

A **SYSTEMATIC APPROACH** TO
FLEXIBILITY
FOR TRUMPET

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Praise for *A Systematic Approach to Flexibility*

A **SYSTEMATIC APPROACH** TO
FLEXIBILITY
FOR TRUMPET

Vince DiMartino, *International Soloist, Educator and Recording Artist (USA)*:

“This book is more than what it says! It is a very well organized method that helps develop and maintain both flexibility, playing balance and range. The thoughtful use of the flutter tongue will find much success for people who try it. It will find a permanent place on many of our music practice stands!”

Anthony Plog, *International Soloist and Award Winning Composer (USA/Germany)*:

“This is a wonderful book that presents both the student and professional with a systematic way to improve their flexibility. When I was a student, and later a professional player, I always felt that my flexibility was a weakness that needed constant attention. Had James Ackley's book been around when I was playing, it would have changed that weakness into a strength.”

Manny Laureano, *Principal Trumpet, Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (USA)*:

“James has truly created an encyclopedia of lip slurs! I like the variety and the gradual, systematic approach to the upper register. Congratulations!”

Eric Aubier, *International Trumpet Soloist, Educator and Recording Artist (France)*:

“Everyone knows the importance of flexibility with playing the trumpet. The intelligence of the writing and explanations in these flexibility exercises by James Ackley, makes this a unique tool that is indispensable. I especially like how James links his explanations to performing these exercises parallel to the air usage and phrasing which, for me, is an inseparable aspect of the art of trumpet playing. James, thank you for this beautiful work.”

Phillip Collins, *Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and Retired Principal Trumpet, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (USA)*:

“This is **the** book on flexibility! Says it all. All that is needed is patience and consistent practice. Love this book!”

flex·i·bil·ity

1. being capable to bend, without breaking; bending easily
2. susceptibility of modification or adaptation; adaptable
3. willing or disposed to yield; pliable
4. the ability to move effortlessly and efficiently

Flexibility on any brass instrument is essential for success. To be flexible is to have the agility to change, to adapt, to be supple and agile. No matter what type of music you prefer or aspire to play—classical, commercial, jazz, or anything in between—if you expect to excel at your craft, you must possess the ability to move throughout the entire range of your instrument evenly and easily. A string player needs to be flexible enough to move up and down his or her fingerboard, just as an athlete must be physically flexible in order to decrease the likelihood of injury. Pertaining to our instrument, you must be capable of playing throughout the entire register of your instrument while maintaining stability and a good sound. *A Systematic Approach to Flexibility for Trumpet* is designed to help the student, amateur and professional player to increase flexibility and/or maintain the flexibility that is needed on a daily basis. If you have a problem with flexibility on certain partials, then you may think this book is designed especially for you!

Throughout my teaching career, many students have asked me questions pertaining to flexibility. The following flexibility studies do not reinvent the wheel, and have been compiled from many different resources. I have organized these exercises into a systematic and logical progression to aid players and teachers in the process of identifying flexibility issues, with the intent of creating a volume of readily available exercises designed to aid in the improvement of these issues. These exercises have been indispensable throughout my career as a player and educator. They have helped nearly all of my students over the years, and I now offer them to you to help you achieve maximum flexibility results.

Getting started....

These are basic introductory exercises – a concept of how to blow through a slurred passage. Whether or not *flutter tonguing* is used, it is important that the player maintain an even sound concept and tone color throughout these exercises. The arrow drawn indicates airflow direction. Keep the air moving forward in a way that is relaxed as possible, without hindering the sound and resonance of the note being played. Many students will “under blow” or not support the sound, while others will “over blow,” causing a strained or “pinched” sound. Finding the right sound is important, as it tells you that everything you are doing is done well. The player should also notice the resistance needed for the starting pitch. Listen for the sound and notice where the resistance “hits” within the instrument. Playing the trumpet is listening to your sound and feeling the resistance. It’s all about balance. You don’t want to overblow the trumpet, nor do you want to underflow the trumpet, as each will adversely affect your overall sound quality. I have found that searching for that resistance point within the trumpet is a great start in finding the correlation between the resistance and the sound. Once you notice this relationship, your sound will have more color and resonate without excessive action. By blowing consistently and evenly through this resistance point, you will gain much more control over the instrument, and immediately become a more efficient player. I have found that this is a good place to begin with students who have general issues regarding flexibility.

