

Hi, I'm Jim Decker, Trombone Professor at Texas Tech University.

On this CD, I will give you practice tips and specific strategies on how to prepare the three All State Etudes so that you may perform them to the best of your ability. All pieces on this CD are played at performance tempo, with practice tempo renditions included for the faster etudes.

This year's T.M.E.A All State Band and Orchestra Tenor Trombone try-out music has been chosen from Selected Studies by Voxman, published by Rubank.

Before we explore aspects of these etudes, let me share with you some basic approaches to music making and practicing.

Study music as though you were learning a language. When studying a language, we learn most effectively by imitating native speakers of that language. With music, we need to study great trombonists, brass players, vocalists and other fine artists. Go to live concerts, collect and study recordings, study with teachers who are fine players, and play music with peers that you admire. By consistently doing all these things, you will develop a solid musical concept, which will elevate your potential as a trombonist and musician.

In practicing and performing, what we need to do is consciously direct our musical thoughts, not our muscles. As the brain distinctly demands musical excellence, the body will, with consistent training, respond to these demands in the most efficient way possible. By controlling your artistic thoughts, your muscles will respond most effectively.

I strongly recommend that you adopt the “sing/buzz/play” method of practice for all etudes. Sing the music, buzz the music on the mouthpiece and then, play the music. You will find that your tone will become more centered and full and your confidence will increase.

One singing approach to study is sight singing. This is the art of interpreting music through the use of specific syllables, each syllable assigned to either the note of a particular scale or the actual pitch on the music staff. Singing in this fashion will elevate your musical ability and comprehension.

There are many specifics on mouthpiece buzzing that I wish to share. First of all, realize that the “instrument” (your mouthpiece) is only 4 inches long and has a naturally higher pitch center than the full trombone. It is not appropriate to make the mouthpiece have the dark, deep sound of the fully assembled trombone, which resonates at a much lower pitch. Instead, go for the most vibrant, balanced, characteristic sound on the mouthpiece alone and let the instrument naturally amplify the vibration. Second, always have specific pitches in mind when you mouthpiece buzz, even when you are doing “sirens”. Specific demands lead to consistent results. Third, buzz both detached, articulate music and lyrical music. Make sure all notes begin clearly and the connection between notes is

uninterrupted. And finally, allow some glissando between pitches when buzzing legato, or connected, melodies or music. This will result in smoother, more lyrical playing on the instrument.

Concept alone is not enough; a steady, consistent practice routine is a must! Practice daily long tones, slurs, articulation, scales, arpeggios, etudes, solos and ensemble music, making the goal to sound like the finest artists to whom you have listened. Write down your practice agenda in advance and the amount of time you want to spend on each item.

By using a practice agenda, the time you spend practicing will be energized and full of purpose!

Electronic aids that can assist you in your planning and executing of effective practice sessions include the “Just Practice” app and a Practice Excel Spreadsheet. The app is available for iPhone, iPad and Android Smartphones. Upon request, I will gladly send you my Practice Excel Spreadsheet.

It is not necessary nor is it recommended that you do all of your practice in one large block of time. For example, instead of 2 hours of straight practice, break up the practice into two hour long sessions or even 2/45 minute and 1/30 minute session. You will be fresher both physically and mentally.

Set your standards high, make practice fun and enjoyable, and let yourself openly discover new ways to improve.

Proper slide movement is essential in optimal performance of all music on the trombone.

Make slide movement more fluid and uninterrupted for faster technical passages and more precise and distinct, both visually and kinesthetically, for slower, more sustained passages. Make slide movement as easy and relaxed as possible, with the control of the slide given primarily by the thumb and the index finger. With this ease of execution and minimal tension, the music will feel and sound the best.

Develop alternate positions on the trombone and apply them according to musical context. Start by comparing the two differently positioned notes, such as 1<sup>st</sup> and #5<sup>th</sup> position Bb, matching both pitch and tone to the best of your ability. Then, match the sound of musical motives, scales and phrases using both positions. With steady training, you will create viable, interchangeable position options.

Two guiding principles for slide position planning are to minimize changes in slide direction and plan slide positions so that half steps occur on the same partial. Fewer changes of slide direction and result in less slide arm tension. When half steps are played on the same partial, the sound is more musically appealing to the average listener.

When using the F Attachment, remember that all positions are slightly different than what you are accustomed. There are only 6 positions when using the F Attachment and each

of those positions are further apart than the standard, 'open' Bb positions. To get an idea of these position locations, compare notes using the trigger to the open notes, starting with fourth line F. You will be playing the exact same pitches, making your goal to match the pitches of the unison notes while letting the slide move to the naturally correct position. This approach will help make it easier to play the optional lower notes in the etudes.

