**Trumpet and Brass Playing Frequently Asked Questions by Jeff Purtle**

**Trumpet and Brass Playing Frequently Asked Questions**

This is not meant to be a stand alone article, but to address questions from the first two articles, [*How To Practice*](https://www.purtle.com/jeff-how-to-practice)and [*What To Practice*](https://www.purtle.com/jeff-what-to-practice), which should be read first.

Categories of Questions:

1. Physical Problems
2. Attitude
3. Taking Lessons
4. Equipment
5. Music
6. Business/Career
7. Lessons with Claude Gordon

**1. Physical Problems**

Do some people just play different than others?

There is only one way to play correctly and various ways to play incorrectly.

How many people play this way?

All the great players play this way. However, not all of them understand that they do. You must use your discernment to ask the right questions and listen. Some players play very good and have weaknesses because of one or more of the items being incorrect. Some players play correct, but are not developed.

How much do you practice each day and what? How many days a week?

I practice my entire practice routine every day of the week.  
That is between 90 minutes to 5 hours, usually about 3 hours.  
Recently, I refrain from practice on Sunday due to the 4th Commandment.

I understand all of this, but how come I can’t play as high as I want?

It is either a matter of incorrect playing, lack of development over time, or both.

How long should I try playing this way for?

If you understand this is the only way things work, you must do this until it shows results in your playing, which it does for everyone without exception.

How do I stay regular with practice?

Practice everyday even when you don’t feel like it. You must be disciplined.  
Have a contest with yourself to see how many days you can go without missing.  
After the first three months it becomes a habit and hard to get away from.  
Claude Gordon went 15 years without missing a days practice.

What do you think about breathing exercises?

Breathing exercises should be a part of the daily practice routine.  
Some people make things far too complicated with breathing devices that are gimmicks and fads that are for a season that players never used in the past.  
Notice the most important item is Wind Power not capacity.  
Anyone can develop these items no matter your size and natural gifts.

What about breathing from the diaphragm or stomach?

If the chest is up everything will work correctly without thinking about the anything else.  
The role of the diaphragm in breathing is greatly misunderstood.  
The diaphragm is an involuntary sheet of muscle tissue.  
If you could control it you could stop hiccups voluntarily.  
it is as thick as a sheet of paper and can not be credited with generating power.  
It’s main function is to separate the lungs from the stomach and intestines.  
it moves only in reaction to pressure differences in the body.  
It has only two positions, flat and raised.  
It moves to the raised position instantly when the pressure on either side of it are unequal from be low on air or blowing hard enough.  
Breathing involves many muscles of the upper body.

What do you think about long tones? Will long tones build strength?

Long Tones as practiced by most people are very stagnating and make players stiff and work against flexibility. A “Long Hold” as used by Claude Gordon and Herbert L. Clarke in their books are always at the end of some movement around the instrument and are used as an isometric exercise to develop Wind Power. They are always done in the middle to lower register because you never should do any normal playing and especially high register playing when you are below half full. See Clarke’s comment:  
“Perhaps now you will realize that much more benefit is derived from playing these exercises in one breath than by holding long tones. At the same time endurance, technique, elasticity of lips and the knack of reading music rapidly, is gained.” H. L. Clarke, Technical Studies, Sixth Study, p. 29 in original text.

How do I build endurance?

Endurance is a by product of correct easy playing. You don’t build it by brute strength. Rest as much as you play between exercises to avoid any fatigue, which begins to tear down and teach you bad habits.

How do I improve my sound?

A good sound is result of a free vibration. Correct playing results in a good sound. A good sound is important, but if your focus becomes primarily a good sound at the expense of working on all the basic then your sound will suffer too. If you lack flexibility, range, endurance, finger technique, etc., then it will be evident that your sound is bad when you are challenged in those areas. You want to master all aspects of playing and be able to control your sound too for a variety of sounds on demand.

How do I build more power?

Power is a by product of correct playing. It is not the same as brute force. But, brass playing does demand Wind Power. Wind Power is built by Breathing Exercises, “Long Holds” on certain exercises, and Range Study work. Breath Control to play soft and flexibility work together to improve power also.

How do I fix that spread (lip) feeling?

This feeling is an indicator that Tongue Level is too low and you are playing too loud. Playing too loud can confuse accurate Tongue Level, resulting in this feeling and a spread out unfocused sound because the air is not being used efficiently.

My band director keeps telling me to play louder and I can’t. Why?

Playing powerful is more a matter of correct technique than physical strength. Watch master martial artists and notice that size doesn’t matter as much as speed and correct technique. Brass playing too is not based on physical strength alone. Some of the most powerful players have been small in stature.

How loud is too loud?

If your playing is out of control and your sound is unfocused and spread you are too loud. If your pitch is not on because of playing too loud you are working against yourself. Playing in tune with a good sound has more to do with projection than brute force. Look at the Chicago Symphony brass section and notice how they can produce more sound with better quality than an entire marching band. It is skill and precise pitch.

How soft is too soft?

“Never play softer than you can get a sure sound.” - Claude Gordon  
As you gain Wind Power you will have more to work with and in time it becomes possible to play in a whisper. This happens by playing soft with power and not playing soft with weakness of blowing. This soft playing later helps improve your ease in playing loud.

Why can’t I play high notes soft? Why not practice high notes soft?

It is really bad to attempt high notes without enough Wind Power because it makes you compensate with more mouthpiece pressure and/or a tighter embouchure, which works against a good sound, endurance and many other things. “The air does the work, the tongue channels the pitch!”-Claude Gordon Later Wind Control be developed to play the high notes with strength yet soft after the knack correct use of air is developed.

Why do notes cut out and not respond?

