

*A Guide to More Efficient*  
***TROMBONE PLAYING***  
*Coordination Training for the Trombonist*

**Allan Kaplan, Ph.D.**

*New Mexico State University (Retired)*

*ABODA Phoenix • April 21–24, 2026*

[akaplan@nmsu.edu](mailto:akaplan@nmsu.edu)



*Move with intention. Play with freedom. Breathe with awareness.*

## Table of Contents

---

<b>About the Tai Chi Trombonist Project.....</b>	<b>3</b>
About the Founders.....	3
<b>The Most Important Ingredient: Sound Concept.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Recommended Listening.....	4
Tenor Trombone: Core Classical / Orchestral.....	4
Tenor Trombone: Jazz / Commercial Legends.....	4
Tenor Trombone: Studio / Versatile Masters.....	4
Bass Trombone: Orchestral / Classical.....	4
Bass Trombone: Jazz / Studio / Solo.....	4
<b>8 Pieces of Brocade Qigong Routine.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Breathing Exercises.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The 4 Elements of Trombone Coordination.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Relaxation and Tone Quality Cycle.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Ping and Relax: The Importance of the First Note.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Preparing and Executing a Melodious Etude.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Remington-Style Warm-Up:</b>	
<b>Tuning &amp; Centering Exercise.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Best Overall Daily Routine for Range and Endurance.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Take It Home: Your Action Plan.....</b>	<b>16</b>
Body & Breath Warm-Up.....	16
Sound Concept & Listening.....	16
Technical Practice.....	16
Coordination & Relaxation.....	16

## About the Tai Chi Trombonist Project

---

*This handout accompanies the master class presented at the 2026 ABODA Phoenix conference. The materials draw on decades of trombone pedagogy, Tai Chi principles, and the research and work of multiple experts. Everything here can be explored independently at home.*



**The mission of the Tai Chi Trombonist project** is to integrate the timeless principles of Tai Chi—breath, balance, and mindful movement—into brass pedagogy. By blending somatic awareness with musical discipline, the project offers a holistic approach to practice and performance that supports longevity, physical ease, and expressive depth. This work empowers musicians of all levels to play with greater freedom, focus, and flow.

[www.taichitrombonist.com](http://www.taichitrombonist.com)

### About the Founders

**Allan Kaplan** is a veteran trombonist and educator with over 50 years of teaching and performing experience. A lifelong student of both music and movement, Allan discovered Tai Chi as a complementary discipline that transformed his understanding of breath, posture, and presence. In retirement, he has launched the Tai Chi Trombonist project to explore and share the intersections between internal martial arts and brass playing. Allan's work reflects a deep commitment to artistry, self-awareness, and the sustainable development of musical skill.

**Coach Rich Kahle** is a seasoned master trainer with over 30 years of experience in the fitness and wellness industry. His credentials include certifications in personal training, nutrition coaching, life coaching, yoga, Tai Chi, and Qigong. A champion strength athlete for more than 25 years, Coach Kahle combines real-world athletic achievement with deep expertise in functional movement, mindfulness, and total-body wellness.

## The Most Important Ingredient: Sound Concept

---

*Before exercises and technique, everything must be grounded in a guiding philosophy. Arnold Jacobs—legendary tubist of the Chicago Symphony—held that the musician's internal sound concept is the primary driver of great playing. Every exercise in this handout serves that concept.*

***“Every day feed your brain with great artistry.***

***“The student has two instruments: the real one in his hands, and another, much finer instrument which exists only in his head. The student should focus on playing the instrument in his head. The instrument in his hands will then be a mirror image of the instrument in his head.”*** — Arnold Jacobs

### Recommended Listening

*Cultivating your inner sound concept requires consistent exposure to great playing. Search these artists on YouTube to hear them perform.*

#### Tenor Trombone: Core Classical / Orchestral

- **Joseph Alessi** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Joseph+Alessi+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Joseph+Alessi+trombone)
- **Christian Lindberg** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Christian+Lindberg+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Christian+Lindberg+trombone)
- **Jörgen van Rijen** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Jorgen+van+Rijen+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Jorgen+van+Rijen+trombone)

