

Michigan Music Conference 2021

Tone & Tonguing For Band

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Please note: This handout of the Presentation has been prepared for your use in a classroom setting.

- Each Concept presented has its own page(s).
- Each page may be used as a separate unit to be shared with your class at your own discretion.
- Most can be done within 3 to 8 minutes and should not take up an entire rehearsal.

Hello & welcome to the Michigan Music Conference. I am David Wells and am presenting a clinic on Tone & Tonguing for Band.

So, I am a retired band director for the Northview Public Schools in the Grand Rapids area. I taught beginning band and middle school age students as well as assisting at the high school level. I do some composing and arranging, as well as play trombone in a Big Band and a Dixieland band. Most importantly, I have been a private trombone instructor for fifty years and wish to share ways to instruct your students on how to produce a characteristic tone quality for their instrument with an emphasis on brass.

So let's begin...

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TONE QUALITY FOR BAND

While directing bands before and after I retired, I have noticed that some bands struggle playing with a balanced volume and tone quality. What I notice are individuals who play very well, contributing mightily, yet not blending their sound with the rest of the group.

Usually, a loud player knows they play well, love to play and consciously or unconsciously, they “Play in order to be heard”.

However, telling individuals to play softer can be confusing. “How much softer should I play” they may wonder. Instead, I invite the entire band to play with a different goal in mind. “Play in order to listen to someone else”.

Most everyone in your ensemble has played next to the same person for some time and has a good idea of how that person plays. I tell them to “Listen to someone TWO people away”.

The purpose of this is to “stretch” their listening capacity. The results can be heard immediately. Use this examples first: Restate the Goal: “listen to someone TWO people away”. Play a unison “F” as a fermata

Ask your ensemble, with a show of hands:

- “Were you listening for someone two people away from you?”
- “Could you actually hear that person?”

It is NOT the job of anyone to “Play in order for others to hear you”
It IS everyone’s job to “Play in order to listen”.

Then, Use these examples as well:...Play an “Eb” major scale....Play a well balanced chord from a piece in band not too high or loud...Play an 8 bar passage the band is familiar with

What I hope you will hear is a comfortable blend and more transparent sound in your group.

ARTICULATIONS FOR BAND

- On a white board, draw five quarter notes
- Have the band play a unison 'F'
- Now play it 5 times, as five quarter notes in a deliberate tempo (not fast)

State that articulations should "Sound Like They Look"

Tenuto

- Add **tenuto** markings over each note

Explain that TENU TO MARKS mean the notes 'touch' each other

- Show your hands in front of you and move your right hand towards your still left hand until they touch.
- Use your instrument to demonstrate.
- Have the band play a unison 'F' demonstrating the TENU TO style on 5 quarter notes

Staccato

- Place staccato markings over each note

Explain that STACCATO MARKS mean detached, the notes DO NOT 'touch' each other

- Show your hands in front of you and move your right hand towards your still left hand, stopping your right hand before it can touch the left hand. Remind them that staccato does not mean 'short', but detached.
- Use your instrument to demonstrate
- Have the band play a unison 'F' demonstrating the STACCATO style on 5 quarter notes

ARTICULATIONS FOR BAND (CTN'D)

Accent

- Place accent markings over each note

Explain that ACCENT MARKS sound like they look. The front of the note has the bulk of the energy for the note. The duration of the note has a taper. The end of the note has a 'lift'.

- Show your hands in front of you and make a fist with the right hand and smack the palm of the left hand with force. Pull your right hand away and strike the left hand again.
- Use your instrument to demonstrate.
- Have the band play a unison 'F' demonstrating the ACCENT style on 5 quarter notes

Marcato Accents

- Place upside down 'V's over each note

Explain that MARCATO MARKS add intensity to the entire note. Further explain with this analogy. "You have an entire roll of aluminum foil. You unroll all of it."

