

Caring for Your Trombone

In order to continue to work properly, it is very important that your trombone be properly maintained. Not only is a trombone a musically artistic device, but it is also a mechanical tool requiring cleaning and service just as any machine would. Fortunately, maintaining a trombone is not a difficult task when the student follows a few simple procedures on a regular basis. The following steps should be taken to keep your trombone looking and sounding great.

| Every Time You Play | Once a Week | Once a Month/As Needed |
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Wipe fingerprints clean with a handkerchief.2. Empty water before storing the instrument in your case.3. Spray your main slide with a fine mist of water.4. Use your mouthpiece brush to remove any buildup that has collected in your mouthpiece. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Apply Slide-O-Mix or slide cream to your main slide.2. Grease your tuning slides.3. Use your flexible cleaner to remove any sediment from your lead pipe. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Bathe your slides in lukewarm water to remove any buildup.2. Check your instrument for loose screws or other wear. Notify your teacher if you find any problems.3. Clean the exterior surface of the trombone to maintain a nice shine. |

Daily Maintenance

The oil that is naturally secreted from your skin will be deposited on your trombone as you handle it in normal daily playing. Although the resulting fingerprints are not immediately harmful to your trombone, they will attract dirt and will result in a dingy appearance. In addition, the acids contained in your body oil will begin to slowly dissolve the lacquer coating on your instrument, exposing the metal beneath and resulting in oxidation. Besides the obvious unsightliness of a trombone in this condition is the fact that the oxidized metal will rub off onto the player's hands, leaving a filthy residue. To prevent this, simply wipe the exterior surface of the trombone with a dry handkerchief before placing your instrument back in its case each time you practice.

Aside from abusive handling of the instrument by the player, friction is the trombone's greatest enemy. To prevent friction, a trombone slide must be checked **every day**. When a slide becomes slow and unresponsive or begins to make noise when moved, damage has already begun to occur.

If your slide is properly lubricated each week, the only thing you should have to do each day to keep it in good working order is to spray the interior slide with a fine mist of water. Use your spray bottle to coat the entire surface of the interior slide with water. Refer to the illustrations on the following page for examples of how to spray your slide.

As you play your instrument, saliva and tiny food particles are sometimes expelled into your instrument, creating a tartar-like residue on the inside of your mouthpiece. To prevent this, you should clean your mouthpiece with a mouthpiece brush every time you play your instrument. Make sure to brush both the shank and cup of the mouthpiece. For an extra clean mouthpiece, occasionally rinse and scrub your mouthpiece with rubbing alcohol or hydrogen peroxide then rinse with water.

Weekly Maintenance

The trombone's main slide must be lubricated at least once a week to work properly. During especially dry weather or periods of heavy use, the slide may have to be lubricated more often. Slide-O-Mix brand slide lubricant is probably the easiest and most effective way to maintain your trombone slide. When using Slide-O-Mix for the first time you will need to thoroughly clean the interior slide to remove any residue. Apply one or two drops of liquid from the small bottle to each end of the interior slide. Use the outer slide to spread the liquid across the remainder of the inner slide. Apply liquid from the large bottle to the tops of the inner slide so that it runs approximately 10cm down the slide. Again use the outer slide to spread the liquid across the remainder of the interior slide. Spray the slide with a fine mist of water. The illustrations below demonstrate this procedure.

If you use slide cream, you should thoroughly wipe the old cream from the slide each time you apply new slide cream. Use your finger to spread a light coat of slide cream to the entire surface of the inner slide. Spray the slide with a fine mist of water and replace the outer slide.

The standard trombone has one slide that is used for tuning adjustments. F-attachment trombones may have two or more tuning slides. These slides must be kept in good working order even if they are infrequently used, since a neglected slide will corrode in a remarkably short time. Greasing slides is a simple process that should be done every one to two weeks. Remove each slide one at a time and carefully wipe off the old grease with a lint-free cloth. Apply a small bead of slide grease around the ends of the slide and gently work it back into the trombone, using the instrument to spread the grease along the rest of the slide. Wipe off any excess grease. Repeat this process for the remaining slides. See the illustrations below for examples of how to correctly grease your slides.

If you brush your mouthpiece every time you play you will prevent most obstructions from entering your instrument, but some particles will inevitably collect in the lead pipe of your instrument. Consequently, you should clean your lead pipe every week with a flexible cleaner, often called a "snake." Remove your mouthpiece and the main tuning slide from the trombone and run the flexible cleaner completely through the lead pipe until all sediment is removed. Rinse the cleaner in running water between each pass.

Monthly or As Needed Maintenance

Food particles and other mouth-blown sediment rarely reaches as far into the instrument as the tuning slides, but other materials such as excess slide grease can collect in these slides. To remove this, you should immerse your tuning slides in a bathtub filled with lukewarm (not hot) water every month or two. A fifteen-minute soak will lift most of this unwanted material, but don't forget to grease the slides before replacing them.

Occasionally you will want to polish your instrument to keep its luster and shine. The procedure for polishing your instrument depends on the finish. Lacquered trombones should be cleaned using a soft cloth sprayed lightly with non-abrasive furniture polish, such as Pledge. Never spray the polish directly onto the instrument. Silver-plated trombones should be wiped with a specially treated silver polish cloth available from a local music store. Never use a commercially available silver polish, as these are too harsh for an instrument's finish.

Regardless of the quality of care you give your instrument, occasional repairs and adjustments will have to be made. It is far better in the long run to have repairs made by a qualified technician as soon as possible than to postpone sending an instrument to the shop by making makeshift repairs. Your director can advise you when it is necessary to take an instrument in for repairs.

Even the most gifted musician cannot be successful on an instrument that is not properly maintained. Proper care of a trombone is not a huge, time-consuming task when basic procedures are followed on a daily basis. The result of good trombone care is an instrument that looks and sounds better with less money spent on repairs. Daily maintenance of your instrument is part of your responsibility as a musician.