#### Tenor Trombone: Jazz / Commercial Legends

- **Wycliffe Gordon** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Wycliffe+Gordon+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Wycliffe+Gordon+trombone)
- **J.J. Johnson** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=JJ+Johnson+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=JJ+Johnson+trombone)
- **Bill Watrous** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Bill+Watrous+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Bill+Watrous+trombone)

#### Tenor Trombone: Studio / Versatile Masters

- **Tommy Pederson** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Tommy+Pederson+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Tommy+Pederson+trombone)
- **Andy Martin** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Andy+Martin+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Andy+Martin+trombone)

#### Bass Trombone: Orchestral / Classical

- **Ben van Dijk** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Ben+van+Dijk+bass+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Ben+van+Dijk+bass+trombone)
- **Charlie Vernon** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Charlie+Vernon+bass+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Charlie+Vernon+bass+trombone)
- **Douglas Yeo** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Douglas+Yeo+bass+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Douglas+Yeo+bass+trombone)

#### Bass Trombone: Jazz / Studio / Solo

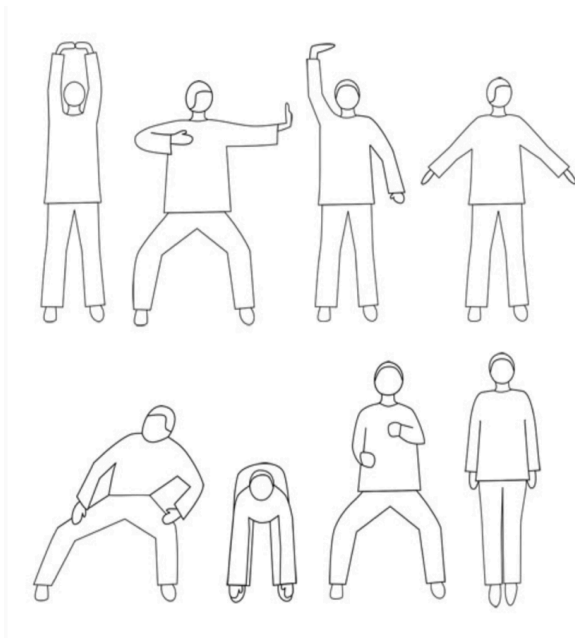
- **David Taylor** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=David+Taylor+bass+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=David+Taylor+bass+trombone)
- **George Roberts** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=George+Roberts+bass+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=George+Roberts+bass+trombone)
- **Bill Reichenbach** [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Bill+Reichenbach+bass+trombone](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Bill+Reichenbach+bass+trombone)

## 8 Pieces of Brocade Qigong Routine

*Qigong (pronounced "chee-gong") is a Chinese practice combining movement, breath, and intention to cultivate life energy. This section offers a full-body warm-up that is fundamentally different from instrument warm-ups—it prepares the whole person before a single note is played.*

The "8 Pieces of Brocade" is one of the oldest and most widely practiced Qigong routines. An excellent demonstration video can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCicH-iz1oU>



**1. Hold the hands to the heavens.**

Regulate Yin Yang of the triple warmer.

**2. Draw the bow.**

Coordinate liver with lungs.

**3. Separate heaven & earth.**

Regulate Yin Yang of the spleen, stomach.

**4. Wise owl gazes backwards.**

Eliminate 5 over strains of the organs and 7 injuries of the emotions.

**5. Sway the head and shake the tail.**

Regulate heart fire.

**6. Two hands hold the feet.**

Stimulates the kidneys.

**7. Clench the fists to glare fiercely.**

Stimulates the liver.

**8. Bouncing on the toes.**

Stimulates the converging point of 3 Yin and 3 Yang channels on the foot covering multiple organs.

Source: [www.earthbalance-taichi.com](http://www.earthbalance-taichi.com)

## Breathing Exercises

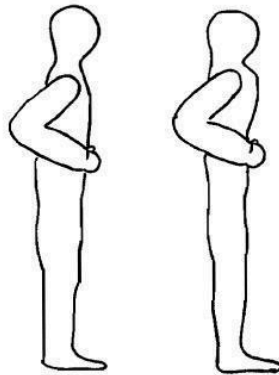
---

*Developed by Bart van Lier—principal trombonist of the Metropole Jazz Orchestra—these exercises are done before you touch your instrument. They address the fundamental connection between breath, body, and tone quality.*

