

NCMEA- TRUMPET CLINIC

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The “Sound of a Good Breath”

We teachers often teach students about “breath support” and “diaphragm” and the importance of good posture etc. All this is terrific, except that it gets student’s thinking about “breath support” and “diaphragm” and the importance of good posture...and NOT thinking about making music!

Remember that we are working with individuals who are already learning to play an instrument, learning to interpret little dots and symbols (music) on a page, and maybe doing both while attempting to hit a specific coordinate on a chart that looks strikingly similar to a football field! In addition, they are watching and following a conductor (hopefully), as well as trying to match the stylistic characteristics of their section mates and/or another set of players across the band.

Lost in the chaos of multi-tasking is the art of breathing. Unfortunately, moving air is the one thing that they MUST do well in order to maintain a good sound and support continued embouchure development.

So, we are faced with the dilemma of further cluttering our student’s minds with abstract concepts such as “breath support” or “diaphragm”...which essentially sets them up for failure. This presents way too many things to focus on at one time!

A possible solution to this is quite simple: When you teach students about breathing, have them make the “sound” of a good breath.

“OH-HO”.

Upon inhalation students make a sound similar to a yawn “OH”. When they exhale, have them make a sound as if they were sighing “HO”. “OH-HO”. If they do this, all the issues with breath support and diaphragm will automatically be addressed *without the students thinking about any muscle movement whatsoever*. It’s not that diaphragm and/or breath support are not important, it’s simply that the same results can be achieved without the students expending any more mental energy than necessary.

The trick is getting students to play with an open and relaxed flowing airstream- as if you were sighing while playing.

In my experience, this is most easily taught with the introduction of simple flow-based or long-tone studies. I also like to use simple chorale melodies in the warm-up stage of my rehearsals. Remember: It’s not WHAT you play, it’s HOW you play it that matters.