- Show your hands in front of you and begin compressing it (imaginary foil) into a ball. It becomes smaller and smaller. Ask, "Is it heavier?" The answer is "NO." It is, however, "More Dense". Show your hands in front of you, compress the "imaginary ball of foil" in mid air five times, with a release before compressing again
- Use your instrument to demonstrate.
- Have the band play a unison 'F' demonstrating the MARCATO style on 5 quarter notes

Reinforce these concepts by playing music that incorporates notes with varying articulations.

TONGUING: THE BETTER THE TONGUE, THE BETTER THE TONE

Shaping The Tongue

- Step 1 - Become aware of your tongue; Try to make it a fat, 'dumb' tongue, then make it a 'skinny' tongue.
- Step 2 - Now shape your tongue so it is pointed (it stays inside the mouth)
- Step 3 - Take your second finger and rest it on your nose, Place it in front of lips as if to "shush"
- Step 4 - Stick out your tongue, touch your finger with the tip of your tongue. Your finger has a 'wet spot', and your tongue has a 'dry spot'. Now notice the 'dry spot'. This 'dry spot' on your tongue is all the surface area that is used when tonguing.

Placing The Tongue

With just the tip of the tongue (the 'dry spot'), Place the tongue;

- Step 1 - on the inside roof of the mouth
- Step 2 - on the gums just above the top teeth
- Step 3 - where the the top teeth meet the gum
- Step 4 - on just the top teeth
- Step 5 - between the top and bottom teeth
- Step 6 - on just the bottom teeth
- Step 7 - where the bottom teeth meet the gum
- Step 8 - on the gums just below the bottom teeth
- Step 9 - on the floor of the mouth

Ask for a show of hands of who were able to locate all these points with a pointed tongue. For brass players, place the tip of the tongue (the 'dry' spot) on their gums just above the top teeth. Flute players use the same area as well. Clarinets and saxophones place this dry spot just under the tip of the reed.

TONGUING: THE BETTER THE TONGUE, THE BETTER THE TONE (CTN'D...)

Using the Air & Tongue to Create Backpressure

This is the most neglected part of tonguing. Many students use their tongue to start their tone, yet struggle to play with a good sound. Often, they have not created back pressure before playing.

Teach tonguing in slow motion - Teacher demonstrates:

1. A slow Deep Breath
2. Place the tip of the tongue on the gums above the top teeth
3. Keep the tongue in place, blow without releasing any air
4. Continue step 3 so your face turns color and the students witness the backpressure is building
5. Release the tongue. "Too". there should be so much energy at this moment that the students can hear and see the burst of air.
6. Have the students exaggerate the burst of air, as though they were launching watermelon seeds for Olympic tryouts, be repeating the first five steps themselves
7. Now have the students play one note with exaggerated backpressure. Tremendous volume from the very moment the tongue is released should be the result.
8. Another result should be a tone with a very good center to it.

CRESCENDOS & DECRESCENDOS FOR BAND

1. **Volume changes can be challenging for bands. The challenges are:**
 - a. The rate of the change,
 - b. The shape of the change,
 - c. Maintain tone quality while changing volume
2. **To improve the band's cresc/dim rate, or the rate of change. First explain:**
 - a. The band plays from pp to ff for 15 seconds and continues to play from ff to pp the next 15 seconds.
 - b. Stress that no one 'leads' the cresc. Nor the dim.
 - c. Play within the volume of the band. Listen
 - d. Stagger breath often, leaving & entering beneath the band volume.
 - e. The band plays a unison 'F'. (Do not read music, do not 'beat' time)
3. **To improve the shape of the change. First explain:**
 - a. Do not change volume 'too early' on cresc.
 - b. Do not change volume 'too early' on dim.
 - c. Save most of the change for the end of the cresc. or dim.
 - d. The band plays a unison 'F' shaping their cresc, then shape their dim.
4. **To maintain tone quality. First explain:**
 - a. The tendency is to let the tone 'spread' while cresc.
 - b. On a cresc., Instead of 'filling the room', play with focus of sound placed on an object in the back of the auditorium
 - c. On dim., play with focus of sound being softer & softer than your neighbor
 - d. The band plays a unison 'F' keeping their tone focused on cresc/dim

THE PERFECT NOTE

A concept I like to teach in the band is challenge them to play “A Perfect Note”

I describe a perfect note that has 3 qualities.

