

Otherwise, just practice on the horn itself. During your practice sessions you'll have the horn off your face about as much as you have it on your face. When the horn is off your face, don't just sit there and stare at the wall. Use the time to practice fingerings. There are also times during rehearsals when the director is occupied with another section and the horn isn't on your face. While you're waiting, actively practice by doing finger patterns. Every little bit of time you spend honing your skills will add up, so use that time wisely. You won't regret it.

To make things neater, the exercises below use numbers for valves instead of the graphic illustration (0 = open, 1 = first valve, 2 = second valve, 3 = third valve).



Practice these patterns until they're memorized and you know exactly how fast you're able to go. Start all exercises at a comfortably slow tempo (slow enough to do it exactly right) and progress from there.

All exercises use the sixteenth note rhythm (4 notes per beat—the “+” symbol stands for “and”, so the count is, “one-ee-and-uh, two-ee-and-uh, etc. For more information about counting and written music in general, get a copy of *Basic Music Theory: How to Read, Write, and Understand Written Music*. I'll show you the details of the exercise first and successive exercises will have only the fingering, but the rhythm is the same.

Always strive for perfection. **START SLOWLY!** Curve those fingers. Check your hand position. Dust off your metronome. It won't do you any good if it's in your case or, even worse, sitting in a music store somewhere waiting for you to buy it! If you don't have a metronome or don't use the one you have, ask yourself the question, “How good do I want to be?” Answer honestly.

A metronome will help you track your progress. In the Codicil of this book is a chart used to monitor your exercises from day to day and week to week. It's important to know where you've been, where you are, and where you're going. Plus, it's more efficient to start practicing at the exact tempo you left off with instead of trying to find your fastest tempo all over again.

Example 5.2 Finger exercises. Repeat many times. Do these both with and without the horn, high, middle and low.

Beat/Foot Tap: ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

1. Single Finger

count: 1 e + a 2 e + a 3 e + a 4 e + a


| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |

- 1 Pound the valves down!
- 2 Say the count while moving your fingers.
- 3 Valves hit exactly on the count.

1 = ●○○ 12 = ●●○ 123 = ●●●
 2 = ○●○ 23 = ○●●
 3 = ○○● 13 = ●○●



2. Two Fingers



count: 1 e + a 2 e + a 3 e + a 4 e + a

fingering: 12 0 12 0 12 0 12 0 12 0 12 0 12 0
0 12 0 12 0 12 0 12 0 12 0 12 0 12

23 0 23 0 etc.
0 23 0 23

13 0 13 0 etc.
0 13 0 13

23 0 23 0 etc.
0 23 0 23

More Difficult Variations:

23 0 12 0 etc. 12 23 12 23 etc.
0 23 0 12 23 12 23 12


13 0 12 0 etc.
0 13 0 12

13 0 23 0 etc.
0 13 0 23

13 23 13 23 etc.
23 13 23 13

12 13 12 13 etc.
13 12 13 12

3. Combinations



count: 1 e + a 2 e + a 3 e + a 4 e + a

fingering: 0 13 12 13 0 13 12 13 0 13 12 13 0 13 12 13
1 0 12 0 1 0 12 0 1 0 12 0 1 0 12 0
1 0 13 0 1 0 13 0 1 0 13 0 1 0 13 0
23 1 0 1 23 1 0 1 23 1 0 1 23 1 0 1
12 2 23 2 etc.
13 12 2 12 etc.
0 12 2 12 etc.
0 13 23 13 etc.
1 0 23 1 etc.
23 1 2 1 etc.
2 23 12 23 etc.
12 2 0 2 etc.
0 12 1 12 etc.

more patterns: 0 13 23 13 etc.
1 0 23 0 etc.
1 0 123 0 etc.
23 1 2 1 etc.
2 123 13 123 etc.
1 0 23 0 etc.
1 0 123 0 etc.
23 1 2 1 etc.

difficult: 123 23 12 23 etc.
123 23 1 23 etc.
123 13 23 13 etc.
123 1 23 1 etc.
13 23 12 23 etc.

Try these fingerings “dry” (without sound) and also while blowing the horn. Once you’ve memorized a bunch, you can do them anywhere. For different variations when actually playing these patterns on the horn, you can choose whether the pitch will go up or down from the starting note.

Up Next

Breathing is one of the most important skills that affect your sound and ability on trumpet. There are specific techniques that will help you get a great breath so your trumpet sound can be full and present and beautiful. Not only does correct breathing help your tone quality, but correct breathing will also help you play higher, softer, faster, and longer. Learn all about proper breathing in the next chapter.