Preliminary Exercises

These exercises add the tongue, in the hopes that the airflow continues and the tongue merely crosses the airflow but does not interrupt its forward direction (consistency). My main motivation behind this “tonguing” action is the continuation of air and the coordination of the tongue. But there is another reason for the “tonguing” here. I use vowels/syllables (toh, tah, teh, tee) as I play. I internally sing these vowels, as I am playing, and my playing is always guided by having the concept of internal song. As I listen to the sound that emits from my bell, I make a comparison to what my inner sound concept is dictating. I use this comparison process to also control my sound. Using vowels simply allows me to channel this concept. I can change the oral cavity, which in turn, with practice, provides a fluid and flexible area (size) within the oral cavity that helps to find the best resonance within any given register. The higher the register, the more it will emulate a “whistling” shape within the oral cavity. There is “no one correct” position for any note. I realize this. It is always important to keep in

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mind that everyone is different, and that *there are no universally correct shapes*, but there certainly are positions that are generally more suitable in certain registers for the *majority* of players. You, the player, must therefore be *flexible* in this regard too — always keeping in mind/listening for your ideal sound, and being conscious enough to fine-tune these exercises to best match your own physiology.

Different players have different physiologies; therefore the different tongue arcs used for the different vowel sounds will differ from player to player. Again, *allow the sound to dictate what is acceptable*. The more developed and informed your sound concept is, the easier this is to determine and the more natural it will occur. My advice would be to listen to recordings and attend live performances as much as possible (At times, I learned more from listening to my teachers perform than the actual lessons). Always think about evolving and refining your sound concept. In these exercises, and of course throughout the rest of your playing, I encourage you to always strive to utilize a natural and relaxed approach of singing through the musical line, much like a singer would.

Changing the rhythm of these exercises has proven helpful. It can systematically work out issues between specific notes that are unclear, not smooth, or difficult to keep in time. Changing the rhythm can make it more challenging and often workout other kinks:

The image displays five musical staves, each representing a different exercise. The first two staves are in 6/8 time, the third is in 3/4 time, and the last two are in 2/4 time. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The exercises consist of a series of eighth or sixteenth notes, often beamed together, leading to a final note with a fermata. A long slur is drawn over the entire sequence of notes on each staff, indicating a continuous, smooth line of sound.

Introduction

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Flexibility Exercises

These exercises were not conceived to contain every possible flexibility ratio, nor are they a compendium of all the flexibility exercises out there. I realize this volume may, at times, seem slightly redundant, but not every section is a carbon copy of the previous section. The specific exercises and their order are meant to act as a progression and target certain playing issues or struggles. Also: as players, we are all familiar with the fact that different days can bring different challenges, and our chops today are often unwilling to cooperate with skills we may have thought mastered yesterday. The teacher, performer, or student should therefore choose the beginning partial and can even skip around, based upon the needs of the individual day.

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I have chosen to begin each exercise grouping on the highest pitch. Too many flexibility exercises emphasize starting on the lower partials first, which is not where the embouchure “set-up” should be placed. I personally feel that the embouchure “set-up” should be around a C in the staff, allowing for the player to potentially move from double C to pedal C. The C in the staff, therefore, would be considered the middle of the register. Some may feel the set-up should be higher (around a G above the staff), and yet others may feel it should start at C below the staff. For this reason, I have placed starting points at different pitches for those that have issues beginning on one particular note or register. It is my wish that the exercises will then familiarize themselves as you play through them and you will feel more comfortable starting on any particular note.