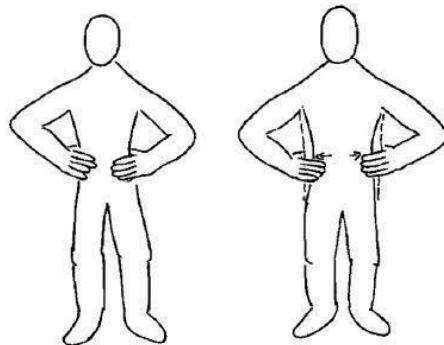
**“To breathe well, move your ribs.”** — Dave Vining, Northern Arizona University

Before you touch your instrument, do the following exercises. They are meant to stretch your **breathing apparatus** in general and to achieve a **relaxed yet alert posture**.

- a. Stand before a mirror and lift your ribcage as high as possible without lifting your shoulders or leaning backwards. Shoulders and arms remain in starting position. Do this four to six times without inhaling.



- b. Put your hands on your hips and at the same time expand your lower back, your sides, and your abdomen. Your hands will be pushed aside. Also repeat four to six times without inhaling.



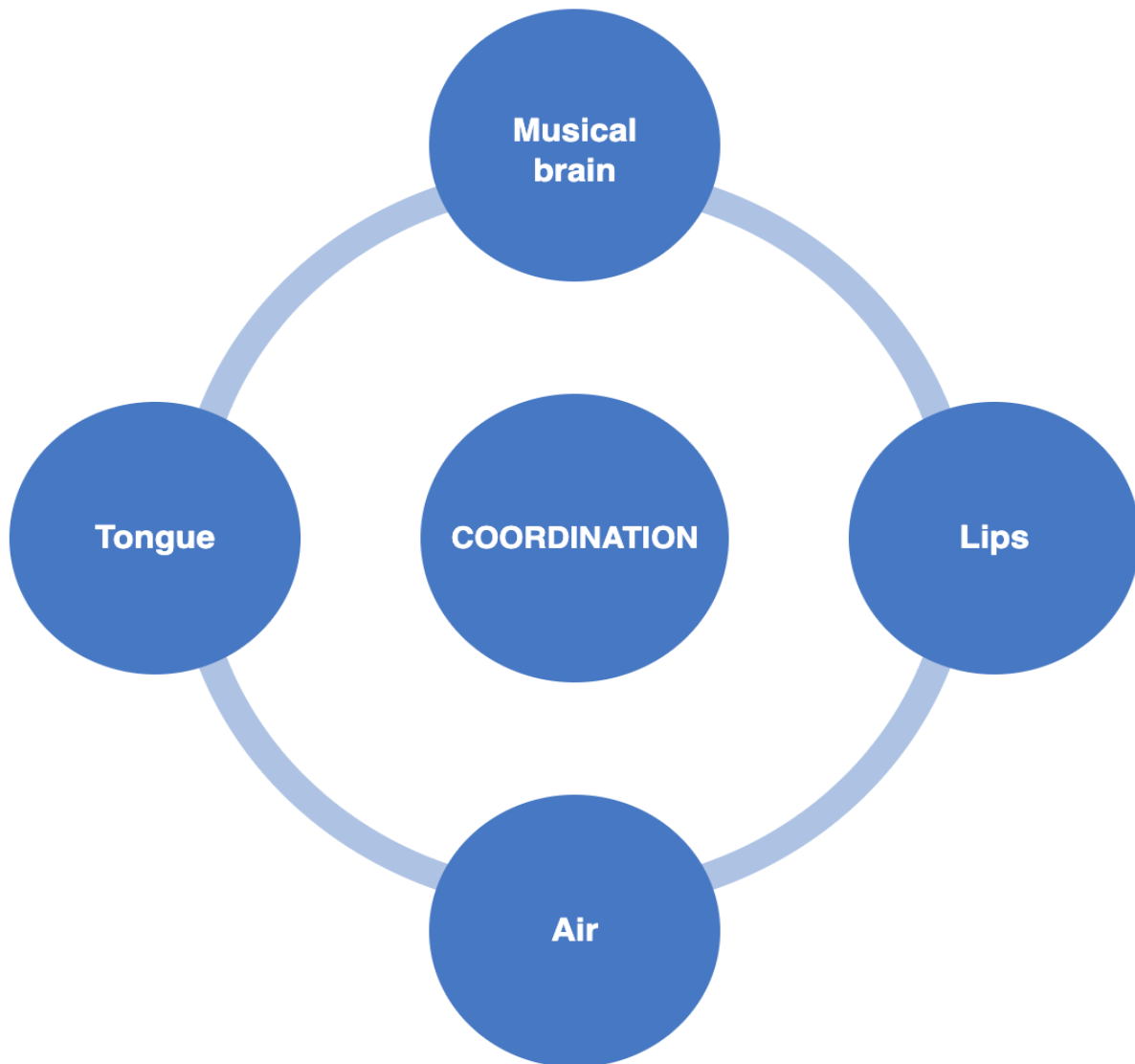
- c. Practice exercises b. and a. (thus reversed) one after the other in one continuous movement. Repeat four to six times.
- d. Repeat exercise c. **with inhalation**. Protrude your lips as far as possible so they resemble the profile of a pig’s snout. **Suck in air**, making the noise of a bath filling with water.