This is from one or more of the following:  
Not enough Wind Power  
Incorrect use of Tongue Level  
Embouchure too low to let The Lip vibrate easily  
Equipment too tight to allow air to make The Lip vibrate  
Too much loud playing, which can throw off correct Tongue Level

Why is it important to single tongue K Tongue Modified?

This is not an optional item. Without tonguing this way you will never experience accuracy, tonguing speed and ease of playing especially in the upper register. Incorrect tonguing disrupts the tongue’s arch in the front of the mouth working against Tongue Level. Everyone uses Tongue Level when they play. Most people are never taught about correct single tonguing. The very tip of the tongue always remains in contact with the top of the bottom teeth and you produce the “T” just slightly back from the tip of the tongue. This is in the front middle of the tongue, hence Claude Gordon coined the term “K Tongue Modified” because like K tonguing it is in the middle of the tongue, but modified to be more forward toward the tip. Here are some people I have spoken with that I know tongue this way: Arturo Sandoval, Doc Severinsen, Frank Kaderabek, Wayne Bergeron, Bob O’Donnel, and Claude Gordon and his students. Claude Gordon learned this from Herbert L. Clarke, who taught it to all his students. Also, Armando Ghitalla tongued this way and taught his students this.

How do I eliminate cracked and missed notes?

You must tongue “K Tongue Modified”

How come I can’t double tongue slow?

You must work on KTM single tonguing, K tonguing, and multiple tonguing at all speeds with a metronome.

What about closing the throat?

It is impossible to close or open your throat. Your tongue is what moves in your mouth. It is possible to do the “Eee” in the back of the tongue like “Ich,” resulting in a bad sound and no arch of the tongue in the front of the mouth.

Why practice so many models (i.e. articulation patterns)?

Your Tongue Level must be trained to respond accurately from every possible approach to any given note.

Is it different to slur or tongue?

The same Tongue Level is used for any given note no matter if is slurred into from another note or tongued T or K tongued.

How do you play with a different sound for Big Band vs. Orchestral music?

Listen. Imitate. Adjust. The sound can be changed by different tongue shapes, angle of the horn, intensity of air, and movements of your mouth.

Won’t striking and lifting the fingers slow you down?

Look at players that have unusually fast and clean fingers.   
Arturo Sandoval, Allen Vizzutti and Doc Severinsen all agree on this item.

How much should you play Clarke’s Tech. Studies to know it?

This is a book you will never outgrow.  
There are various stages to “knowing” this book. Don’t ever think you are done.  
The order of priority should be: clean fingers, various articulations, clean speed,   
and finally Wind Control tying it all together.  
Absolutely all the metronome markings and Wind Control markings are possible for anyone.  
I have heard Clarke’s Ex. #1 played 55 times in one breath, Etude #5 played two times in one breath, and the three octave chromatic from low G to high G ten times in one breath. Anything is possible with correct practice and patience and strong will power.

What causes raspy tone?

Bad vibration from the lips is usually from one or more of the following: mouthpiece too low, not taking enough rest with horn off mouth between exercises, or too tight of equipment.

Should I play downstream or upstream? What about horn pivot?

Don’t worry about it. The jaw moves with Tongue Level to different degrees with different players. What you look like doesn’t matter as much as how it sounds and feels. This can even change during a players life.

How important is the lip?

It’s only function is to vibrate. To prove the point you can even produce a sound with your tongue stuck out in place of using the lower lip because it too will vibrate. You could potentially develop an embouchure any place on your lip like Gordon, Mendez and Herseth. Claude used to demonstrate a three octave chromatic from low G to G above high C while at the same time sliding the trumpet from one corner of his mouth to the other corner. The top lip does vibrate better and will get the best results.

Should I use a high note embouchure? (i.e. lower lip tucked in)

NO! This is a very bad thing to get into. That will hinder your flexibility and sound over the entire range of the horn. There is no short cut to correct practice and development over time. Have patience!

What about too much facial movement?

Don’t worry about this. Focus on the basics. People look different.

Why did Arban say to not change an embouchure?

In Arban’s text he was not dogmatic about his position, but dogmatic about changing an embouchure being bad. Consider the fact that he was speaking as an authority at the time and those changing would be changing from a higher position to his 1/3 top lip position. He knew from experience that people had problems with the change. The problem was not the change but what the change was to. St. Jacome, an author at the same time, cites in his original original text that 2/3 on the top lip is the best way. In 2002 Carl Fischer reissued the St. Jacome’s Method with the original text that Claude Gordon was instrumental in restoring.

When should I change my embouchure?

As soon as possible. But, hopefully at a time when you can be free from the pressure of playing exposed or high parts. Summer is a perfect time for students.

How do I change my embouchure? How long will it take?

If possible don’t play a single note for 4-6 weeks to forget the old placement.  
Set the mouthpiece on the red of the lower lip, with at least 2/3 on the top lip.  
Practice low Tongue Level slurs (i.e. lip slurs) also with pedal tones.  
Practice tonguing to get an accurate centered sound.  
Begin weekly lessons in Physical Approach To Elementary Brass Playing (Gordon).  
Don’t play higher than C in the staff for 2 weeks.  
Some can be back to playing a high C in three months.  
By one year anyone should be completely confident in the good results.  
Time completely off the horn to forget the old embouchure speeds things up.

Is it possible to damage yourself from too much practice?

No. If you are playing correctly you should be able to play all day and not get tired.  
Incorrect practice even for a short period of time can create bad habits.  
Bad habits and supposed permanent damage can always be fixed with patience.

What about playing off center?

I personally play off center because of irregular teeth and comfort.  
I used to play with a low mouthpiece placement and the change to more top lip matters the most. There are some excellent players that play off center.

What about air leaking out the sides of mouth?

If this happens it is nothing to worry about. I know a teacher that taught his students to intentionally leak air and that is stupid. You want the air to go into the instrument to produce sound. Claude once had a student that could play powerful double high Cs and his corners would open up and you could see his teeth and a little air would leak. He sounded great. It looked strange. But, everything was working correctly.