Please play softly – no more than a *mezzo forte*. These exercises are about keeping things resonant, smooth, and focused. You are not trying to “blow the house down” — although in time, your efficiency will improve, which will certainly help your *forte/fortissimo* playing as well. For our purposes, concentrate on keeping the airflow forward with a “continuous” feel. It’s as if you turned on the air machine and the flexibility is a *result* of that machine running at a consistent rate of flow.

As with the preliminary studies, use your vowels (syllables). Allow the tongue to aid in your flexibility. Perform the following test: sing what you want to play out loud. Then, *internally* (silently) sing it as loud as you can, using your inner voice. Afterwards, whistle it – your tongue should more or less mimic the whistle. Exactly how closely the tongue will do so while playing the trumpet will vary — again, use your sound concept to determine what is best for you. Sound is principal. Then, perform this on your trumpet, using the “same” vowels. I believe this to be a very natural process with most brass players, whether they know it or not.

Dr. Keith Amstutz (Professor Emeritus at the University of South Carolina) wrote his DMA dissertation on this subject, “A Videofluorographic Study of the Teeth Aperture, Instrument Pivot and Tongue Arch and Their Influence on Trumpet Performance”. His fluoroscope videos show that brass players use their tongue for flexibility, whether the player is aware of it or not. The amount differs, as it should, simply because our physiology differs. The fact that the tongue has anything to do with flexibility and aiding in range can be a hotly debated subject in the world of trumpet pedagogy; despite any controversy, I think we can *all* agree that the result should be a natural act.

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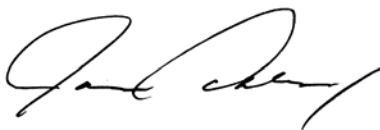
Sound matters! Always play with the best sound you can play with — *always*. *Never* accept an unfocused sound or a fuzzy sound. Work to keep the sound clean and resonant at all times. When this is achieved and the exercises can be performed with ease and clarity of sound, you will notice great stability throughout your range and much control over your flexibility in general. All exercises either descend or ascend, chromatically.

Flexible Range Studies

These are a few studies that have worked wonders with my students over the years. The concept behind the first set of studies is that incorporating both flexibility and gradual scalar activity aids to keep the embouchure focused. As you ascend in triplet form (with the higher pitch within the triplet), you do not adjust the embouchure or add unneeded muscular support. The idea is that you don't need to move the embouchure to play the higher pitch; the higher pitch is a natural result of the continuation of the line, and there is already enough support there. The trick is to keep the aperture open as you ascend – being careful not to close it off – and “whistle” your notes (using the tongue positions discussed above). These exercises, even over a short amount of time, can lead to significant improvement. Do not try to play these too loud too soon: small steps breed future progress. I would also caution against playing these exercises at the end of the day. It would be better to play these near the beginning of the day (e.g. after the warm-up), while you are still “fresh,” to help avoid forming bad habits or injuring yourself. Just use common sense.

Lastly: I hope you enjoy this book and that it helps you achieve some of your trumpet goals. Perfection is certainly a life-long pursuit, and while there is no “one book” that will turn you into a perfect player, I hope at least to help you turn the key a few more times towards unlocking your fullest potential.

Sincerely,



James Ackley, 2012

Getting started....

I call for the use of *flutter tonguing* in this book. *Flutter tonguing* is the best resource I have found to keep the airflow moving forward with steady effort. If there is a "bump" in the flutter tongue or a change in the overall sound of the flutter, chances are there is a change in how you are blowing. Work to achieve a smooth motion and a smooth *flutter* sound. Above all, the sound should be resonant and the flow should be as natural as possible.

For those that cannot *flutter*, please don't be discouraged. I have had many students that were unable to *flutter tongue* and have gone on to master flexibility. If you cannot *flutter*, then keep these exercises at a very soft dynamic. You will need to obey the same rules as those that flutter... listen to your sound. Your sound must be even and smooth. If the sound is not smooth, chances are your air stream is not smooth. The two are correlated.

- Blow through the exercise, as if the entire thing were just one note. Stay in time. Use a metronome.

Begin on other notes...

