

# The Pocket Guide to Teaching Trombone

Dr. Deb Scott

You feel comfortable teaching beginning trombone, but what do you tell your more advanced trombone players? Help encourage the musical growth of your section from the podium and for the individual player. Improve intonation, tone, technique, and learn what to tell students about the “F” attachment as well as the “D” attachment for the bass trombone. The following information outlines the “nuts and bolts” of how to teach trombone.

## TUNING

### I. Tuning Notes in First Position



Best tuning note. Regular trombone 1st position	Beginning trombonist 1st position	Trombone with F-attach 1st position	Bass Trombone with D-attach 1st position
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- Tune the main tuning slide on all trombones to top of the staff “B-flat”. Beginners may tune to 4th line F
- Tune the tenor trombone F-attachment tuning slide to the bottom of the staff low “F” in first position (all the way in).
- Bass trombonists should tune their main tuning slide and F-attachment as above, then the D-attachment should be tuned to the below the staff “D” in first position.

### II. Tuning and Tone

Many factors affect tone quality. One of the least talked about is the relationship of the slide to the note produced. In other words, there is a “sweet spot” for each note that improves tone quality (and of course, pitch). Learning to “blow straight” and adjust with the slide creates a slightly better tone. It is possible for a trombonist to play in-tune without micro slide adjustments by “lipping” which may produce an “okay” tone. However, to produce the best sound possible, the slide should be placed in exact positions. Check outer positions with a tuner often.

### III. Tuning Adjustments (The trombone actually has 41+ positions, not 7.)

First position notes (or partials) on the open trombone are written below. Solid notes indicate that an adjustment should be made to get the note in tune. The arrows indicate which way the adjustment should be made. A downward arrow means move the slide outward. An upward arrow means move the slide inward. Note that only the partials that are octaves of the fundamental “B-flat” are in tune. The first position “A-flat” on the seventh partial should not be played because it is too flat.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
				$\flat$	$\flat$	$\flat$	$\flat$	$\flat$	$\flat$
				$\flat$	$\flat$	$\flat$	$\flat$	$\flat$	$\flat$
							$\flat$		
Adjustments:			↓		↑	↓	↑		↓

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## IV. Chart of Positions Requiring Adjustments

Each slide position on the trombone lowers its pitch by a half-step. Therefore, each half step down from the out-of-tune partial generally follows the same adjustments. The following chart indicates what adjustments are needed for each out of tune partial:

The notes in the 9th partial should be played longer than usual.

The notes of the 7th partial should be played extremely short.

The 6th partial is noticeably sharp. All of these notes should definitely be played in a longer position.

The "D", "D-flat", and "C" of the 5th partial may be sharp. The rest of the notes are flat and should be raised.

The adjustment on the 3rd partial is so small that it is unnecessary.

## V. What is Most Likely Out of Tune in Your Trombone Section

### Memorize this:

Intonation Tendencies (not found on most fingering charts)

7th Partial Notes: G and Gb/F# (2nd and 1st) ABOVE MIDDLE "C" should be shorter positions.

6th Partial Notes: F#, E, Eb, alternate D, (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th respectively) ABOVE MIDDLE "C" on the ledger lines above the bass clef. 6th partial notes should be played in slightly longer positions (roughly .5 inches longer).

5th Partial Notes: D, C#, C, B nat., alternate Bb, (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th respectively) ABOVE MIDDLE C on the ledger lines above the bass clef, 5th partial, should be played in a slightly shorter position (roughly .25 inches shorter). However, some models of trombone need to play these notes in slightly longer positions.

All positions should be checked with a tuner frequently, especially middle of the staff f#/gb in 5th, low c in 6th, and low b in 7th. Remember that young students will be growing (and so will their arms.)

There is no substitute for a good ear. Hearing intonation problems can be taught.

The fourth position is regularly sharp because most beginners are taught to use the top of their slide equal with the bell. It is actually below the bell.