What do you think about buzzing the mouthpiece? or the lips alone?

I believe at best neither is beneficial and usually it is detrimental to most players.  
The lips do not play the instrument. The Wind Power and Tongue Level do more.  
Forget about the lip and practice the instrument.  
Buzzing usually makes players tighter and gives the wrong feel of tighter for higher.  
correct playing of Pedal Tones helps to show how to play high notes with the Lips more relaxed and able to vibrate freer.

Are my teeth ok to play high notes?

Some people worry about this too much. There once was a guy who said he knew Maynard Ferguson’s secret to his high notes was the gap in his front teeth. He had a gap opened up and then went to show Maynard at a concert. When he showed Maynard, Maynard smiled and showed the man how he had his gap fixed and filled in. That kind of stuff is stupid to worry about.

What about the Suzuki method for trumpet?

Reading music should come before playing by ear.

What about Alexander Technique?

Alexander Technique is primarily focused on body posture.  
If the player looses sight of the 7 Items and replaces them with their own interpretation or ignores the 7 Items, then bad habits can creep in and technique will regress.

What do you think of Arnold Jacobs’ approach?

Jacobs was a fantastic tuba player.  
His most erroneous idea was that focus on musicality will fix incorrect technique.  
He didn’t believe in a definition of “correct” technique, just a pragmatic approach.  
His focus on the quantity of air and the “Aww” vowel sound neglected Tongue Level.  
There seems to be a big lack of technical exercises and a practice routine in his followers.  
But, he and his best students show evidence of practice of technical exercises.  
He and his better students also tongued “K Tongue Modified.”

What do you think of Bill Adams’ approach?

Adams has turned out some of the best players in the world.  
He like Gordon was known for helping players at all levels to become great.  
He was a student of Clarke like Gordon and was taught the same fundamentals.  
He may not explain all the fundamentals, but they are covered in his routines.  
His focus on psychology and playing seems too esoteric and mystical.

Can a mentally disabled person learn to play?

Yes. I have had some that are better students than people with average mental ability. Brass playing is not that hard!

Can someone play with a tongue piercing?

Yes. I had a student who played fine with it. He played in a Ska/Punk Rock Band. Of course it is best to remove it when playing. It works, but doesn’t look pretty.

Do braces limit high notes?

No. I have had a 4th grader, playing only 3 weeks, hit an F above high C on trumpet with no strain. I had a student who made principal trumpet in SC All State Band and Orchestra with braces. Don’t worry about it!

What are some goals to have?

Tonguing Speed (Clarke could single tongue 16ths for a solid minute at 180 bpm.)  
Clarke’s Technical Studies marking regarding speed and breath control  
Accuracy (Don’t tolerated cracked notes, bad rhythm and time, intonation, etc..)  
How many days can you go without missing a days practice?  
Can you play any scale or chord in all keys in any register?

How do I fix my problems?

Focus on the solution as it relates to the 7 Basic Items and avoid thinking about what not to do, otherwise you will do what you desire not to do even more.

What should I play for a warm-up? Do I warm-up before playing my routine?

If you practice a correctly structured and balanced routine you will be ready anytime.  
There are times as a professional when you don’t have time to do a “warm-up.”  
Tongue Level and scales usually are good to play to “warm-up if you need it.

**2. Attitude**

Be confident, not arrogant.

“You must drive all fear out of your system!”-Claude Gordon

How do I stay humble when I play better than everyone?

Being humble and teachable are keys to improvement.  
You will never be able to do everything better than everyone.  
You must be aware of the great players and what you have to strive for.  
Your standard must be complete perfection. That will keep you humble.  
The greatest players are usually humble because their standards are very high.

How do I match up to others? Be humble! There is always someone better than you.

Admire other virtuosos:

Flexibility and Facility: Allen Vizzutti, Del Staigers, George Swift, Walter Rogers  
Perfect Accuracy: Claude Gordon, Malcolm McNab, Jerry Hey  
Power and a Big Sound: Arturo Sandoval, Conrad Gozzo, Johnny Audino,   
Bud Herseth  
Creativity: Miles Davis, Clifford Brown, Clarke Terry  
Beauty and Ease: Maurice André  
High Notes: Arturo Sandoval, Bud Brisbois, Johnny Madrid, Maurice André, Maynard Ferguson(old recordings), Andrea Toffanelli, Roger Ingram  
Clean Playing: Claude Gordon, Malcolm McNab, Wayne Bergeron

How do I deal with someone I disagree with? Teacher, Student, Professor, Friend?

There will always be people that disagree with you.  
Even if you make the most convincing arguments they won’t change their mind.  
Practice correctly and understand why and wait for people to ask you for advice.  
People generally don’t like to be told they are wrong or ignorant.  
When studying with a professor for a grade you must make the best of it.

What do you do if you have a bad day?

Shut-up and don’t make excuses!  
“Hit it hard and wish it well!”-Claude Gordon  
Don’t forget “Big Breath, Chest Up”. That is the number one thing to remember.  
Never let people know you are tired! Sound your best anyway.  
Don’t blame your mouthpiece or instrument for your lack of preparation.

I am the best player and want to play first chair. What do I do?

Practice even harder. Be patient and wait for an opportunity.  
Be the best section player possible.  
Don’t ever play other people’s solos unless asked by the conductor!

**3. Taking Lessons**

How can a trumpet player teach another brass instrument?

The basic 7 Items are the same for every brass instrument.  
The challenge is to know how to use and adapt material.  
The teacher must understand typical expectations of each instrument.  
The teacher must know things such as Transposition, Bass, Alto, and Tenor Clef.  
Claude Gordon had many professional students on Horn, Trombone, and Tuba.