## The 4 Elements of Trombone Coordination

---

*This framework comes from Bart van Lier's book "Coordination for Trombone Playing." Rather than drilling individual technical elements in isolation, van Lier trains the four elements to work together as an integrated, reflexive system.*

The coordination concept focuses on developing the synchronized interplay between a trombonist's **musical brain, lips, tongue, and air** — training these elements to work together seamlessly so that technical demands don't interfere with musical expression.

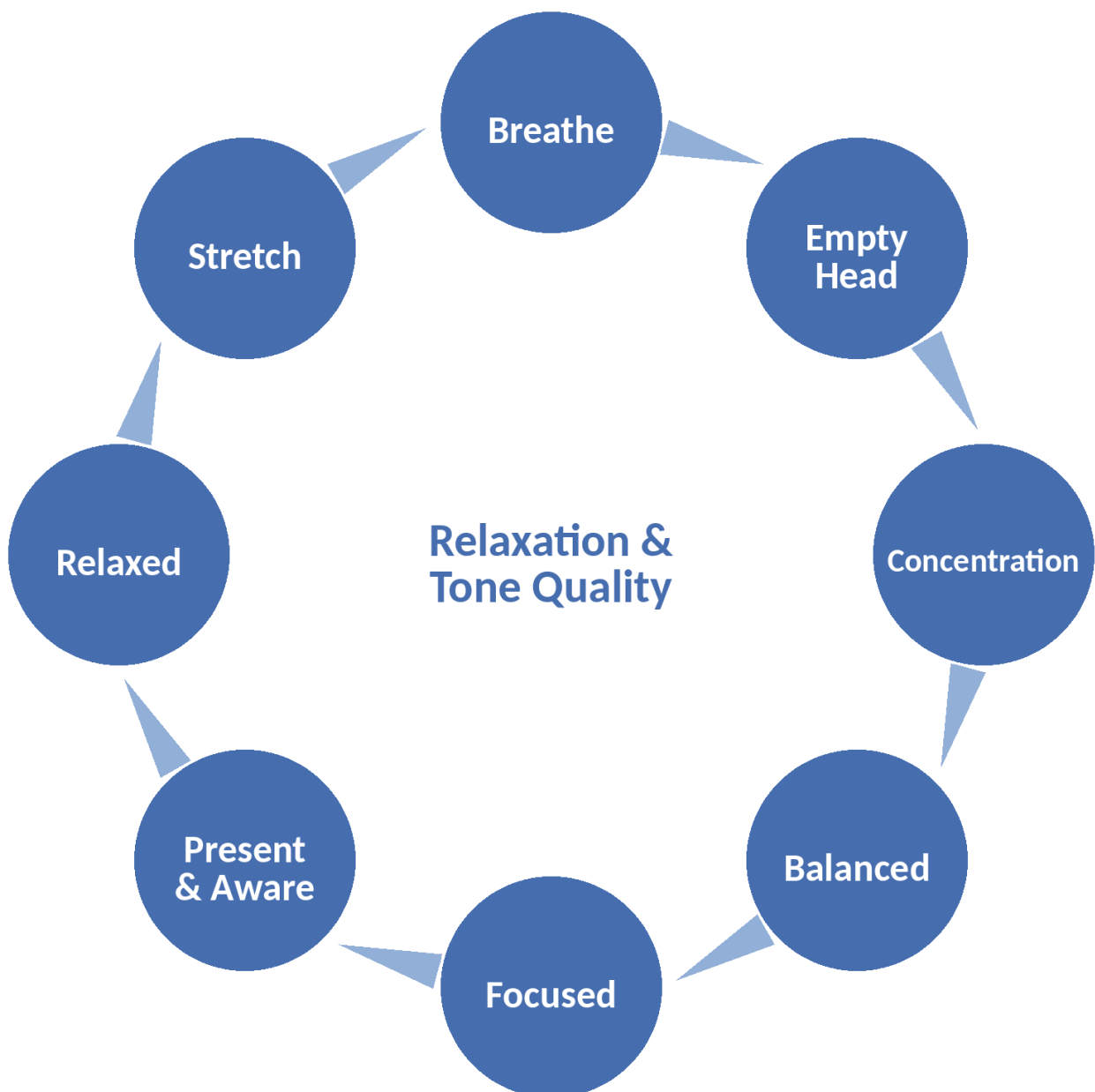


## Relaxation and Tone Quality Cycle

---