1. The beginning: Clean start using the tongue
2. The duration: Full tone, Even pitch, Even volume
3. The ending: Open release, not chopped off

I then demonstrate by playing one note “Perfect Note”

- Ask the band to play together “A Perfect Note”
- Play a unison “F” as a fermata

I like to use this opportunity to have every student play for me one at a time. I listen to tell each student something positive about their “one” note. Always start by telling them what they did well.

For example: “You used your tongue well to start your sound. Now, let’s try to make the duration of the tone even”, etc.

This builds rapport with each student because you care to listen to them and give them concise information, such as: ‘what needs to improve’ and ‘how to improve’ it.

Remind students:

The best players in the world practice slowly.

...And you will find:

“The Slower You Practice, The Faster You Improve”

HOW TO ACHIEVE TONAL CENTER

Introducing this concept: Ask 2 Questions

1. Can you point to the center of the sky?
2. Can you point to the center of your music stand (desk)?

Answering question #2 is easier because the stand has a clear boundary. Students need to discover the 'boundaries' of their sound. Playing extremely loud and extremely soft helps students discover their limits to tone quality.

Steps to Achieve a Center To The Tone

Teacher demonstrates the following steps then students demonstrate one at a time

1. Play as loud as possible – it may sound distorted.
2. Then play with less volume. Listen for improvement in tone.
3. Continue reducing volume on each attempt
4. Create a 'pearl' of a note. Smooth & round with a luster.
5. Play as soft as possible

A Good tone indicates the student is now playing within his/her tonal boundary and should have an improved tonal center.

BRASS EMBOUCHURE BASICS

The 2 Areas of the Embouchure Are:

The OUTSIDE Of The Lips Is:

1. Visible
2. Exposed To The Air
3. Dry
4. Leathery

The INSIDE Of The Lips is:

1. Not Visible
2. Not Exposed To The Air
3. Moist
4. Fleshy

EXPLAIN HOW THE LIPS VIBRATE

When the OUTSIDE portion of the top & bottom lips are placed together the results are very rapid vibrations.
Fast vibrations result in very high pitches

When the INSIDE portion of the top & bottom lips are placed together the results are very slow vibrations.
Slow vibrations result in very low pitches

HOW THE LIPS VIBRATE (CTN'D)

DEMONSTRATE WHAT BUZZING LIPS LOOK & SOUND LIKE . Do not use a mouthpiece or instrument. . Let the students watch you first. .

- Buzz from fast to slow vibrations in one descending buzz
- Students will benefit greatly by watching and listening to you .
- Buzz an airy tone – this represents a good tone .
- Buzz a buzzy tone – this represents a pinched tone .
- Next, watch the students buzz WITHOUT a mouthpiece .
- Next, watch the students buzz WITH a mouthpiece .
- They should buzz from fast to slow vibrations, just as you had shown .
- They should blow “sirens” from high to low and back up repeatedly

Finally, with mouthpiece inserted in horn, play a high pitch by vibrating the OUTSIDE portion of both lips It will not matter which pitch they play. Ask, “Were you able to play higher than before?” And also ask, “Did it feel easier to play in the upper register?”

SETTING THE LIPS

- To Set The Lips Use the phrase: “Curl Your Lips Onto Your Teeth”
- Demonstrate this phrase by curling your own lips on your teeth so both top and bottom teeth are visible.
- Have each student demonstrate this to you. At first, they may curl their lips ‘over their teeth’ as though it looks like they need dentures because neither top nor bottom teeth are visible.
- Repeat the instructions as necessary.
- Bring lips together so they barely touch.
- This is the embouchure setting for playing in the upper register on brass instruments
- When blowing through this embouchure setting, do not pinch
- If there is pinching in the tone (too buzzy) the student should drop the bottom jaw.