How can someone take from two teachers at one time?

This is a bad idea. But, possible.  
The student has to have a firm understanding of the 7 Items or they will be confused.  
A good teacher will hopefully guide the student through every aspect of practice.  
Trying to do that with two teachers at the same time won’t do justice to either teacher.

Should I study with as many people as possible for a different perspective?

It is arrogant to think you can learn everything from a teacher in a few lessons.  
It is ignorant to think someone will have a secret that will fix everything in one lesson.  
Study from one person consistently with the focus of developing the basics correctly.  
This can’t be done when taking from several teachers.  
The contacts you make from taking from several teachers will be worthless if they think you are a bad student and don’t practice the way they tell you.

Do I really need all those books?

Yes. You must build a complete library of method books that will serve as tools to improve your playing. Knowing how to extract the author’s knowledge and experience from their book will show you how to be the best possible player.

Do you know of a cheap teacher close by? “My child is just a beginner and not serious.”

There is no such thing as a beginner teacher or an advanced teacher. There are good and bad teachers. One of the marks of a good teacher is not neglecting daily work on basics. The key to advanced playing is a solid foundation of basic skills. I believe far too many teachers and players don’t understand this and think advanced solos will do only what scales, exercises and systematic practice can do.

If everything is spelled out so clear in these articles and books, why take lessons from anyone?

Playing an instrument is an art form, like martial arts, that cannot be learned by a book, but only through physical experiences guided by someone else that understands how to take the student through systematic development and knows what is appropriate at the right time.

Why do lessons cost so much?

What you learn in lessons has great value.  
I used to pay $60 an hour for lessons with Claude and ten years of lessons and workshops cost about $13,000. I made that back in six months when I first started playing professionally at 18 years old. I now make my living at teaching and playing. My private study with Claude Gordon was more relevant to what I am doing now than my college music degree was.

How long should I take lessons to get caught up in band class?

Private lessons are not “tutoring for band.”  
Private lessons are to improve all your skills and give you total control of your horn.  
It would be ideal if everyone that played in band took private lessons.  
Schools that do this have the best sounding groups.

What about a teacher that says, “Let’s try this.”?

The expression might be well intentioned. But, a teacher must understand how things work and exactly how they are going to take you where you need to be. I don’t believe anything ever happens in life by luck or chance.

How do I know I have “outgrown” a teacher?

Be humble and learn!  
Students that think they “outgrow” a teacher must ask themselves how and why.  
Who helped them get to where they are in their playing? The one they outgrew?  
Some students and parents think they know more than they really know.  
The problem is really not with the teacher but with the student and the parents.  
Humility is essential to learning from anyone.  
Remember pride comes before a fall.

Do teachers with the best students teach the best?

Not necessarily. Some teachers recruit students that play great and take credit for someone else’s work. The better teachers are able to improve any students playing.

What makes one teacher better than another?

A good teacher has a firm grasp on the basics and how to communicate them.  
They also should be striving to improve their application of these basics.  
They should be serious about being the best at what they do. (i.e. inspiring)  
They should be encouraging because they know they can teach someone how.  
Being encouraging is natural for someone that knows these things work for anyone.

How can I be a good student?

Listen and think before talking or asking a question. Don’t waste time!  
Follow all the teachers instructions, not your interpretation of them.  
Know that sometimes you won’t understand until you actually experience things.  
Be patient.  
Be respectful.  
Be on time, which means early enough to make the teacher comfortable.  
Bring all materials.  
Don’t make excuses. It is annoying to anyone!  
Be humble. You never know as much as you think you do.

Do all great players make great teachers?

No. But, a teacher can’t teach a student to play better than they know how.  
Brass playing is a physical experience that you really don’t know until experienced.  
It is possible for a teacher to teach other brass instruments at as high a level as their primary one because they understand the experience and can transfer it.

Why do teachers need to practice?

Since playing is an experience, you can’t teach something you haven’t experienced.  
If someone comes wanting to know how to play a double high C and the teacher can’t do it, then how will the teacher know what to do to accomplish that goal?  
Claude Gordon personally practiced everything he gave his students.

How much should a teacher explain?

It is best when the teacher explains and applies at the same time.  
There are times when too much information can cause confusion.  
Certain exercises cause development that can be explained after the fact.  
It is always wise to use the fewest words in the clearest manner.

Will going to college make me a better performer to get a gig?

No. But, you should learn about all elements of music to be more informed.  
The private instructor and your practice are the most important factors.

Why go to college? What is the value of a music degree?

College gives you a broad base of general knowledge about many things.  
College can be a way to be exposed to a large variety of music styles.  
Contacts made in school sometimes lead to future business.  
Some of the best players though don’t have college degrees.  
The modern fallacy is that you will be a superior musician if you go to the right school.

What will look good on my resume? College? Orchestras?

The bottom line is that you either can or can’t play.  
People have won auditions and been fired when they can’t play the gig.  
A resume must show relevant things to the job being pursued.  
It would be foolish to list drum and bugle corps soloist on an orchestra resume.  
Know what your musical goals are and build your experience.

How do I find a great teacher?

These articles are good criteria for evaluation.  
Find out who has the best students and who has the most improved students.

What about saving money and taking from a good high school or college student?

There are significant differences in skill and experience of a professional.  
The teacher must have an overall strategy of what to be taught in what order.  
An experienced teacher will know what to listen for, and what to address first.  
The expense of incorrect development will far outweigh the savings of money.

What do you play when auditioning for a teacher?

The idea of auditioning for a teacher seems strange to me.  
The most important thing for me as a teacher is someone who is eager to learn.  
If you must prepare something know ALL your scales and play something tonal with contrasting lyrical and technical playing.  
A teacher can evaluate your playing usually after only a few notes.

What if this doesn’t work for me?

