

# Developing a Daily Routine

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The vast majority of advanced brass players advocate the use of a practice routine to develop and maintain technical proficiency. For the purpose of this discussion, a “daily routine” (sometimes called a “practice routine” or “warm-up routine”) is a collection of drills and exercises that address certain physical or technical skills. Most often the contents of a daily routine changes very little over the short-term, although players often find it helpful to include difficult passages from their repertoire or may add exercises to address a specific need (such as extremely soft attacks, large interval leaps, upper register playing, etc).

While “daily routines” by exceptional teachers and/or performers have become very popular (for example, the routines or drills of Bill Adam, Louis Maggio, Max Schlossberg, James Stamp, and Carmine Caruso), most players compile their daily routines from a variety of sources. There are a few points to keep in mind when developing your daily routine:

- **To be most effective, your routine must be a daily occurrence, a standing date with your horn that you are able to keep every day.** It should be comprehensive enough to cover the various aspects of your playing (see below) but not so long that you are never able to finish it. A three-hour routine is great if you have the mental prowess to maintain your concentration for that long, have the endurance to complete it, and have a sufficient block of time open every day. You will benefit the most from a routine of 45-90 minutes.
- **The daily routine should be easy to navigate.** Although compiled from several sources, your routine should not be spread out among several method books. The more cumbersome your routine is, the more likely you are to avoid doing it or to accidentally leave things out. Once you’ve decided on the contents of your routine you should photocopy it and keep it in a folder or small binder. This will also make it easier to rearrange things as your chops or concentration requires.
- **The daily routine should cover five basic aspects of your playing:**
  - **Warm-up-** exercises that you like to use to prepare the chops, fingers, ears, and BRAIN for the work to come. Mouthpiece buzzing, lip bends, flexibility studies, long tones, articulation drills, pedal tones, etc., are all valuable warm-up components. Your warm-up should be fairly easy to do- lip flexibility studies are fine for someone who can do them comfortably, for others they result in a tightening of the throat and chops and a great deal of frustration... what a lousy way to begin a routine! A 5- to 10-minute warm-up component is most helpful because you can also use it before rehearsals or later practice sessions.
  - **Fingering studies-** scale and arpeggio studies, Clarke’s *Technical Studies*, chromatic scales, trill studies, Nagel’s *Speed Studies*, Plog’s fingering studies (*Trumpet Method, Bk. 2*), etc. are all good examples.
  - **Articulation studies-** exercises to coordinate the fingers, air, and tongue, such as scales and arpeggios, interval studies, Schlossberg, Stamp’s “Staccato Exercises,” double- and triple-tonguing drills from Arban, Chris Gekker’s *Articulation Studies*, etc.
  - **Flexibility studies-** such as Earl Irons, Walter Smith, Arban, interval studies (slurred), etc.

- **Range studies-** flexibility, articulation, and scale/arpeggio studies into the upper register, Schlossberg, Stamp, Jay Zorn's *Exploring the Upper Register*, etc.
- **Tone and pitch accuracy studies-** Long tones, pitch bending, slur exercises, simple interval studies, scale/arpeggio studies, etc.

As you may have noticed, a single exercise can cover different aspects of your technique. For example, scale studies improve finger technique, articulation, range, and intonation (pitch accuracy). Like a healthy diet, a successful routine offers variety to keep your interest. It should also be challenging enough to allow you to improve but not so difficult that you can't get through it or you feel bad about your playing afterwards. As you improve, your routine will change accordingly.

Other than the warm-up portion, there is no preferred order to the exercises. In fact, I feel it is important to mix topics within the routine, as this more accurately reflects real-world playing. (Have you ever sat in a rehearsal and played *only* lip slurs for 15 minutes?) However, you may find it helpful to follow range or flexibility studies with some finger studies that are easier on the chops or practice multiple-tonguing only after you've worked on single-tongue studies.

### **OTHER POINTS...**

**You must strive to play your routine MUSICALLY at all times.** Allowing yourself to mindlessly run through the routine with no concern for the outward product is a complete waste of your time and effort. You must do more than "go through the motions." Sloppy or unmusical technique is of absolutely no value.

**Use your metronome.** Keep track of tempos on each exercise and increase the tempo on an exercise when you're satisfied with it. This is also good for your ego, as you can actually *see your improvement over time*. The ticker isn't only for tongue and finger studies- use it on your flexibility and range studies, too. You may be surprised at the rhythmic fluctuations in your lip slurs or interval studies.

**Schedule time in your morning for your routine.** Covering all aspects of your technique early in the day will make the rest of your practice sessions and rehearsals more successful. However, you must avoid getting to the point where you feel you can't have a good playing day UNLESS you've done your routine. There will be days when your schedule or playing commitments just won't allow you to squeeze in your routine. It's helpful to think of your technical skills as a bucket with a small hole- if you add enough technical practice into the bucket every day you can get by with the *occasional* missed session. However, miss too many days and the bucket will certainly run dry!

**Don't forget to rest.** Be sure to take time between exercises to rest the chops, particularly after range and flexibility studies. Your chops should not be *completely exhausted* at the end of your routine. A good rule of thumb: rest as much as you play.