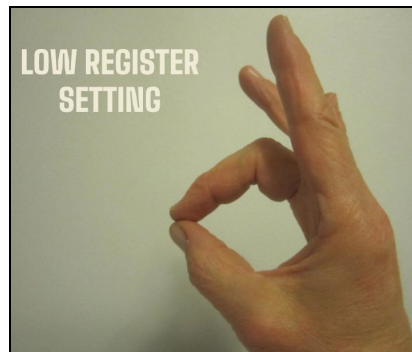
Portraying The Embouchure With Your Hand

I have found that using my hand to portray the position of the lips has been a helpful visual aide. I use it to explain the embouchure for:

- The lower register
- The upper register
- A Pinched tone quality
- The flow of the air through the lips

Most students begin playing on mid to low range pitches. I describe their embouchure for these notes by:

Visual Aide #1: Placing my thumb and third fingers together so they barely touch



- This represents the embouchure for the low register (as though the lips are buzzing on the inside of the embouchure)
- To help students go from playing mid range pitches to their upper register pitches; I describe their embouchure for these notes by:

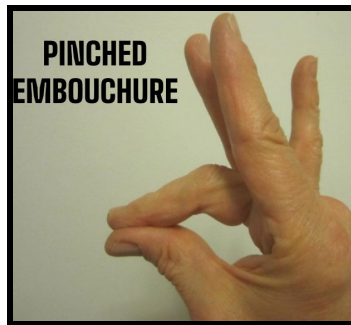
Visual Aide #2: Placing my thumb and third fingers together and tucking both fingers toward the palm of my hand



- This represents the embouchure for the upper register (as though the lips are now buzzing on the outer portion of the embouchure)
- Students that play with a pinched tone quality have too much lip surface touching the other lip. I describe their embouchure with my hand by :

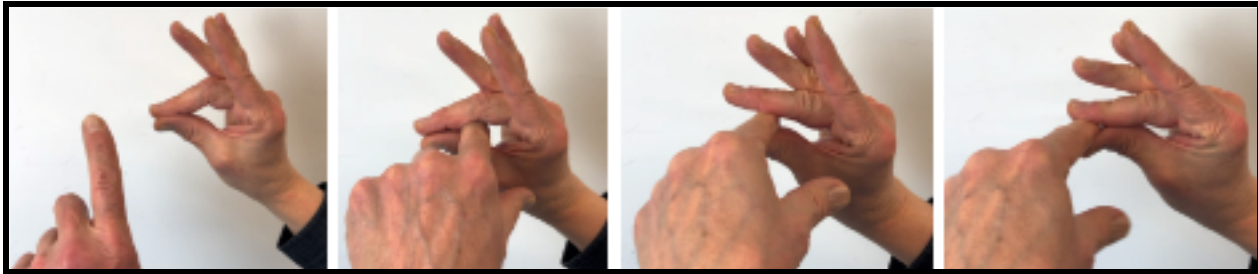
Portraying The Embouchure With Your Hand (CTN'D)

Visual Aide #3: Placing my thumb and third fingers together and squashing my fingers together



- This represents the embouchure that has too much lip touching the other lip (this setting prevents the air from flowing comfortably through the embouchure)
- To help students see how air flows through the embouchure, I use my other hand to help describe it by:

Visual Aide #4: Placing my other hand's index finger through the fingers I have used to represent the embouchure (as though the air passes through with ease when the lips are barely touching, as compared to the struggle to send the air through lips that are squashed together)



Explain that-

- A good sound comes from blowing an even flow of air through the lips.
- A pinched sound comes from lips in a position that allow air bubbles to pass instead of an air stream

HOW TO UNLOCK THE EMOUCHURE (Get rid of the pinched tone)

- Use the phrase "Chew with your mouth closed"
- Then tell the students to "Play At The Bottom Of A Chew"
- Immediately add their horn to their new lower jaw setting and blow a middle range note.
- Watch to see if their tone is less pinched, freer, and easier to play loud.