*This cycle draws on the practice philosophy of Bart van Lier and the body-awareness principles at the heart of both Qigong and Tai Chi. Rather than treating relaxation as passive, this framework presents it as an active, self-renewing loop that a musician can consciously move through.*

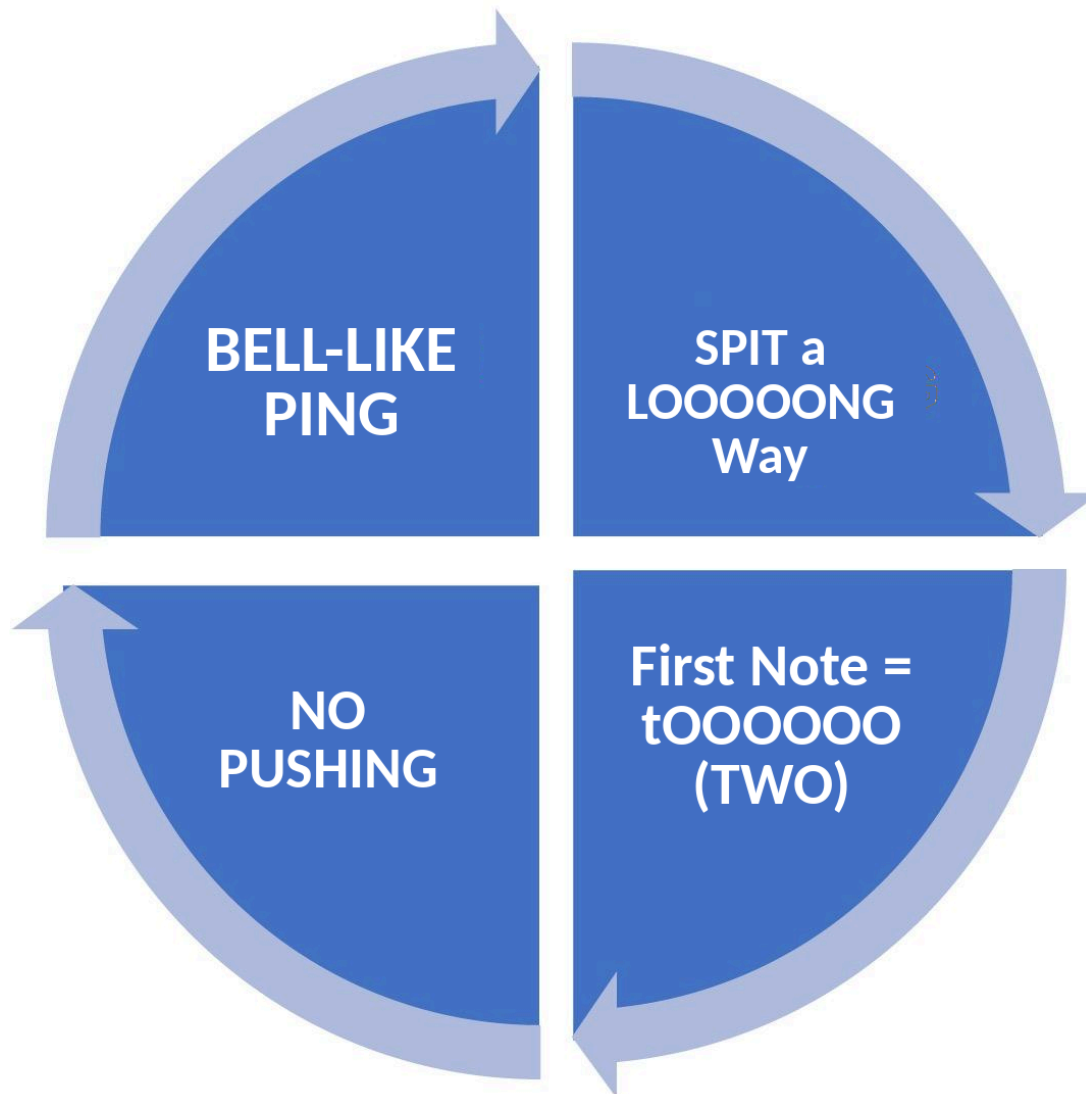
The eight states in this cycle do not operate independently. Each one creates the conditions for the next, forming a continuous loop. The goal is to recognize where you are in the cycle at any moment and use that awareness to restore flow, tone quality, and ease of playing.



