

A GUIDE
TO
BASS TROMBONE PLAYING

BY
HUGH E. McMILLEN

**IMPORTANT NOTE: PLEASE READ ALL EXPLANATORY
MATERIAL CAREFULLY**

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Hugh McMillen is Associate Professor of Music and Director of Bands, University of Colorado at Boulder. His bands have achieved a wide reputation in the Midwestern and Rocky Mountain area and Mr. McMillen's work as a clinician and adjudicator throughout this entire area is highly regarded.

In addition to his work with the University of Colorado Bands, he was formerly Supervisor of Instrumental Music in the Boulder, Colorado, Public Schools and heads the Department of Wind instruments as well as teaching trombone, baritone and tuba students at the University.

His professional organizations include the American Bandmasters Association, Vice President of the College Band Directors National Association (1953-55), Past President of the Southwest Division of the Music Educators National Conference, Past President of the Colorado Music Educators Association, Grand President of Kappa Kappa Psi and a member of Phi Mu Alpha as well as several local service organizations.

His musical preparation includes B. M. Ed. from Northwestern University, M. M. Ed. Colorado University, private study on trombone with William T. Drever, Gerrie Vogt, Carroll Martin, and Jerry Cimera, and first chair or soloist positions with a number of outstanding symphonic bands and orchestras.

Mr. McMillen has been greatly interested in trombone pedagogy, has conducted some outstanding clinics on the trombone, and has been very much interested in promoting knowledge of and interest in the bass trombone for which no adequate teaching material is available in published form. It is hoped that this introductory guide to bass trombone playing will fill a very evident void now existing.

FOREWORD

This manual is designed as a *guide* for the teaching or playing of the instrument, and is *not designed as an instruction book*.

Scales, chords, and short exercises are included in order that the practical uses of the combination B \flat -F trombone may be understood. An explanation concerning the use of the E valve (or slide) is also included.

Since intonation is a very critical factor in the playing of tenor *or* bass trombone, the exercises have been very carefully notated as to **ALTERED POSITIONS**.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE FOLLOWING SYMBOLS AND THEIR MEANING:

1. *Tenor trombone slide positions* are indicated with Arabic numerals (1-2-3, etc.)
2. *Bass trombone (or F valve attachment) positions* are indicated with Roman numerals (I-II-III, etc.)
3. *Altered positions* are indicated thus:

Positions which must be shortened in order to bring a note upward into pitch *are indicated with a minus sign (-)*.

Positions which must be lengthened in order to lower a pitch into good tune *are indicated with a plus sign (+)*.

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- Section IV - The B \flat , F and E Bass Trombone.
- Section V - Conclusion and suggested materials.

SECTION I

The Combination B \flat and F Trombone: its design and use

The bass trombone is a combination of a regular tenor trombone (B \flat) with an "F" attachment which is brought into use by depressing the thumb valve with the left thumb. The majority of bass trombones are characterized by their large bore and bell which facilitates the playing of the low register (which is made possible by the additional tubing added when the thumb valve is depressed).

However, in addition to the large bore, large bell bass trombone, several manufacturers offer a tenor trombone with an F attachment (or F valve). This type of instrument is *not* primarily designed to produce a rich, full sound in the lower register, but rather for two other reasons: *first*, as an instrument designed for the "short armed" trombone player who cannot reach far enough to play the sixth and/or seventh positions in tune. In this respect the instrument is ideal for many players whose arms are not yet long enough to reach the sixth position on the standard tenor (B \flat) trombone. *Second*, many dance band players find that the presence of the F attachment makes easier many passages which are very awkward on the standard tenor trombone, and feel that they gain considerable technical facility with the use of this attachment. Perhaps this aspect will become more popular with the "legitimate" player and soloist as more of these players become acquainted with the possibilities of the instrument.

FOR THE SAKE OF CONVENIENCE, BOTH THE TRUE BASS TROMBONE AND THE TENOR TROMBONE WITH F TRIGGER WILL BE CALLED "BASS TROMBONE" IN THIS MANUAL

Unless the thumb valve is depressed, the instrument is actually a tenor trombone, and the positions are identical with those of the ordinary tenor trombone with which everyone is familiar: (See Figure 1).

