

Trombone Care and Maintenance

Trombones are easy to maintain – the slides (and trigger if applicable) require proper lubrication and maintenance.

Never eat or drink anything besides water before or while playing a wind instrument, since sugar and food particles will accumulate inside the instrument and mouthpiece, causing sticky slide action and fostering bacteria growth – YUCK!!

Assembly:

While trombones are quite easy to assemble, it should be noted that the mouthpiece does not need to be twisted or tapped into place. The shanks of all brass mouthpieces are tapered and designed to make a tight seal with very little pressure into the receiver.

Maintenance

Trombones need to be thoroughly cleaned by a professional once a year if it is being played regularly. However, it is advisable for the player to occasionally take a few steps to help reduce the build-up of deposits and dirt inside the instrument.

Trombones, like all brass instruments, are susceptible to RED ROT. This irreversible damage can often be seen on older brass instruments, but can also happen to newer instruments if they have been played a lot without having been cleaned. With trombones, it is particularly common to see it along the hand slide's outer tubes and the also along the crook. Red rot is the result of the metal being eaten away from the inside out by corrosive deposits, so by the time you see the tell-tale red dots appear on the outer surface of the instrument, most of the damage has already been done and it is just a matter of time before pin-hole leaks occur. The only real way to remedy this condition is to patch or replace the damaged part, and if there is red rot throughout the instrument, the whole instrument may need to be replaced.

Trombones should never be set down on a chair, the floor, a table top, or anywhere else. They should either be in the case, in the player's hands, or on a trombone stand. Also, never store anything on top of the instrument while in the case such as music, as this can throw the hand slide out of alignment or cause other damage to the instrument!

The Bathtub Flush

Every serious trombone player should learn how to give their instrument a bathtub flush. If the trombone has a trigger, then the hand slide can be flushed by the player and the bell section should be cleaned by a professional. Depending on how much the instrument is being played, this should be done once every few months. This process is vital to keeping the instrument in top playing condition and for preventing the build-up of corrosive deposits that can lead to red rot. It is so important that it can be likened to changing the oil in a car. The list of materials you will need are on the next page.

Materials

- Mild liquid dish soap such as *Dawn*
- Trombone snake
- Mouthpiece brush
- Trombone slide cleaning rod
- Dish sponge with a rough and scratchy cleaning surface on one side
- Mild solvent such as rubbing alcohol
- Clean cotton cloths such as old towels or t-shirts
- Tuning slide grease
- Hand slide lubricant

Step 1 Completely disassemble the trombone (if there is a trigger, then just do the hand slide).

Step 2 Fill the bathtub with luke-warm water (do not use hot water! It is better to err on the side of caution and use cooler water) while adding a little dish soap to create suds. There should be enough water to completely submerge the trombone.

Step 3 Allow to soak for twenty to thirty minutes.

Step 4 Run the cleaning snake through all of the tubing, including the inner and outer hand slide tubes. Clean the mouthpiece with the mouthpiece brush. If the tuning slide is discolored and dirty, you can use the rough side of a dish sponge to remove any corrosion. Be careful as this material will scratch silver plating and lacquered brass. Do not use this abrasive surface to clean the inner slide tubes! You can remove dirt from the inner slide tubes with soft side of the sponge or a soft cotton cloth wetted with some solvent.

Step 5 Use the cleaning rod to clean the inside of the outer slide tubes. Be careful that you do not scar the inside of the slide with the cleaning rod – the soft cotton cloth should be pulled through the slot and then wrapped carefully around the rod until the metal is thoroughly covered and is roughly the same size as the tubing. Apply some solvent to the cloth and work this cleaning area back and forth inside the slide tubes. Repeat until the cloth is no longer discolored when removed.

Step 6 Thoroughly rinse everything with cool clean water.

Step 7 Shake as much excess water from the parts as possible and then lay out on a clean dry towel to air dry. When everything is dry, blow through the slide tubes to ensure that any small particles left from the cleaning cloth are removed. This is a good time to inspect the water key cork and test it for suction to see if it is sealing: seal one end of the outer slide tubes with a finger and suck on the other end. If air is leaking anywhere, the suction will be compromised before you release the pressure with your mouth.

Step 8 Grease the tuning slide and insert it into the receivers, wiping away any excess grease. Run a clean dry cloth through the outer slide tubes to ensure that all moisture has been removed

Step 9 Assemble the hand slide and test for smoothness of action. If the slide is still catching or feels gritty, it should either be flushed again or professionally cleaned and aligned.

Trombones should still be cleaned by a professional once a year even if the player flushes their instrument on a regular basis as described above.