It will. You must have patience. It is the only way that it works.

Should I try different ways of playing to see what works?

There is only one correct way to play and many incorrect ways to try to play.  
In a world of subjective truth people recoil that anything can be objectively true.

Can a teacher make me a great player?

No. But, they can show you how to practice to get there.

Why use so many books?

To keep things interesting while focusing on the same basics.

Should I stop taking lessons from a teacher I don’t like?

No, unless they can’t teach well.

Who is the boss?

Some parents and students “think” the teacher is their employee, which is repulsive.  
The teacher must be respected as the authority.  
A student must be teachable.  
They have dedicated their life to teaching and should know more than other people.  
Consult the teacher about anything related to your instrument.

When should private lessons start?

They should start at the very beginning, provided there is a skilled private teacher.  
I get the best results with students that never hear incorrect information or a bad sound from sitting next to other band members. Also, the progress can be completely guided and controlled so as to avoid learning to play by brute force caused from trying to play too high too soon.

Why do teachers get good results that hold a different view on the basics?

It is possible for the basic items to be practiced without being fully understood. Some people fall into the knack of correct playing and don’t know why or how.

What should I do in my off season? Practice less?

No! Practice more!  
Don’t be a sluggard! It is in no way virtuous to brag about not practicing.

What are parents responsibilities? (i.e. Dos and Don’ts)

Do:

Compliment and encourage and let the qualified teacher give criticism.  
The student should know that their parents are always 100% behind them.  
Stay out of trying to teach the student or give advice.  
Refrain from giving advice on teaching to the teacher.  
Don’t take from more than one teacher, going behind the back of one.  
The parent and the student need to be patient.  
Trust the private teacher for their teaching of their high priority things first.  
Focus on secondary things will slow overall progress toward long term goals.  
Encourage the student to trust the teacher.  
Be on time and consistent to lessons and all appointments.  
Pay on time to teach responsibility and respect for the teacher’s work.  
Teach consistency and discipline in practice, lesson attendance and other activities.  
Keep all commitments (i.e. recitals, auditions, lessons, etc.)  
Teach the value of hard work.  
Never make excuses, blaming someone or something for personal mistakes.  
Teach self-discipline with a scheduled consistent daily practice time.  
Encourage responsibility (i.e. be on time, take accurate phone messages, return all phone calls promptly, be prepared)  
Buy everything the teacher requests asap.  
Ask the teacher for advice about all purchases (i.e. instruments, music camps, etc.)

Don’t:

Tell them they sound bad and point out mostly mistakes.  
Put the student down and make them worried and fearful.  
Allow them to make excuses for shortfalls (i.e. lessons, practice, performances)  
Threaten to take lessons away as punishment.  
Use practice as punishment.  
Don’t allow practice of their instrument before homework is complete.  
Practice must be considered an important daily discipline.  
A days missed practice can’t even be recovered from like homework.  
Don’t supply the child with an adequate instrument or ask the private teacher.  
Allow the child to be undisciplined and lazy. Children learn from their parents.  
Punish the child for a bad performance, making them hate and fear playing.  
Push them to goals/ends without the means to get there (i.e. lessons, practice, etc.).  
Set unrealistic goals.  
Force them to decide on their career before developing skill.  
Tell the student they know more than the teacher and discourage trust.  
Switch teachers often.  
Try to instruct the private teacher and child to the point of frustration.

**4. Equipment**

What makes a mouthpiece a good or bad one?

The mouthpiece either inhibits or allows the player to play correctly.  
A tight mouthpiece inhibits air flow necessary for correct playing and creates false security from more resistance. When someone is playing correctly the resistance comes from the arched tongue inside the mouth, giving security and control over everything. A more open mouthpiece will allow for a better vibration of the lips and a fuller sound and actually better wind control, endurance and control over tone. Most people fall into the trap of tight equipment because of incorrect notions about the lip playing the instrument.

What mouthpiece do your students play on?

My trumpet and cornet students all play on a “C. G. Personal” mouthpiece made by Zig Kanstul in Anaheim, CA. It is modeled after Del Staiger’s personal mouthpiece and is similar to the CG Benge mouthpieces. It has only one rim size. The cup has a slight V shape. The rim is narrow and rounded and tapered on the outside (as opposed to the Bach block design). The backbore is open with a concave taper similar to a Full Schmidt (i.e. “Symphonic”) backbore. The throat that comes with it is a drill #22. The CG Personal can be purchased from Patty Gordon at 909-866-2107 in Big Bear, CA. My french horn students play a Giardinelli C1, standard with a #1 drill throat.  
My trombone and euphonium students play a Bach 5G.  
My tuba students play a Conn Helleberg.

Do you have all your students play the same mouthpiece?

Because the selected mouthpiece allows everything to work correctly.  
The whole idea of a mouthpiece being an individual thing for each person is a product of commercial hype since the 1930s to promote the sale of more mouthpieces. Before that time mouthpieces were not sized.  
Correct practice is the big issue. All my younger students start on the CG Personal

Why don’t I sound like Maynard when I play his mouthpiece?

The late Don Ellis while in a lesson with Claude asked this common question. Even professionals fall prey to the notion that a mouthpiece might make someone sound a certain way. The best demonstration I have heard was Arturo Sandoval doing impersonations of peoples sounds(i.e. Freddy Hubbard, Maurice André, Timofei Dokshitzer, Harry James, Chet Baker, Clifford Brown, lead trumpet, the Haydn concerto with a “Classical” sound) all with his regular mouthpiece and trumpet. Most players are very eager to take credit for sounding good and then shift the blame to a “bad” mouthpiece when they sound bad. If you sound bad it is your fault for either incorrect practice, not enough correct practice or lack of mental focus.

What makes a quality instrument?