## Ping and Relax: The Importance of the First Note

*Jay Friedman, legendary principal trombonist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, developed this concept as a way of thinking about note attacks. Instead of pressing into a note, the idea is to create a resonant initial "ping" and then immediately release tension—allowing the body to resonate freely, like a concert hall.*

The best way to practice long tones—and produce the most beautiful sound—is to begin each note with a bell-like start in order to relax as quickly as possible. The bell-like shape of the note will start the air fast enough where no pushing is necessary from the body. The relaxation after the start of the note allows for maximum resonance. In a sense the torso becomes the concert hall: if the diaphragm muscles are engaged and tight, the concert hall will sound small and dead. If the diaphragm muscles are relaxed the concert hall will sound spacious and reverberant.



## Preparing and Executing a Melodious Etude

*This exercise comes from Jay Friedman, principal trombonist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for over four decades and one of the most influential pedagogues in the history of the instrument. The full article is available at [jayfriedman.net](http://jayfriedman.net) and is essential reading for any serious trombonist.*

The "Melodious Etude" exercise trains three distinct articulation characters simultaneously — marcato, sostenuto, and legato — using the same melodic material. Rather than practicing one articulation style at a time, the player cycles through all three in a single sitting. The goal is not merely technical variety but the internalization of musical character as the primary driver of articulation. How a note begins, sustains, and releases is always in service of expression — never a mechanical habit.

The image displays a musical score for a trombone exercise titled "Melodious Etude". The score is written in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It consists of three systems of three staves each. The first system is labeled with three articulation styles: *marcato*, *sostenuto*, and *legato*. The *marcato* staff features a series of eighth notes with accents. The *sostenuto* staff features a series of quarter notes with a long, smooth slur. The *legato* staff features a series of quarter notes with a long, smooth slur and includes vocalizations "DU AH AH AH AH" and "DU AH AH AH AH" written above the notes. The second and third systems continue the exercise with similar patterns of articulation and slurs. The score is presented in a clean, black-and-white format.

For more information and audio cues, visit:

<http://www.jayfriedman.net/preparing-and-executing-a-melodious-etude/>

## Remington-Style Warm-Up: Tuning & Centering Exercise

---

*These exercises come from Daily Warmup Routine for Trombone by Unai Urretxo. They combine mouthpiece buzzing with trombone playing to deepen tone quality and reinforce intonation awareness across all slide positions. Play slowly, with full attention to sound.*

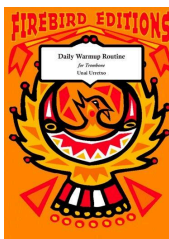
In this exercise, we work to make our sound deeper and provide more quality and clarity. We also work on flexibility, legato, and high register using both the mouthpiece and trombone. The glissando plays a very important role in intonation with the mouthpiece, helping lip vibration to become more relaxed and have better quality.

### Key reminders while playing these exercises:

1. Take air deeply and a tempo.
2. Even in technical and simple exercises, do not forget to play with character and musical sense.
3. Make sure that by buzzing and by playing trombone you make sound between the notes; do not lose your sound.
4. When playing these exercises, think about the coordination between your slide and the vibration or pitch of your lips. Make sure the change and move happen at the same time.
5. By subdividing the beat you will know the perfect time to move from one note to another.
6. Move the slide a tempo, not fast—not slow. A TEMPO.