- Next, use it with the flutter tongue (if possible) to keep the air column even and flowing.

- Now add a slur. Do not forget to blow through the exercise, as if the entire thing were just one note.

- Limit the embouchure to no more movement than is necessary. The sound "within" the note should not change. Aim for resonance and stability.

Preliminary Exercises

The idea behind these exercises is that you keep your air forward - your airflow needs to be in **constant** motion. Don't "pull back" or "save" your air. On the contrary, use as much as you can without "pushing" your air. Just let it go. **Allow** it to move through the horn and out the bell. Just remember, use a large and slow moving mass of air, not a fast moving airstream. Be careful not to "push." Try to find the "resistance" point within the trumpet and blow "against" that. Every instrument has resistance. You need to use this resistance to your benefit.

You will notice that I use vowels/syllables for each note. It has been my belief that the tongue changes the oral cavity. This can have a profound impact on your playing, making it easier to guide the airflow and produce your notes with more efficiency and a centered sound. Ultimately, it is your decision which vowel to use (or whether or not you want to use them at all). Generally, I use the "ee" vowel above the staff and only on the highest note within a phrase. The examples below do not use the upper register, therefore they only contain vowels I would teach within this confined register. Extreme high notes require the tongue to come forward, so I would recommend using something similar to "ss". The amount of tongue movement is chiefly determined by the sound - always keep the aperture open. Notes within parantheses can be played with or without *flutter*. Try the *flutter* to keep the air moving, then try it without. If more than one note contains *flutter*, do not articulate the note - slur.

A

p "tah" "tah" "ah"

Simile: **downwards**
2, 1, 12, 23, 13, 123

The horn should come off the face at the end of each exercise.

B

"tah" "tah" "eh"

Sim.

Use the *flutter* tongue where indicated, or throughout, when you need to be reminded of air support.

C

sim. "tah" "ah" "tah" "oh"

Sim.

D

"tah" "eh" "ah" "oh"

Sim.

E

"tah" "oh" "ah" "eh" "ah" "oh"

Sim.

F

"tah" "tah" "tah" *sim.* "toh" "ah"

Sim.

G Sim.

H Sim.

Continue the with the harmonic series (right) to solidify this concept:
(please note: the harmonic series begins with pedal C. Low C is the 2nd partial).

HARMONIC SERIES

A FEW THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- ♪ ALWAYS play with the best sound quality possible.
- ♪ Take a break, BEFORE you begin to feel tired.
- ♪ Keep your corners against your teeth, but don't force them. As you go up in range, the corners go FORWARDS, not backwards.
- ♪ We sound different to listeners than we do to ourselves; always strive to be aware of what you sound like *in front of the bell*.
- ♪ Begin each practice session (also rehearsals) with the best posture you can produce for the first 10 minutes. Over time, you will develop good posture habits.
- ♪ BREATHING. Breathing is of the utmost importance. Take a relaxed, full & natural breath without restriction. ALLOW the air to come out and keep it moving. Kinetic energy, not potential energy.

A Reminder...

- ♪ Flutter on mouthpiece; glissando with a full (*f*) and smooth sound.

- ♪ Flutter/maintain direction of airflow through the exercise on the trumpet. Keep it smooth.

PARTIALS

Nos. 2-4

All exercises in one breath. Repeat 2-8 times.
Flutter *ad lib* to maintain smoothness.