Thoroughly practice the scales and arpeggios of the keys in which the pieces are centered. For example the Belcke Etude is in Eb Major; the Dieppo Etude is in A Major, and the Vobaron Etude is in A minor. Practice of these scales and associated arpeggios will make performance of the etudes become much easier.

One other element that will help make your performances special are your comprehension of foreign musical terms. Some meanings are cited in this written master class; however, if words appear that you are not 100% sure of their meaning, look up the translation of those terms and write them in pencil in your music. A good source on the web is [www.wordreference.com](http://www.wordreference.com).

With these processes established, we now should look at the special characteristics of each individual work that you are preparing. Keep in mind that many topics discussed in a given etude apply well to either or both of the other etudes.

The Belcke Etude in Eb Major is marked "Marcia", or March-like. Much of the work is very repetitious and demands great technical flexibility and fluidity. In general, if you focus on the different scale segments and arpeggios involved in this piece, you should encounter a good, basic degree of success.

Another great technical challenge is the large interval skips, especially octaves. One must make sure that these intervals are in tune and that the sound of both notes is the best that you can produce. Separately practice octave scales, such as those in this handout, for greater security.

Technical passages that have wide and differing intervals as well as articulations pose particular challenges in this etude. For example, measures 33 – 40 can be difficult to negotiate. When faced with passages such as this, practice smaller units of this passage using the same articulation. If the sequence of pitches continues to be awkward, then also play several of each pitch in the sequence. For instance, if measure 33 poses challenges for you, play four sixteenth note Db's four Bb's four A's, etc. in the tempo of the etude. Next, play two sixteenths/pitch. After achieving success here, then play as written. You should notice greater command of the passage.

Another strategy to bring technical passages into control is to slow the tempo down to a tempo where you can play the passage perfectly and flawlessly three times in a row. Initially, use the same articulations. Next, change the articulations to what is printed in the music and play 3X in a row perfectly. Increase the tempo by ten clicks, repeat these steps, and then advance by an additional 10 clicks when in control.

When playing slurs that encompass pairs of notes, such as in measures 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6, make the first note strong and the second note weak. By doing this in these measures and other times you have paired slur notes, the slurs become more distinguished and the piece sounds more ‘dance like’. Think ‘crescendo’ on the first of the slurred pairs when the interval ascends, such as in measure 1. This will make the second note come out easier.

Syncopated figures are abundant in this etude. Examples include the rhythms in measures 41, 43 and 47 – 49. Make the downbeat eighth notes short and accent the subsequent note to make the rhythm swing and sound exciting. Always support all accented notes with the breath, which will project and improve the tone rather than result in a percussive sounding articulation.

One minor point with this etude is the execution of the grace notes, such as those in measures three and seven. Always play the grace notes as natural slurs whenever possible and let the trombone idiomatically articulate the notes. Make sure that the grace note is played before the beat rather than on the beat. The “big notes” need to occur on the beat.

For Etude #2, *Andante affettuoso*, or a slow, walking pace in an affectionate, tender manner, we will focus on lyrical playing in general, expressive playing as denoted by crescendos and diminuendos, execution of the turns and ways to improve playing in this uncharacteristic key.

The basic style of this work is lyrical, or songlike. All notes must be played in a more sustained manner, while distinguishing the different printed articulations that appear within this lyrical style. When there is a pure slur, use the lightest consonant possible. For me, that consonant is an l, thinking la, lo or lu. There also appears slurs with dots underneath the slurs, commonly known as portamento. I play music of this style with a pronounced da, do or du syllable. When music has no slurs, I am using a T consonant. As long as the air behind the notes is constant and consistent, the piece will sound lyrical to the listener.

In addition, whenever you have slurs that cross partials, use natural slurs for ultimate smoothness and greater breath support.

Execution of the turns in measures 5 and 31 should adhere to some specific guidelines for smoother rendering of this musical ornament. First of all, the notes that make up a turn, which are played after the written C# dotted quarter, are the upper neighbor note – (D), the original note – (C#), the lower neighbor note (B) and the original C#. Although there is rhythmic freedom in the performance of this figure, play the four notes as 32<sup>nd</sup> notes on beat 3 for maximum effectiveness.