You must consider the quality, feel, long term value, and manufacturers reputation.  
The most expensive brass instruments are cheap compared to pianos and strings.  
Buy the very best instrument possible and you will enjoy playing it more.  
Also, a quality instrument will be easier to sell later if you need to.  
Be cautious of mass produced Assembly Line instruments.

How can someone double on say trumpet and tuba? Should anyone try?

Having personally done this I can speak from experience. Playing more than one brass instrument is possible and will not damage your embouchure. But, in order to do it well you must practice fundamentals on both, especially flexibility. My general advice is to first do one instrument at a very high standard and never compromise that one instrument. Don’t be a jack of all trades and a master of none!

Doesn’t a large bore horn and mouthpiece make you more tired?

Actually, just the opposite if you are playing correctly.  
Players that are used to tighter equipment and not blowing will experience a different feel of using more air and fatigue when they first play more open equipment. When all things are working correctly and the player has had enough time to get used to the change then they will understand the advantages. Most people “try” something for a few minutes or days and don’t get used to anything consistent. Each time equipment is changed the feel (i.e. Tongue Level) is changed and it takes time.

How come my new mouthpiece feels worse than the first day I played it?

This happens more on tight equipment.  
More open equipment will feel better and better over time. Be patient.

What about practice with a mute?

Mutes all restrict some air flow and have the same result as tighter equipment,  
placing resistance on the wrong side of the lips.  
The tongue inside the mouth creates a controllable resistance.

What about devices? (i.e. wind bag, spirometer, volumeter, BERP)

There is absolutely nothing that takes the place of systematic practice over time.  
You must avoid all supposed shortcuts and gimmicks.  
Tongue Level and resistance that the player feels and controls are dependent on the length of tubing and the corresponding resonant frequency. Buzzing a mouthpiece, the BERP of any other device can never feel like the instrument. The focus of all these devices comes back to the old fallacy of the lips playing the instrument instead of Wind Power and Tongue Level making the lips vibrate.

How should I tune my instrument? I play sharp or flat.

You are the one that plays the instrument in tune or not. You must listen.  
Strive for a resonant sound before moving the tuning slide.  
Incorrect embouchure, tonguing, and tongue level will hinder consistent intonation.  
(i.e. A mouthpiece too low can cause sharp pitch in the high register from pinching.)  
If the tuning slide is abnormally in or out too far something is wrong.  
A small mouthpiece will require the tuning slide to be out 1-4 mm (tpt.) more to be in tune. Usually the tuning slide is out 1 cm at room temperature with my mouthpiece.  
If the student tunes with a tuner without first listening for a resonant sound, they will usually play sharp, resulting in the director telling them to pull out, resulting in fixing the pitch on the one note, but making it necessary for them to pinch all the notes to be in tune and not flat. This hinders sound, endurance, power and range. If you are tuned up correctly the horn will work for you in resonating the best and efficiently transmit the sound to your listeners.

What is resonance? Playing in the center of the horn?

These are just terms to describe that the instrument has a specific frequency that it wants to produce sound at that will thereby result in the fullest most open tone, less resistance, and more power with less effort. If the players tuning slide is in or out to one extreme that is usually and indication they are playing too far under or above the resonant frequency.

When should the student get a new instrument?

Parents often ask this in regards to a graduation present.  
The primary concern should be the highest quality you can afford.  
An inferior instrument will discourage the student and make practicing frustrating.  
The superior instrument won’t replace correct consistent practice.  
I believe it is good to have a professional level instrument in high school or sooner.  
Some children are destructive and can’t handle the responsibility of care.  
I believe children should contribute something to the purchase to appreciate it.

**5. Music**

How do you play with a different sound for Big Band vs. Orchestral music?

The first thing to do is have the right sound concept in your brain.  
If you are playing correctly with open equipment you will have the most control.  
Adjustments can be made to Wind Power, The Tongue, and The Lips to get results.

How do I improve sight reading?

Practice reading scales and arpeggios (i.e. Clarke’s Technical Studies) everyday.  
Practice with a metronome everyday. Count everything you play.  
Break things down in regards to rhythm (i.e. clap and count).  
Practice etudes and music in all styles in all keys.  
Practice sight reading with a metronome going. Do the same with a friend.  
Don’t tolerate any kind of misreading of music (i.e. articulations).  
Keep a record of your accuracy when sight reading and have goals.  
Claude Gordon went over 7 years with 3 mistakes on live nationwide TV and Radio.

What if I just want to play Classical or Jazz?

Learn how to play all styles. Don’t be ignorant!  
It is very annoying to play in an orchestra with people that think they know how to swing, but they never have listened to or played anything that swings.  
It is also difficult to play in an orchestra with someone who never listens to or plays orchestral music.  
You must listen to every style of music and understand what is normal.  
You must feel the Clave rhythm to play Salsa and some Latin music.  
You must feel beats two and four and do correct articulations to play Swing right.  
You must articulate differently for orchestral music vs. popular music.  
Be able to play on top of, ahead of, and behind the beat with steady time.

Who should I listen to?

You must listen to the best musicians.  
Don’t buy recordings of no name groups just because they are cheap.  
You are learning what to sound like when you listen. Imitate the best.  
Live performances are even better than a recording.  
There are some things recordings never can capture in regards to the three dimensional quality of sound and the impact of live music.  
I remember hearing how a certain player’s sound would fill a room and the first time hearing Arturo Sandoval try out trumpets in a big concert hall. Arturo’s sound was all around me at the same time and I was no longer aware he was just a few feet in front of me. You will never understand that from a CD and the best stereo.

Do players play better now than the famous cornet soloists? Why?

