

Linda Yeo Leonard

Teaching Trombone Masterclass Overview

1. Teaching trombone can be complicated. As a teacher, you have to deal with air support, breathing, accuracy with the slide, AND accuracy with the lips. You all are probably pretty decent trombonists because you have ears that have been trained to know if something is out of tune or not. Young students often don't have highly developed ears, and need help with all of the things I mentioned above.
2. When I'm teaching a first time trombonist, I often start by watching them take the horn out of the case. While this may seem simplistic, it's very important that they understand that the slightest dent in their outer slide can cause friction in their slide, and cause them to have to take their horn into the repair shop.
3. Please make sure to watch a student as they first put the trombone to their mouth. I often tell them to approach buzzing as if they were spitting out a watermelon seed. (demonstrate) Then I tell them to play whatever note comes out of their trombone in first position. It's often low B-flat or F. We work from there.
4. Please make sure that your students are not using their tongue as their bottom lip, and also that they haven't put together their trombone backwards. My father (now the bass trombonist in the Boston symphony orchestra) put together his trombone backwards for a full year before someone told him he was doing it wrong. Don't be that band director!
5. As you've learned in your beginner trombone book, the first 5 notes you'll teach are B-flat, C, D, E-flat and F. You also know that B-flat and F are in the same position. Make sure that students don't just associate the picture of the note on the page with a position, but make them say the note name and then the position for you, so you're sure they know their note names and positions. I can't stress this enough especially in the beginning. I often give my students pop quizzes- I'll teach them something, and then close the book and ask them to explain the concept to me. This allows them to tell me what I just taught them, and tells me if they really understand it. I often say to my students, "Do you understand? And tell me the truth because if you don't, I'll know eventually and we'll waste lots of time with you not understanding this concept." I make sure they know it's OK not to understand everything that I teach to them, but I need to know that. I tell them we're both on their team, to make them into the best player they can be.
You can access trombone flashcards at <http://www.brasstages.com/banddirector.htm> which can be helpful in teaching kids where the notes are played.
6. Sometimes kids have problems getting up to the "higher" notes. Please encourage them away from straining their neck so they look like a giraffe. Also, keep them from straining any other part of their body, as that sends bad messages to their brains like, "You can't really play that note." And then their brain gives up. There are alternate positions for many of the mid-range notes like F and higher B-flat, and I'll often disguise a higher note for my students' brains by playing the notes in the alternate positions, and making them glissando up to the higher notes. I have them slide up one position, maintaining basically the same lip setting. And then two positions and so on until they unknowingly hit the note I want them to hit. While it may seem like trickery, it works, and then they gain the confidence to play this formerly "hard" note.
7. Breathing is a key element to playing a brass instrument. Make sure that your students are not taking little tiny breaths through their noses. If they are doing this, I try to reason

with them- “Look at your instrument. Do you really think a nose breath will power that?” An open throat and a low tongue will aid with deep and full breaths. Think of your mouth as if you were yawning. Take a deep breath this way, and then exhale into the trombone. Don’t ever hold your air.

8. Encouragement is VERY important at the beginning of anything, but finding something to praise them about at the end of each piece is key. Then I go into “What do you think could make that better?” You’ll hear all kinds of answers including them parroting back to you what you’ve said to them. But eventually you will break through.
9. I published warm-ups on the Online Trombone Journal’s website (<http://www.trombone.org/jfb/warmups.asp>) a few years ago. I was poking around the site when it first launched, and mentioned to the webmaster that I didn’t see a warm-up. He encouraged me to make one up myself. These warm-ups are basically Remington warm-ups with lip slurs and a few extra things. I’d encourage you to get the students into buzzing on their mouthpieces as early as possible. Also get them playing this warm-up pretty early on. It takes them chromatically from low B-flat to higher B-flat. It adds in 5th position to their knowledge base, and allows them to understand the chromatic scale.
10. Accuracy with the slide is obviously extremely important, and it is crucial to be picky about from the very beginning. Please study a slide position chart carefully, so you don’t steer a kid wrong about a particular position. I’ve had many kids come to me telling me, “But my band director told me 4th position is here,” and be way further in than they should be. Then it’s me against the band director, which isn’t a great place for either of us to be. There are slide position charts on www.yeodoug.com, which can be very helpful in your teaching.
11. “Keep It Clean: A Basic Guide to Trombone Care” is an excellent resource to give students so they know how to clean their instruments. (<http://www.trombone.org/jfb/library/jfb-keepitclean.asp>) It’s a great hand out to give to kids whose slides are sticking like crazy, and have not idea how to give their trombone a bath.
12. I always encourage parents of my trombone students to buy a trombone for their child rather than rent an instrument. It’s often cheaper in the long haul, and one can get a better sound and slide action on a trombone with a new instrument. You’ll find a list of good basic trombones for the aspiring trombonist on my website.
13. If you have any questions about teaching the trombone, please feel free to contact me. There is a contact form on my website where you can send an email to me.