Note: More volume is a good indicator that the embouchure has improved.

SETTING THE CORNERS OF THE MOUTH

- Step 1 Firm the corners of the mouth so they are anchored on the top teeth
- Step 2 Now anchor the corners between the top & bottom teeth
- Step 3 Now anchor the corners on the bottom teeth.

The setting for step 3 will allow the bottom lip to be the most flexible.

Note: To double-check the placement of the corners in all three steps, the students place their own finger on the embouchure corner to verify its placement.

THE ROLE OF THE BOTTOM LIP

- Explain to the students that the reed instruments have a “magic button” they use to change registers. They change pitches by lifting fingers one at a time. However, when they run out of fingers to lift, they simply add a thumb key, place all their fingers back down and continue playing higher, lifting fingers one at a time again.
- Brass do not have a magic button on their instrument to change registers, however, their bottom lip can “do the trick” when changing registers.
- When students have anchored the corners of their mouth on their bottom teeth as in “Step 3”, they can maneuver their instrument pitches successfully. To demonstrate, have the students do the following:
 - Have the students smile (the corners of the mouth should be up) and move their bottom lip out and in while keeping their smile. Was this easy to do?
 - Have the students pout (the corners of the mouth should be down) and move their bottom lip out and in while keeping the pout. Was this easy to do? Which moved the bottom lip easier, smiling or pouting?

THE ROLE OF THE TOP LIP

The Top Lip Mirrors The Bottom Lip that is:

1. If the bottom lip is protruding out, the top lip protrudes outward as well
2. If the bottom lip is tucked in, the top lip is tucked in also. When the lips match each other’s playing positions, both lips buzz more effectively. However, when one lip vibrates and the other remains stationary, range becomes limited, and endurance suffers.

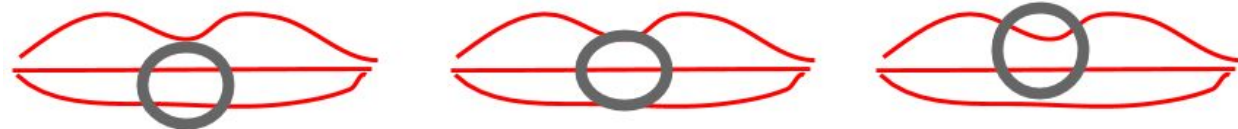
THE POSITION OF THE LIPS ON THE MOUTHPIECE

The circle represents the inside circumference of the rim. The director should draw each example on board for the class.

Proper Setting



Improper Settings



Goal: To correct an improper position of the mouthpiece: To Achieve Goal: A small portion of the face is inside the rim. Refer to Descriptive Aid #1: “Curl your lips onto your teeth.”

A HELPFUL ANALOGY OF HOW THE LIPS VIBRATE

Introduce the analogy of “Swinging Doors” (like the ones in the old western saloons). Swinging doors swing freely in and out. Lips need the freedom to swing into the mouthpiece and return. When a student’s tone sounds like it is sputtering, the lips are not being allowed to “swing freely”.



HOW THE LIPS VIBRATE (CONT'D)

2 reasons for sputtering:

1. The lips are slamming into the inside of the mouthpiece cup on the Forward Stroke of the vibrating lips.
 - a. The cause is: The mouthpiece is too shallow (usually occurs in lower register)
 - b. The cure is: To acquire a mouthpiece with a deeper cup
2. The lips are slamming against the teeth on the Return Stroke of the vibrating lips.
 - a. The cause is: Teeth are too close together (usually the tip of the top lip is even with the tip of the top teeth). THE TOP LIP MUST DESCEND BELOW THE END OF THE TOP TEETH. This position will allow for the proper “Swinging Door” of the lip.
 - b. The cure is: Drop the lower jaw (Descriptive Aid #2 – “Play At The Bottom Of A Chew”)