In every generation there are usually no more than a handful of virtuosos.  
Our generation is no different. We actually have it easier in regards to better horns.  
Players now think that no one ever played as high before. But, cornet soloists from the late 1800s to the early 1900s played double and triple high Cs.  
I believe one of the hindrances in our time is too much entertainment.  
For those early players there wasn’t electricity, radio, TV, movies, recordings, computers, and the internet. Playing their instrument was their entertainment also.

Where do I find recordings?

The Public Library is great to preview and sample new music you might buy.  
I always try to listen to something new every time I go.  
Listen to the radio to preview what you might buy.  
I browse record stores, buy at www.tapmusic.com and other online stores.

How do I learn how to improvise?

In the future I will be writing an entire article devoted to this and post it here.  
Your daily jazz routine must consist of the following:  
Theory (Practice of Scales and Chords)  
Memorization of a tune with all the chords changes  
Memorization of a transcribed solo (Transcription is later done by student.)  
Transpose selected licks from the solo into all keys, not thinking by interval,   
but by thinking of each note as a chord tone in the current chord.  
Imitate inflections, tone, etc. of a noted musician playing the learned tune.  
Playing through the melody and learned solo from memory, then improvising.  
This builds your vocabulary of ideas and a constant awareness of harmony.  
These are the common things that every good jazz player has done.

How do I learn to play musically?

Listen to recordings and teacher to develop taste.  
Imitation is important in all styles of music.

What is a good sound? The best sound?

Worrying about tone at the expense of technique hurts both.  
A good sound is the result of a free vibration and a result of correct technique.  
The player should gain control over sound just as any other technique.  
It is good to be able to play with a variety of sounds for different music.  
The use of vibrato also must be in control.  
I hate to hear players run down a great player because of their sound.  
There are great players with drastically different sounds and that is good.  
It would be boring if everyone sounded exactly the same.

How do I learn to play in tune?

Practice scales, intervals, and arpeggios individually.  
Practice tuning intervals and chords with other players.  
An electronic tuner is not the end all solution to intonation.  
Most electronic tuners only can tune to equal temperament, which is a compromise.  
Your most valuable tool is your ear and ability to match pitch to what you hear.

Should I practice with a tuner?

An electronic tuner is useful to play in tune with an Equal Tempered Scale.  
It helps to discover tendencies of the player and the instrument.  
But, if the player doesn’t listen all their work on the tuner will be useless.

What makes music good or bad?

This is a very philosophical, moral, and even religious question.  
There are those that will say music is evil because of certain “unnatural” things.  
That is foolish because music is the composers ideas of organized sound.  
In order to be a knowledgeable musician you must understand styles.  
I listen to all styles of music even though I don’t care for some.  
Those that dissect elements of music to classify music as morally evil miss the point that beauty can’t be dissected.  
Music is a tool that can be used for good or evil in the same manner any other material thing can be used or abused.  
Those that believe a certain music style can be evil or good share the same philosophical ideas with gnostics who held matter as evil and spirit as good. This idea is also prevalent in our time with gun control advocates and those who think alcohol consumption in any form is a sin. The irony is that people from such opposite political views could share such a philosophy that was by the way condemned as heretical in the first century.

**6. Business and Career**

How does someone know they are “called” to be a musician?

I believe everyone has a “calling” to a vocation.  
A vocation is not merely something to make money.  
Every vocation has dignity if it is lawful and not immoral.  
You must first have a significant amount of knowledge and skill in a field in order to make a reasoned judgment about what your calling is.  
A beginner can’t make this judgment and shouldn’t be forced to by a parent’s desire for the child.  
Someone that is “called” to be a musician will love the process of learning.  
A person that wants to be a player without practice is either lazy and/or not called to be a player.  
Making money is the end result of knowledge, skill, diligence and ingenuity.  
Just because you are not making money at it now doesn’t mean it won’t happen.  
If you are “called” don’t listen to anyone that is discouraging you to quit.  
Find encouraging knowledgeable people in your desired field.  
You must evaluate criticism so you can excel above the competition.  
Your standard must be perfection and not just to be better than a specific person.  
Just because someone is not called to be a professional player doesn’t mean they can’t learn to love playing an instrument excellently.  
Anything we do must be done excellently.  
Adam was put on earth originally by God to work even before the fall.  
Work is an honorable thing in any profession.  
When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments then 4th Commandment stressed no work on the Sabbath and six days of work the other days.

What is essential to making a living at music?

Primarily, know how to play at the highest level of proficiency.  
Secondarily, build a reputation of being dependable and consistent.  
Don’t be a sluggard and a fool.

Can I really make a living at music?

Students and parents need to know that being a musician is an honorable calling.  
Lazy people won’t make a living at music.  
But, the best players who are dependable and industrious will always work.  
Those of us in the USA should realize our freedoms of capitalism.  
We can create our own jobs and employment more than any other society.

How much should I charge for a gig?

I once heard Arturo Sandoval say, “Don’t be a cheapy cheapy musician!”  
It is your daily job to practice to be the very best and know your value.  
Inexperienced players may charge less for a gig for a good reason.  
If your playing is of a higher quality you must charge more.  
NEVER undercut someone else’s price just to get the one gig, you hurt yourself and others for the future.  
Know your price and be willing to turn down someone who won’t pay.  
Those looking to pay less will demand the most from you and be unsatisfied.

How early should I be?

Be as early as you need to eliminate worry from those hiring you.  
When playing with new people leave enough time to change a tire and get lost.  
Make sure you are warmed-up and ready to play before leaving home.

What are some dos and don’ts?

Gary Grant is an experienced Los Angeles studio trumpet player with great advice.  
See his web page at: http://www.garygrantmusic.com/manual\_main.html

How do I win an audition and keep the job?

Players can win an audition and loose the job (i.e. get fired) for many reasons.  
If all you can do is play the excerpts (i.e. audition material) you have a problem.  
Endurance and consistency is something the audition process usually misses.  
Work horse trumpet players like Adolph Herseth standout above others in their ability to play the most demanding music for hours without fatigue.

