



Tuba & Euphonium

Beginning Tips

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Forming the Embouchure:

1. Lips together...as if saying the letter "m"
2. Firm corners into a "puckered smile" (watch for tension)
3. Blow a steady, centered air stream to create a buzz
4. Try to place mouthpiece as centered as possible but be aware of students facial features (lips, jaw structure, etc.)
5. Reinforce buzz practice in your students

Common Problems & Solutions:

a. smiling embouchure

- this often creates a "quick fix" to many range problems but many other performance aspects will suffer in the long term such as tone, endurance, and physical damage to the student.

- encourage the student to bring their corners down which will in turn allow more lip in the mouthpiece creating a fuller tone.

b. air leaking

- the tuba-euphonium mouthpiece is quite large for a beginning 5th or 6th grade student so pay close attention that a full seal is kept on the mouthpiece at all times.

- be aware that your students physical features are still developing and issues such as over-bites, under-bites, tooth problems will have an effect on this issue. You are

encouraged to experiment in finding the optimal solution for your student.

c. *unfocused air stream*

- this problem is often signified by “puffed cheeks”.
- a good teaching concept is having the student focus on the air coming out through the bell of the instrument instead of into the mouthpiece.

- Exercises such as “spit drills” (see explanation of exercises below), “mock berp”, along with a steady regiment of breathing exercises will do wonders for this issue.

Exercises

d. Spit Drills

- Open the Spit Valve on the main tuning slide and hold it open using a 1” binder clip. You might want to use a paper towel in between the clip to absorb the condensation. Work on long tone exercises or other “daily routine” materials with the clip in place. You will experience that after a few moments of playing with the clip that your air flow and capacity will expand and once you remove the clip a change will be noticeable in the students tone production.

e. Mock Berp

- Place a “flat” toothpick in between the shank of the mouthpiece and the receiver. Work on long tone exercises or other “daily routine” materials. This is generally the same concept as the spit drill but will a more drastic effect.

Important Notes for Instrument Position

1. Instrument should always come to the student!!!
2. Watch for tension in the student’s body
 - tension in holding the instrument (thumb rest, hand, etc.)
3. Always use additional aids for students if necessary
 - Tri-pod support stands for tuba
 - Have the student sit on phone books

- Consider starting the student on euphonium and switching to tuba as he/she develops
4. Bad instrument position will lead to many different problems
- The most common problem from poor instrument position is an off-set embouchure.

Playing Basics

- Start on a comfortable range for the student, which is normally around F2 or Bb2, and work on expanding their range from there. Please be aware that many beginning band methods start on different notes. Try to find the best one for all of your students.

- Working on a **Daily Routine** of: Breathing Exercises, Long-Tone, Lip-Slurs will greatly improve your ensembles tone quality and musicianship. This routine need only be around 5 to 10 minutes alternating the focal points daily to avoid boring the students.

-**Scales** are one of the most important components of music; and sadly, they are also one of the most avoided. Please try to encourage your students to their scales and provide some practical use in the band class. Also, do not limit your scale practice to the most common beginning band keys such as Bb, F, and Eb. Challenge your students with harder keys. It has been my experience that if you don't inform your students that B natural or F# is a hard key then they will not be intimidated by it. Children are like "sponges" at that age and will absorb more than we give them credit.

- **Tone** production is one of the most frustrating concepts to explain when dealing with young musicians; it makes our days as teachers long but it drives the students' parents crazy as we require at home practice. One of the most common issues in tone production is the student not "opening up" to create a darker mellow sound.

A good teaching concept is one I call "**Fogging the Mirror**"

- have the student blow warm air on a section of their tuba or euphonium. The condensation should create a slight fog on the instrument (you might also explain to them that this is the condensation that collects in the horn...not spit!)

- have the student create the same effect through the mouthpiece.
This action, though not necessary will connect the concept of “blowing warm air” to “blowing with an open sound”.

- once the student has worked on the above two steps, have the student play a note well in his/her most comfortable range with this “warm air” concept. If all is done correctly, there should be a marked improvement in the students sound. The next challenge will be getting the students to sustain this sound with more air.

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