UPPER REGISTER SUCCESS FOR BRASS

Ricochet Accuracy Vs. Bulls Eye Accuracy

1. The goal is to play each pitch accurately. The challenge is how to eliminate a second pitch from occurring accidentally on the attack
2. Acknowledge the difference in effort to play extremely high pitches and to play mid range pitches
3. For upper register notes, take in plenty of air and set the embouchure. Each note must be practiced separately first.
4. Approach the upper register note as “target practice”. Aim for the note straight ahead, as if it is at “eye level” and you intend to hit it in the middle of the “bulls-eye”.
5. If a split occurs, it could be that the note “seems high” and you were aiming up. The result is the note falls down. This is referred to as “Ricochet Accuracy”. It is as though you were aiming at the ceiling on an angle and the shot ricocheted down. It is caused by using an embouchure setting for a note that is lower than the desired pitch.

WHEN THERE IS A RATTLE IN THE TONE

This sound is an indication that the tone is about to drop to the next lower partial. The problem is the embouchure has not been set to properly center the tone. It is as though the embouchure is set just below the center of the target. The corners of the embouchure may be firm, however, when the bottom lip muscles are not engaged firmly enough to hold the bottom lip in place, the tone will slowly drift down until it rests on the next partial down.

Demonstrate to the students by:

- Firming up the corners of your embouchure first.
- Then show how the firming up of your muscles for the bottom lip keep the embouchure in place.
- Blow through the embouchure, keeping lips stationary
- Next, blow through the embouchure, allowing the bottom lip to collapse. This demonstrates how the rattle may be occurring.
- The cure for the rattle is to add more muscle strength to the bottom lip

(THIS NEXT SUBJECT, **LEGATO TONGUING**, WAS NOT INCLUDED IN THE MMC 2021 PRESENTATION DUE TO TIME LIMITS. IT IS INCLUDED HERE FOR YOUR CLASSROOM USE AT YOUR OWN DISCRETION)

(The Conclusion of the presentation is on the next page)

LEGATO TONGUING

Legato playing is smooth and flowing, melting from one note to the next. The air column is steady and even in speed.

Use a *softer than usual* tongue with a relaxed “du”, not “too”.

Some will place the tongue in the same place for “too” or “doo” tonguing. I find that using the top of the tongue near the tip allows an easier flow of air. I also do not place the tongue in the same place (just above the top teeth on the top gums).

Instead, the top of the tongue near the tip is placed slightly back from the top teeth. A good analogy for legato tonguing is that of an impulse lawn sprinkler.

- The water for the sprinkler (the air column for our wind instrument)
- Flows continuously (the air column is expelled)
- While the arm of the sprinkler (the tongue)
- Swings into the flowing stream, (the tongue moves upward toward the top gum)
- Interrupts, but does not stop the water flow. (The tongue brushes the top gum with a soft “du”).

And for varying degrees of legato, have the students say, “Tooh”, “Doo”, “Nooh”, and “Zooh”. Demonstrate these on your instrument. Then have the students play a unison ‘F’ on 5 quarter notes using each of these variations of legato tonguing.

USE THESE HELPFUL PHRASES WHILE TEACHING:

Please use several phrases more than just once to reinforce your teaching.
They are:

“Do not play in order to be heard. Play in order to listen to someone else”.

“Articulations should sound like they look”

“The better the tongue, The better the tone”

“When changing volume, play within the volume of the band”.

“A perfect note has a 1. Clean start 2. Even tone 3. Open end”

“The two parts to the brass embouchure are the inside and outside of the lips”.

“For the brass embouchure setting: keep the corners down, chew with your mouth closed, then play at the ‘bottom of the chew””.

And Remember, “The Slower You Practice, The Faster You Improve”

CONCLUSION

I hope that there has been some information shared that you may find helpful for your bands to use. Thank you for your participation in the 2021 Michigan Music Conference and enjoy the music you can make with your students this year. Again, my name is David Wells and you may access this information online by visiting: davidwellsmusic.com