**7. Lessons with Claude Gordon**

Who was Claude Gordon?

Claude Gordon was one of the most influential and successful brass teachers of the late 20th century. His skill was the ability show students how to practice in order to correct and develop their playing to become a virtuoso. He believed that anyone could become a virtuoso if they played correctly and worked diligent. He was a very encouraging teacher because of this. He learned all of what he taught primarily from Herbert L. Clarke, one of the most famous cornet soloists of all time.  
See www.claudegordonmusic.com

What made Claude Gordon a great teacher, and better than Clarke?

Gordon surpassed Clarke in systematizing his teaching more in order to show students how to synthesize the great method books by various authors into a structured practice routine.

Who was Herbert L. Clarke and his students?

Herbert L. Clarke was the most well known cornet soloist of all time and was a featured soloist with the Sousa band. He wrote four books and made recordings at the advent of Thomas Edison’s invention of the phonograph. Many of the great teachers and players two generations ago were his students (i.e. Claude Gordon, Bill Adams, Ernest Williams,...).

How long, when and where did I study with Claude?

My first lesson was July 24th, 1984 and I studied until a year or so before his death in May 1996. I did this while living in Bakersfield, CA (in High School) and Los Angeles, CA. During this time he taught me at his studio in Reseda, CA and his home in Big Bear, CA.

What kind of people took lessons from Claude? How good did you have to be?

Claude would teach anyone that wanted to learn and practice the way he prescribed.  
He wholeheartedly believed he could teach anyone to be a great player.  
During the years I studied with him I witnessed many awful students become great.  
It was very encouraging to see so many people improve so much.  
There were even well known players that studied and improved.

Did Claude Gordon only use his books?

No. This is a misconception that people have that never studied with Claude.  
Claude’s books filled in the gaps not addressed in other books.  
All of his books started out as handwritten supplements for his students.  
There were many series of handwritten exercises never published.  
We did cover all Claude’s eight books, but the other books amount to a stack of over ten feet tall. He taught students to love learning to apply various books.

How did Claude Gordon teach?

Claude was very systematic, structured and never guessed at what to assign.  
He would practice new series of routines himself before assigning them to students.  
His focus was always on the basics and he never got sidetracked as many do.  
His main objective was that you could play and command your instrument.

Were Claude assignments difficult?

No. Because everything was so progressive and systematic nothing felt really difficult if you practiced regularly as prescribed and progressed. His routines always made you feel great and gave you comfort and confidence to do what professional playing demands.

Did Claude ever get mad at students? For what?

I only saw this happen a few times when a student wouldn’t follow directions.  
Most of the time he was very happy.  
The things that made him the most upset were teachers who ruined students with all the many wrong ideas and gimmicks about playing or equipment.

Don’t all Claude Gordon students just play high, loud and fast with a jazz sound?

This was a common misconception spread by non-students or short-term students.  
If the student understood the big picture of all the Seven Items this didn’t happen.  
Claude’s emphasis to go beyond others caused students to stretch their limits.  
No style of playing was ever emphasized over another.  
The practice routines in total were very balanced, but to a listener hearing only one part it might seem to be only focused on that one item.  
Control is developed over time after strength and the students that didn’t study long or didn’t pay attention would sometimes not understand that.  
Not everyone that takes lessons is really a student of their teacher.

More articles to read: [How To Practice](https://www.purtle.com/jeff-how-to-practice), [What To Practice](https://www.purtle.com/jeff-what-to-practice), [Clarke's Technical Studies](https://www.purtle.com/jeff_articles_clarke.html)

©2003 [Jeff Purtle](https://www.purtle.com/jeff)

**Shopping cart**

Your shopping cart is empty.

**Popular content**

**Today's:**

* [How To Practice by Jeff Purtle](https://www.purtle.com/jeff-how-to-practice)
* [Correct Hand Position For The Trumpet And Valved Brass Instruments by Jeff Purtle](https://www.purtle.com/jeff-correct-hand-position)
* [Scale Sheets for Brass and Woodwind Instruments](https://www.purtle.com/scales)

**All time:**

* [**Trumpet and Brass Playing Frequently Asked Questions by Jeff Purtle**](https://www.purtle.com/jeff-brass-frequently-asked-questions)
* [Scale Sheets for Brass and Woodwind Instruments](https://www.purtle.com/scales)
* [How To Practice by Jeff Purtle](https://www.purtle.com/jeff-how-to-practice)
* [Purtle Brass Conferences](https://www.purtle.com/brass-conference)
* [Trumpet Lessons and Brass Clinics](https://www.purtle.com/jeff)

**Last viewed:**

* [Trumpet Lesson Assignment - Ali Daneshkhah plays Hummel Trumpet Concerto - Allegro con Spirito](https://www.purtle.com/trumpet-lesson-assignment-ali-daneshkhah-hummel-allegro-con-spirito)
* [Correct Hand Position For The Trumpet And Valved Brass Instruments by Jeff Purtle](https://www.purtle.com/jeff-correct-hand-position)
* [Walter M. Smith's Top Tones For The Trumpeter](https://www.purtle.com/walter-m-smith-top-tones-for-the-trumpeter)

**Newsletter**

Top of Form

 Purtle.com News

Email Address \*

First Name

Last Name



Bottom of Form

**User login**

Top of Form

Username or e-mail \*

Password \*

* [Create new account](https://www.purtle.com/user/register)
* [Request new password](https://www.purtle.com/user/password)



Bottom of Form

**Recent visitors**

302 Sweetbriar Road  
Greenville, SC 29615 USA  
864.292.3532  
[**Connect using FaceTime**](facetime:18643543223)

Copyright © 1999-2014 by Purtle.com

Powered by [Drupal](https://www.drupal.org/)