

Legato – It., a directive to perform a certain passage of a composition in a smooth, graceful, connected style, as opposed to staccato. It is often indicated by a slur over the effected notes.

Most teachers agree that there are 3 main elements to produce an effective legato style on the trombone:

1. Continuous airflow – I emphasize a continuous vibration (buzz) that is caused by the steady stream of air.
2. Quick slide motion – I prefer to think of a rhythmic slide motion – more on this later.
3. Soft articulation – especially when the notes to be performed legato remain within a partial. This is usually directed to be performed with a “d” tongue motion – “n” works well too.

Following are simple (meaning not complex) exercises to assist in learning to perform in this style. These exercises all remain within a partial – where we probably need the most work. Most of the concepts/exercises apply to passages that cross partials as well.

I. The Additive Exercises



Measure 1 is to be performed in a slow tempo, with a slow glissando. Notice the continuous buzz, listen for a very consistent sound as the slide arrives at beat 3. Repeat several times.

Measure 2, still at a low tempo, keeps the same airflow/buzz that was discovered in meas. 1, but adds a rhythmic slide, moving exactly on beat 3. Listen for any unwanted “bumps” in the sound caused by added tension as the slide moves. Try to keep the motion simple, wait as long as possible on the first note – the required speed will become a result, rather than the goal. Repeat several times.

Measure 3, still slow, keeps both elements practiced in measures 1 and 2, but adds the soft articulation on beat 3. The tongue motion and slide motion should be simultaneous. Repeat several times.

II. The Subtractive Exercises

The idea behind this group of exercises is to remove 1 of the 3 elements of legato, practice the remaining 2 together, then add the 3rd element back.

1. Remove the slide motion

These exercises should be done over the complete range of the instrument.

The first exercise consists of three measures: a quarter note followed by three eighth notes, a whole note, a quarter note followed by three eighth notes, a whole note, a quarter note followed by three eighth notes, and a whole note. The second exercise consists of three measures: a quarter note followed by three eighth notes, a whole note, a quarter note followed by three eighth notes, a whole note, a quarter note followed by three eighth notes, and a whole note. The third exercise consists of three measures: a quarter note followed by three eighth notes, a whole note, a quarter note followed by three eighth notes, a whole note, a quarter note followed by three eighth notes, and a whole note. Each exercise is followed by "etc." indicating it continues.

2. Remove the tongue motion

Practice these exercises (and others) with rhythmic glissandi. Avoid “bumps” in the sound. Wait as long as possible on each note before moving rhythmically to the next. Quickness is the result. After practicing this exercise, add the tongue motion to produce true legato.

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Invert and extend these exercises.