To ensure readability, the sheet music follows on the next page.

**Recommended Resource:** *Daily Warmup Routine for Trombone* by Unai Urretxo (Firebird Editions)



This highly practical method book by Spanish trombonist Unai Urretxo is designed to be played through from start to finish each day as a complete warm-up system. It covers long tones, flexibility, legato, scales, arpeggios, and high-register work—making it one of the most comprehensive single-volume daily routines available for trombone. The exercises reinforce the buzzing-to-instrument coordination concepts introduced by van Lier, and the progressive layout means players at any level can adapt the material to their needs. Available as an affordable PDF download directly from the publisher.

### PDF download (\$12):

<https://firebirdeditions.com/product-category/method-book/trombone-method-book-pdf/>

Reference note with the piano, tuner or tuning CD.

$\text{♩} = 60 \text{ to } 80$

1pos. 5pos.  
6pos. 5pos.

First time buzzing and glissando with mouth piece.  
2x with trombone: make sure you play a beautiful and connected legato.

1pos 4pos  
6pos 4pos

1pos 3pos  
6pos 3pos

sim.

Reference note with the piano, tuner or tuning CD.

5pos 2pos  
1pos 2pos

sim..

### Buzzing with the Mouthpiece

1. Take air deeply and in tempo.
2. Even in technical and simple exercises, do not forget to play with character and musical sense.
3. Make sure to make sound between the notes; do not lose your sound—use your air between the notes.

## Best Overall Daily Routine for Range and Endurance

---

*John Kitzman's Daily Routine is widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive single exercises for developing trombone range and endurance. It systematically works through all eleven slide positions and the full range of the instrument. Practice slowly with consistent air support—resist the urge to speed up.*

To ensure readability, the sheet music follows on the next two pages.

# Daily Routine

John Kitzman

1. Trombone

7 Tbn.

13 Tbn.

19 Tbn.

2. 25 Tbn.

3. 29 Tbn.

4. 31 Tbn.

5. 33 Tbn.

35 Tbn.

In all 11 positions

1st to 7th

7th to 1st

b3 4 1/2 6 bb7 b3 lip

1 or 6 b2

v v v v v v

v bb7

b1 b1

b1 b1 b1 b1

1st to 7th

6. 37

7th to 1st

7. 38

7th to 1st

8. 40

7th to 1st

8. 42

7th to 1st

8. 44

7th to 1st

9. 46

7th to 1st

9. 47

## Take It Home: Your Action Plan

---

*Use this page as a quick-reference guide after the clinic. These are the highest-leverage habits drawn from today's session—simple enough to start tomorrow, deep enough to sustain a lifetime of practice.*

### Body & Breath Warm-Up

- Before picking up your instrument, do the 8 Pieces of Brocade Qigong routine (or at minimum, the Stretching & Breathing exercises a–d from Bart van Lier).
- Spend at least 5 minutes on breath awareness before playing—ribcage lifts, expansion, and the lip-suction inhalation.

### Sound Concept & Listening

- Choose one artist from the Recommended Listening list and spend 10 minutes listening before each practice session. Feed your inner instrument.
- Internalize the Arnold Jacobs principle: play the instrument in your head first. The physical instrument follows.

### Technical Practice

- Start every practice session with the Ping and Relax concept: bell-like attack, immediate release, no pushing.
- Incorporate the Kitzman Daily Routine at least three times per week to systematically build range and endurance.
- If you invest in one method book, consider Unai Urretxo's Daily Warmup Routine.

### Coordination & Relaxation

- Practice the Relaxation & Tone Quality cycle consciously: Breathe → Empty Head → Concentration → Balanced → Focused → Present & Aware → Relaxed → Stretch → Breathe.
- Return regularly to the 4 Elements of Coordination: musical brain, lips, tongue, and air are always working together—never in isolation.
- Explore Bart van Lier's Coordination for Trombone Playing for a deeper dive into the full program.

#### Ready to go deeper?

Visit [www.taichitrombonist.com](http://www.taichitrombonist.com) to watch a **free practice session** and sign up for future updates, resources, and master class announcements.

***Move with intention. Play with freedom. Breathe with awareness.***