4th Partial

♩ = 60-160

Simile: downwards
2, 1, 12, 23, 13, 123

1 

2 

♩ = 50-100

3 

4 


5 

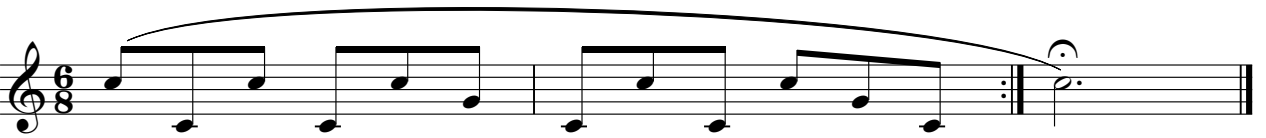
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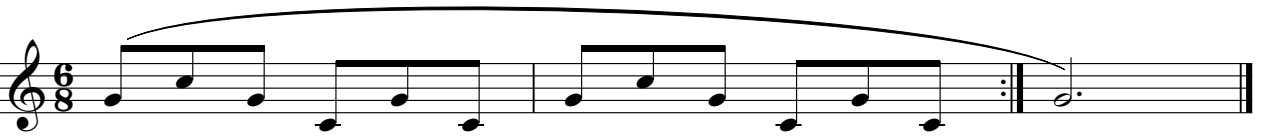
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3rd Partial

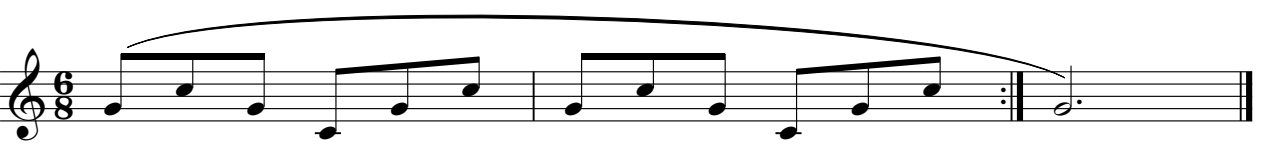
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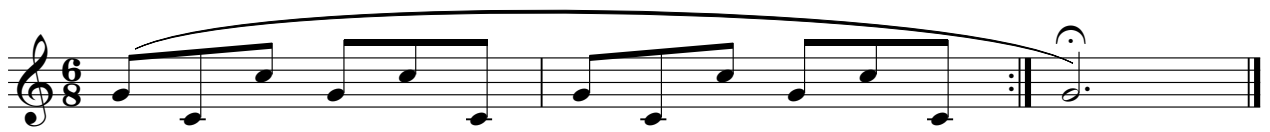
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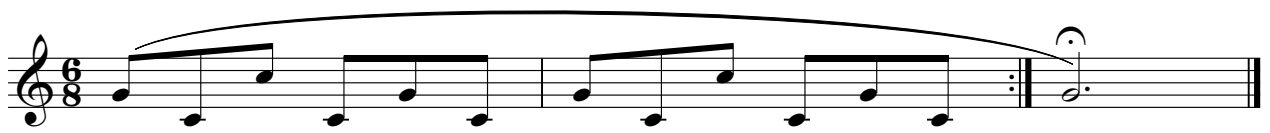
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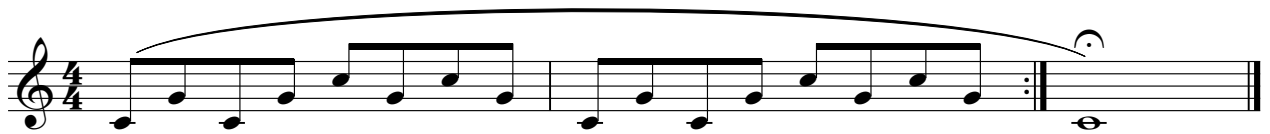
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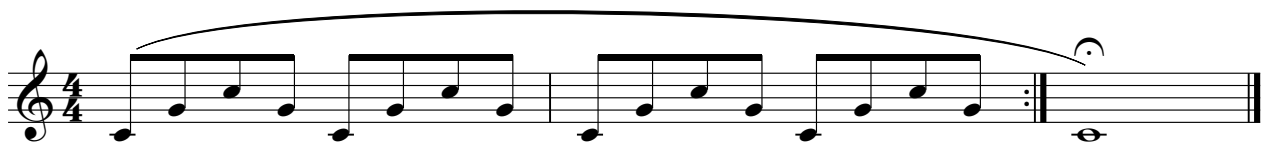
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21 

22 

2nd Partial

23 

24 

25 

26 

27 

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29 

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