Being expressive with your dynamics will help make your performance of this etude noteworthy. Assign numbers to your dynamics to indicate the weight or strength of the tone when that dynamic is written. For instance, have the number 3 indicate mezzo forte

and 1 piano and imagine the difference in volume of sound. This contrast will come through in your playing of this work if the concept is distinctive. When you have crescendo/diminuendo pairings in the music, let the change in volume occur within the numerical boundaries of one given dynamic. To do this, use fractions of numbers to indicate changes in loudness. For example, a crescendo could start at dynamic '2' and the climax of that crescendo could be '2.5'. Examples of this figure occur in such places as measure 3 and 4, measure 9 and 10

Another marking that may look like a dynamic is the 'sf' indication, such as in measures 19 and 20. This symbol is an abbreviation for 'sforzando', or a type of accent. Fuel these accents with breath support rather than forcing them with a harder tongue. This mindset will result in a more beautiful, fuller sound.

In regard to Etude #3, allegretto in a minor, I will discuss phrasing, rhythmic precision and stylization, and alternate position use for technical fluidity.

Decisions on where to breathe must be written in your music and executed accordingly. Mark breaths in pencil for easy revision. In this etude, add a breath mark at the beginning of measure 3, after the high A, and play through measure 8 without taking an additional breath, if possible. A good basic recipe for breath planning in much of this etude is to breathe after ties, such as in measure 12, 16, 40 and 68.

Rhythmic accuracy and differentiation in terms of subdivision and style are so important in this etude. Releasing ties precisely will help the piece move forward musically and rhythmically. Make a clear rhythmic difference between the eighth/two sixteenth rhythm and triplets. The triplets must sound like a division of the beat into three equal parts, whereas the eighth/two sixteenth figure needs to be played so that the sixteenths are faster and clearly placed on the second half of the beat. Another way to make the rhythmic differences a bit more apparent is by playing the opposing rhythms in a slightly altered style. For example, play all figures involving eighths and sixteenths in a more clearly articulated, separated style and triplets with a softer articulation and more length.

Alternate positions will make passagework in this and the other etudes flow more easily. Whenever D's are surrounded by third position notes, such as in measure 34, play those D's in fourth position. Examples of this are in measures 34, 53 and 93. Other positions to try include #6<sup>th</sup> position A on the last sixteenth of measure 39 and fourth position D in measure 51 on beat 2. Practice these new positions separately from the etude, making the pitch and sound quality of the alternates match the more familiar positions as closely as possible.

I would be glad to answer questions that you may have about these etudes or this spoken master-class. Please feel free to e-mail me at [james.decker@ttu.edu](mailto:james.decker@ttu.edu) or phone me at 806-834-8865.

If you are considering a career in music, I encourage you to consider Texas Tech as your next academic step. I can provide more information about the music school, the

ensembles and the trombone studio. . Should you be traveling through Lubbock at anytime in the future, I would be happy to personally show you around campus and/or meet you for a lesson. Just let me know if advance and I will make time for you! Feel free to visit our web page, [www.texastechtrombones.com](http://www.texastechtrombones.com), and our Facebook Page.

I would like to invite you to the Big12 Trombone Conference at Texas Tech in January. Feature guest artists include Douglas Yeo, Professor Trombone at Arizona State University/Former Bass Trombonist of the Boston Symphony and Alex Iles, LA Solo and Commercial Artist. The dates of the conference are January 16 – 18, 2015. I will be sending more information out to your band directors soon.

I would also like to invite you to come to our Texas Tech Band and Orchestra Camp in July. Contact Rebecca Webb, the Special Music Activities and Summer Camps Coordinator of the Texas Tech School of Music, at 806-742-2225.

In addition, I am available to perform clinics and concerts in various areas of the state. Ask your band director or get in contact with me for further details.

I wish you success in working on these all-state pieces and lots of fun and happiness in your music making.

# Octave Scales

James T. Decker

Staff 1: Bass clef, 4/4 time signature. Scale starting on C2, ascending and descending.

6

Staff 2: Bass clef, 4/4 time signature. Scale starting on D2, ascending and descending.

12

Staff 3: Bass clef, 4/4 time signature. Scale starting on E2, ascending and descending.

17

Staff 4: Bass clef, 4/4 time signature. Scale starting on F2, ascending and descending.

22

Staff 5: Bass clef, 4/4 time signature. Scale starting on G2, ascending and descending.

27

Staff 6: Bass clef, 4/4 time signature. Scale starting on A2, ascending and descending.

32

Staff 7: Bass clef, 4/4 time signature. Scale starting on B2, ascending and descending.

37

Staff 8: Bass clef, 4/4 time signature. Scale starting on C3, ascending and descending.

43