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## THE F-ATTACHMENT (or trigger)

- The F-attachment adds extra tubing to the tenor trombone, allowing it to play lower.
- Pressing the trigger puts the harmonic series of the trombone into F, (rather than Bb.)
- Its primary function is for the convenience of having alternate positions in the low register.
- It adds 4 notes to the low register to help bridge a gap between low E and pedal Bb. (The low B is attainable if practiced by “lipping” down.)
- It is a convenience but is not necessary. Many principal trombonists play “open” horns in symphonies.
- Open wrap is preferable

V1+      V2++      V-4      V5      V6      V7

+ indicates the position should be slightly farther OUT      - indicates the position should be slightly farther IN

V1      V2+      V3++      V-5      V6      V7+

**Memorize this:**

Tune to LOW F  
 C should be slightly out in 1st. (Do not play higher than this note on the trigger.)  
 B in long 2nd with the trigger  
 Bb in short fourth is available; use it!

## TUNING THE D-ATTACHMENT (2nd Trigger—Bass Trombone only)

The D-attachment is operated by the middle finger of the left hand while the F-attachment is simultaneously pressed by the thumb of the left hand.

"D" stands for both triggers engaged.  
 The number relates to the regular slide position of the open horn.

D1+      D-3      D4+      D-6      D7+

+ indicates the position should be slightly farther OUT.      - indicates the position should be slightly farther IN.

D1      D2++      D4      D5++      D7  
 (Pedal B-flat)

**Memorize this:**

The second trigger is in “D”.  
 Tune to LOW D, below the staff  
 Learn Low Db (D2++)  
 Learn Low C (D4)

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## SLURRING

The trombone is the only wind instrument without a true slur.

• A light tongue must be used to dent the airflow when the slide moves. If the tongue is too hard, slurring will not occur. If the tongue is too soft, glissandos may occur.

SYLLABLES FOR SLURRING range between one rolled “r” and “du”,

- The slide action must be extremely fast between slide positions since there is less time between tones.
- Breath support!

*In general, do not use a natural slur. A light tongue is smoother, avoids the pop, and is more consistent. It is also easier to teach.*

## ALTERNATE POSITIONS

- Alternate positions should be taught early so that players don’t cling to familiar positions.
- The more notes played with the slide going in one direction, the better.
- Half steps should be played with adjacent positions whenever possible.
- Alternate positions have a slightly inferior quality of sound and should not be used for “prominent” notes.

Memorize this:

4th line “F” also in 6th

Top of the staff “Bb”, also in short 5th

1st ledger line “D”, also in long 4th



## VIBRATO

• Jaw Vibrato is the best vibrato to use for classical solo purposes. (Practice chewing gum.) Use only on long notes; start slow to fast. Do not use too much. Listen to professionals.

- Slide Vibrato is used in the jazz idiom. In a jazz band soli trombone section, only the lead player should use it.
- A gut or air vibrato should never be used! (Do not “mess” with a brass player’s air support.)

## MULTIPLE TONGUING

• Multiple tonguing should be taught early. It takes a while to develop this tongue twister. Students who start early have more success.

- Double Tonguing

TU KU for regular double tonguing.

DU GU for legato double tonguing.

- Triple Tonguing

TU TU KU for regular triple tonguing. (Not TU KU TU)

DU DU GU for legato double tonguing. (Not DU GU DU)

- Learn slowly and gradually increase speed.
- Walk around practicing saying the syllables.

*Dr. Deb Scott is the professor of trombone and bass trombone at Stephen F. Austin State University. She is also the director of SFA's first jazz band, The Swingin' Axes. She is active as a performer and clinician in both classical and jazz styles. She graduated with top honors from Texas Tech University and received the top award for her master's degree at the University of Northern Colorado. She went on to be the first woman to complete the doctorate in trombone performance from the University of North Texas. Scott's solo CD, *Playing Favorites*, was released in 2017 by Navona Records. She has been a featured soloist in many recitals and concerts with bands and orchestras in Texas and has been described as "one of the premiere soloists for her instrument" (Cinemusical 2017). In 2016, she was a featured soloist and faculty member in Santa Fe, Argentina at Trombonanza. She has been featured in radio broadcasts throughout North America. At the International Trombone Festival, she and the SFA trombone choir were described as playing a "fantastic performance...of some of the most challenging works in the trombone choir repertoire" (ITA Journal 2010). Scott has reviewed solos for the PML list for trombone and bass trombone and is active as a clinician and performer for All-Region jazz ensembles and festivals. Over fifteen jazz etudes composed by Dr. Scott have been accepted as audition material for the state jazz auditions; she has also selected all-state band audition material for trombone.*