

CMEA Bay Presentation 11/16/2024
“A Balance in Brass” – Playing Smarter, Not Harder
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The Issue

Through years of teaching beginning to advance brass students of all ages, I’ve noticed a common trend of misunderstood basics they were attempting to implement. These issues resulted in their struggles with tone production, flexibility and endurance. Without these key elements being properly addressed, brass students will face many struggles.

Terminology Considerations

Cautious Using...	Instead Try
“Big Breath” – can cause unwanted muscle strain.	Low breath, filling up your lower back.
“More Air” – can cause unnecessary force.	Forward Air, Small fast focused air
“Big Sound” – can cause an uncontrolled aperture	“Controlled/ Comfortable Sound”
“Lips Stationary” or “Saying ‘emm””	“Lips should start rolled in about 50%” “Rolled in, but not locked in”
“Higher”	“Forward” or “More Forward”

Things to Try – Embouchure Formation

- The Four-step Process
 - 1. Roll in the lips (roll in, not lock in)
 - 2. Place mouthpiece in the appropriate spot
 - 3. Breathe in through your nose (*this would be the only instance I’d have a student breathe through their nose*)
 - 4. Blow out at a medium rate. Allow the lips to come back out to a degree that works for that student.
- *For embouchure and articulation*, tell the student to imagine that they have a mouth full of dry rice. Have them imagine they are spitting out each grain of rice individually.

Key Takeaways

- Get brass students into flexibility as early as possible, let them “experiment” with partials right away. John McAllister warm-ups are great to get into ASAP.
- Lips should start off partially rolled in (not locked in).
- Limit mouthpiece buzzing. A student has to create tension that’s not needed to play a brass instrument efficiently. The instrument creates resistance for a more natural buzz.
- For playing higher, air should be moving faster (not harder) forward as if trying to blow a straight line of candles directly in front of you.
- Trumpet mouthpieces: Try to keep on hand a 3C, 5C, 7C, and 10.5C for the student to “try on.” I don’t recommend a Bach 7C or Yamaha 11B4 for most beginners.