

Instrument Care Procedures for Brass Instruments

These procedures are for brass instruments only: trumpet, trombone, euphonium, baritone, and tuba. (Not saxophone!) They will work for both silver plated and lacquer finish instruments. Trombones can ignore anything about valves, but make sure you only use oil on your main slide, not slide grease.

Daily Maintenance

1. Don't eat or drink sugary drinks before playing. Water is fine.
2. Rinse your mouth out if you have to play right after eating.
3. Keep your water key ("Spit valve") emptied, especially as you put your instrument in its case.

Weekly Maintenance

1. Rinse the mouthpiece out in warm tapwater. Use a mouthpiece brush to remove any buildup.
2. Oil valves. If they are exceptionally sticky, it may be helpful to remove them from the valve pistons, wipe them down with a clean cloth, and apply fresh oil.
3. Trombone – Remove the slide, wipe it down with a clean cloth, and apply fresh oil once a week.

Note that valve and trombone slide oiling may be done as often as needed to keep the parts functioning. You should not need to wipe them down more than once per week though.

If you want to sanitize the mouthpiece on your own, you can purchase rubbing alcohol with wintergreen oil at most pharmacies and grocery stores. Put it in a clean spray bottle and you have your own mouthpiece spray. Make sure the alcohol evaporates before you play. This is not a substitute for weekly washing.

Major Cleaning

Thorough cleaning should be done at least once every grading period (nine weeks). This will prevent buildup in the instrument from becoming a major problem and extend the life of the instrument.

Required Materials

- Valve/Slide Oil (Do not substitute household or machine oil!)
 - Slide grease (Looks like chapstick and may say cork grease. Vaseline will also work in a pinch, but is a bit too thick.)
 - Snake (Long, flexible double ended brush)
 - Warm water (Do not use hot water, as it can sometimes crack the lacquer clearcoat.)
 - Soap (Use cheap, non-moisturizing dish soap. Fragrance is okay, but you don't want a lotion residue left in the horn. I usually use the cheapest Great Value, Ajax, etc. dish soap that I can find.)
 - Towels, cleaning rags, etc.
1. Find a safe place to work with a large flat surface and a sink or bathtub. Be wary of small children and pets that might steal or eat parts. 😊
 2. Disassemble the instrument completely. Be careful to set parts out to remember what goes where.
 - a. Remove the tuning and valve slides.
 - b. Remove the trombone slide, taking care not to hit it on anything.
 - c. Remove the valves. Baritone, Euphonium, and Tuba players – there will be loose springs in the bottom of the valve piston. Don't lose them!

3. Submerge each part in warm, soapy water. Work out the air bubbles so that soap gets everywhere. *(Do not wash valves in this step.)*
4. Scrub each part out with the snake. Even if a part looks clean, wash it anyway to remove old oil, saliva, food particles, sugar, germs, etc. Sometimes it can help to let a part soak for 30 seconds or so. (Longer soaking is not recommended.) Scrub out the inside of the valve casings with a casing brush, if you have one.
5. Rinse each part thoroughly. Soap residue CANNOT be left inside the instrument.
6. Wash the valves. Only submerge the bottom section. Do not let the felt pads at the top get wet. You can scrub out any gunk in the valve tubing using the snake. Rinse these thoroughly as well.
7. Allow the instrument to dry. You can dry it off with a towel to speed up the process.
8. Apply fresh slide grease to tuning and valve slides. Begin reassembling the instrument. I recommend that you apply a bead of grease to the end of the slide and then slowly push it in. Wipe off any excess grease with a rag or paper towel.
9. Apply a thin layer of slide grease to the threads on the valve caps. This will help keep them from corroding and getting stuck.
10. Apply fresh oil to the valves (or main trombone slide) and reassemble those sections.
Euphoniums, baritones, and tubas: start by putting the spring back in the valve casing. Make sure the plastic valve guides line up with the slot on the casing. Trumpets: Make sure you rotate the valve until it “clicks” into place. Trombones: Make sure you put your trombone slide on the correct way! Look for the slide lock. It should line up.
 - a. Tip: If you’ve gotten the valves out of order, the number is stamped on the valve itself. 1 is closest to the player, 2 is in the middle, and 3 is farthest away.
11. Double check that you don’t have any extra parts sitting around. Wipe off any extra grease that may be left on the exterior surface of the instrument.
12. If you have a polishing rag, you can use it to shine up the exterior surface and wipe off fingerprints.