



Studio
of
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Slurring on the Trombone

Slurring on the trombone is different and more complicated than slurring on any other brass instrument. It is very necessary for you to completely understand how to accomplish a slur on the trombone so that you can effectively communicate during your music making. In other words, *proper slurs just plain sound better*.

First, let's define exactly **what is a slur**. A slur is moving smoothly from one note to the next with no audible break in the sound. The notes are connected.

When you play a series of repeated *staccato* or *détaché* eighth notes, you maintain a steady stream of air and use the tongue to begin each note. Every note ends simply because the next note starts.

When you slur, you maintain a steady stream of air and do your best to hide the transition between two notes, so that the two notes seem to be connected and no sloppy slide movement is audible to you or the audience.

Now, let's take a moment to mention *ties*. Ties look exactly like slurs, except with tied notes the pitches of the notes are the same. With slurs, the pitches of the notes are different. Notice in *Example 1a* below, the two B^b-s are connected.



Example 1a. Two tied notes.

The two quarter notes should be added together, sounding just like a half note. This means that the example above should sound exactly like the example below.



Example 1b. Two tied notes have been replaced with a half-note.

Both examples above should sound exactly the same. As we discuss slurs in this article, don't get them confused with ties as shown above.

A *slur* connects two or more notes of different pitches. *Example 2* shows two slurs. Notice that the

A Mini-Glossary

détaché - (there is no symbol for *détaché*) this is the "normal" articulation: notes are separated by the tongue, with a clear beginning and end to each note.

slur, slurred - (a large curve or arc connecting one or more notes of different pitches) notes that are smoothly connected, or elided, with no audible break between them.

staccato - (shown by a dot over or under the note) notes played with a large degree of separation, or "space," between the notes.

tie, tied - (a large curve or arc connecting two notes of the same pitch) these look *exactly* like slurs, but the notes are the same, like two B^b-s in a row. This means they are played as *one note*, held for the length of the two notes added together.

notes in each slur are different, first A and B^b, then B^b and C.



Example 2. Two slurs.

When slurring on the trombone it is important to remember that there are three different kind of slurs: lip slurs, natural slurs, and legato-tongued slurs. Deciding which slur depends on two things: 1.) which direction is the slide traveling (if it moves at all) and 2.) what direction does the slur go (high to low, or low to high).

If the slide does not change position during a slur, then you are playing a **Lip Slur**. This would happen when slurring from G to high B^b, for example, since both pitches are played in 4th position. This is our first type of slur and certainly the most fundamental. Slurs are performed like this on all other brass instruments.

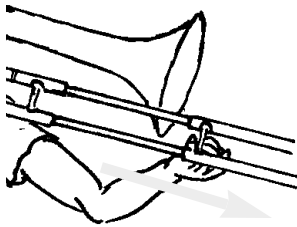
The next type of slur is the **Natural Slur**. This is the most misunderstood slur by other brass players and music directors. We use it because it is very pleasing to the ear and has almost no discernable break. Here is the rule: *a Natural Slur is used when the direction of the slur goes opposite the direction of the slide*. A slide can be considered going down when it is moving away from the trombonist (think 1st position to 3rd). The slide is moving up when traveling back towards the trombonist (again, think 3rd position moving to 1st).

Here is an example of a natural slur.



Example 3a. A Natural Slur.

Assuming you play everything in normal positions and don't use the trigger, the B \flat would be played in first position and the C in third. This means that the slide is going out or down.



Example 3b. Slide is moving "down" or out.

The notes themselves are moving up (C is a higher note than B \flat). So the slide and the notes are moving in contrary or opposite directions. A perfect time to use a Natural Slur!

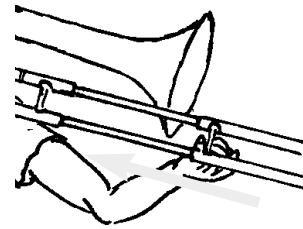
Try a Natural Slur on the indicated notes (Example 3a) right now. Start in 1st position on a B \flat , then slowly slur upwards (tighten the lips and corners of your embouchure to create a slightly smaller hole to blow through) as you move the slide slowly out to third position. Notice that somewhere in the middle the note just "pops" up to the C. Try it again just a little faster. Soon you will be able to slur in this manner with the greatest of ease.

Please note that the natural slur works the other direction as well:



Example 4a. Another Natural Slur.

Assuming you play everything in normal positions and don't use the trigger, the C is in third and the B \flat would be played in first position. This means that the slide is going in or "up."



Example 4b. Slide is moving "up" or in.

The notes themselves are moving down (C is a higher note than B \flat). So the slide and the notes are still moving in contrary or opposite directions. It's still a perfect time to use a Natural Slur!

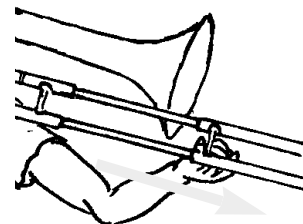
Finally, we come to the **Legato Tongue**. In certain situations, it is not possible to slur cleanly on the trombone: if the slide is moving in the same direction as the slur, then you will hear a "swooping" sound called a *glissando* or *portamento*. This is used a lot in novelty pieces such as *Lassus Trombone*, where the sliding trombone sound is used for great comical effect.

The Legato Tongue is actually a form of cheating that we must use on the trombone. There is no way to truly slur when the slide and the notes are moving in the same direction. A messy glissando will always result. In these situations, we must move the slide very quickly while using the light tongue articulation "du." The tongue is used merely to hide the glissando effect and should not truly be audible or heard. Let me say that again: you want to hide the actual sound of the tongue, leaving a smooth connection between the notes!



Example 5a. The notes are moving down, the same direction as the slide. Time to Legato Tongue.

Assuming you play everything in normal positions and don't employ the trigger, the B \flat would be played in fourth position and the C in third. This means that the slide is going down, the same direction as the notes. If you don't hide it with a Legato Tongue, you will hear a distinct slide from one note to the next.



Example 5b. Slide is moving "down" or out.

Many players over-use the Legato Tongue, being too lazy to figure out the proper time to use Natural

Slurs or lacking the strength to perform clean Lip-Slurs. Don't rely on the Legato Tongue more than necessary: it cannot sound as clean as a properly executed Lip- or Natural Slur.

As you practice these three slurs, you will quickly develop a natural ease in identifying when each

kind of slur is needed. Soon, you will be able to use the proper slur technique even when sight-reading or playing old music that you may have learned with improper slurring. The time and effort taken now will pay off in the future with more musical playing and cleaner slurs. ■



Slur Identification.

Practice the exercise below. Before playing it on the the trombone, take a pencil and fill in each of the empty boxes below. Each box is over a slur in the music. Mark each box with one of the following codes:

- L **Lip Slur** Notes are both played in the same slide position.
- N **Natural Slur** Slide motion is opposite the direction of the notes. No tongue is needed.
- LT **Legato Tongue** Slide motion is the same as the direction of the notes. Must hide slide motion with a light "du" tongue.
- T **Tie** This is not actually a slur at all, but a tie. The notes are the exact same pitch.

Once you have labeled each of the slurs, play the exercise completely, checking to make sure that each slur sounds clean, with no swooping or *glissandi*. Remember, practice slowly at first to ensure proper technique.

Cornette

1 **Andante**

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