

Teaching the Brass Embouchure

In the Spring 2000 issue of *Kjos Band News*, I wrote an article entitled, “A+E=T” In other words, A (Air) + E (Embouchure) = T (Tone). While this is true for all wind instruments, it is especially true for brass instruments.

In addition to tone quality, air support dramatically affects intonation, articulation, range, and endurance. If there is a deficiency in any of these areas, the first place to look for the source of the problem is air support.

Once the student is inhaling and exhaling properly, the brass embouchure should be taught. The embouchure is, obviously, critical to producing a good tone on all brass and woodwind instruments. With woodwind instruments the reed or the air stream creates the vibration that is necessary to produce a tone. The brass family, however, is the only family of instruments where a part of the body (lips) is the vibrating force used to produce the tone. Consequently, good tone on a brass instrument must be taught in such a way that the vibrating lips (“buzz”) remain relaxed and free of any stress.

Assist students in forming and developing their brass instrument embouchure by making each student responsible for providing a small mirror that can be placed on the music stand. This will allow students to see that their embouchure is being formed properly.

Ensure a good formation of the embouchure by having each student do the following:

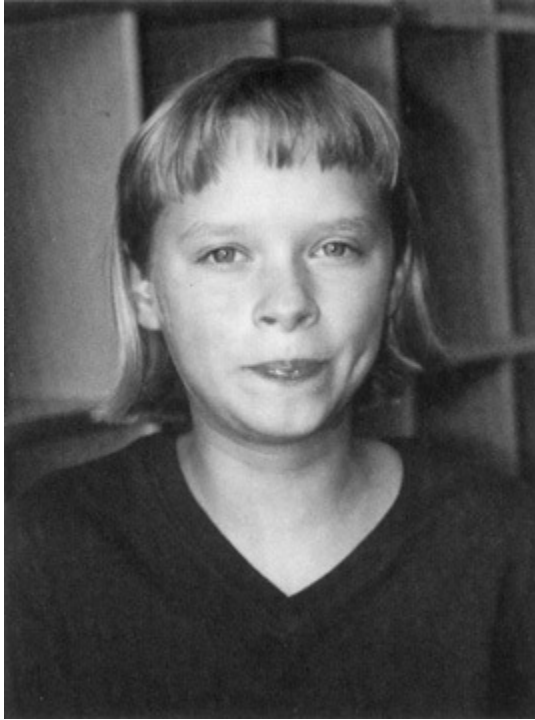
1. Shape the inside of the mouth as if saying “oh.” Bring the lips together as if saying “em.” Remind students to keep their mouth in the “oh” position while saying “em.”



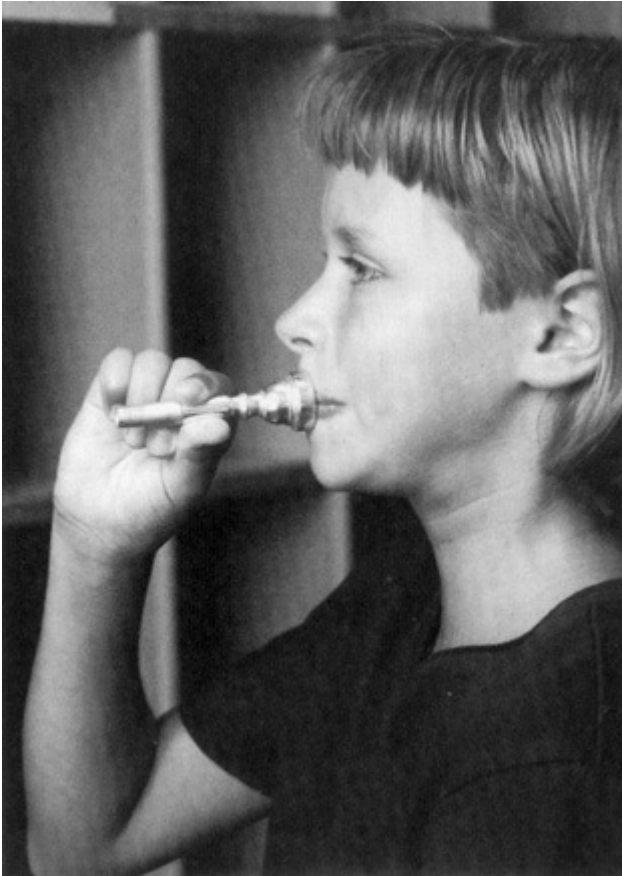
Bruce Pearson

Music

2. The lips should have firm corners but a relaxed center. The chin should be flat and pointed.
3. Take a full breath of air and blow, creating a relaxed, buzzing tone.



4. While buzzing, place the mouthpiece over the buzz. Cornet, trumpet, trombone, baritone, euphonium, and tuba should have equal amounts, of the mouthpiece on the upper and lower lips. For French horn, place the mouthpiece over the buzz with $\frac{2}{3}$ of the mouthpiece on the upper lip and $\frac{1}{3}$ on the lower lip.



5. Put the mouthpiece into the lead pipe. Take a full breath of air and play a long, steady tone.

Once a student can produce a relaxed buzz they should be encouraged to do “mouthpiece workouts.” The first mouthpiece workout should be to produce a “siren.” Explain that the pitch is changed by tightening and loosening the *corner muscles*. The next set of mouthpiece workouts consists of three, four, and five note songs played on the mouthpiece only. The songs on pages 6, 7, 8, and 9 of **Standard of Excellence, Book 1** are perfect for this purpose. Impress upon students that the brass instrument is in reality an amplifier of the pitches that are produced by the embouchure.

By following these simple steps, students will learn to form a good brass instrument embouchure that will be important to the development of a beautiful brass instrument tone.

Published in Kjos Band News, Fall 2001, Volume 4
Copyright © 2009 Neil A. Kjos Music Company