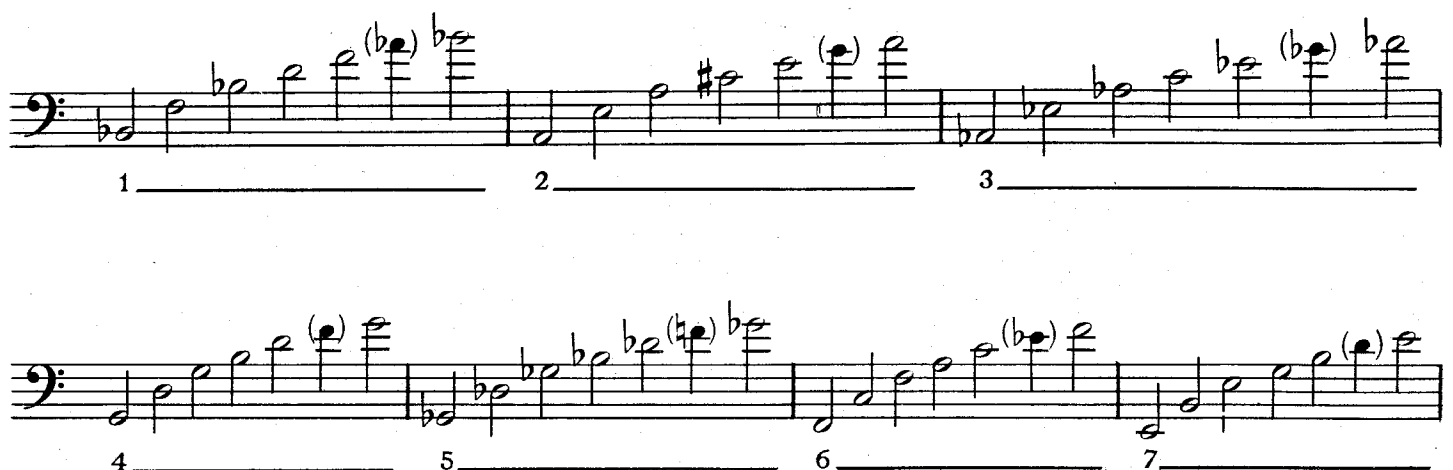


Figure 1. Positions without thumb valve down (same as those on standard tenor trombone).

When the thumb valve IS depressed, the extra length of tubing which is located in the upper end of the bell section is "cut in" or added to the total length of the horn. The pitch of the instrument is then LOWERED by a perfect fourth to the key of F. In other words, the notes which can be played in Bass Trombone first position will be the same as those which can be played in Tenor Trombone sixth position (see Figure 2). This demonstrates why the bass trombone can play the low notes which are impossible on the tenor trombone.



Figure 2. Notes which can be played in bass trombone 1st position which are the same as the notes possible in tenor trombone 6th position

It is extremely important to the bass trombonist (and teacher) to understand WHY there are only SIX positions on the bass trombone instead of the usual seven positions found on the tenor trombone.

As the player proceeds from first position out to seventh on the tenor trombone, the distances between positions gradually increase, with the greatest distance between positions found between sixth and seventh (see Figure 3).

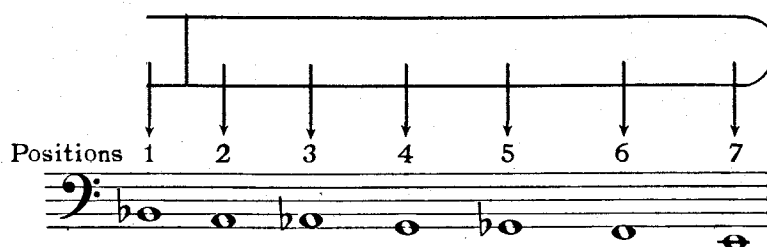


Figure 3. Drawing illustrating how distances between positions gradually increase from first through seventh.

It can be readily seen that the distance between sixth and seventh positions is considerably greater than the distance between first and second.

When the thumb valve is depressed, the distance between bass trombone first and second position is the same as the distance between tenor trombone sixth and seventh. As the player proceeds downward from the first position toward the end of the slide (the slide length is designed, not for the F attachment, but for the B \flat part of the instrument) the distance between positions becomes consecutively greater with the result that there is insufficient slide length to permit seven positions. HENCE THERE IS NO SEVENTH POSITION ON THE F TROMBONE, and it is consequently impossible to play low B natural (see Fig. 4).

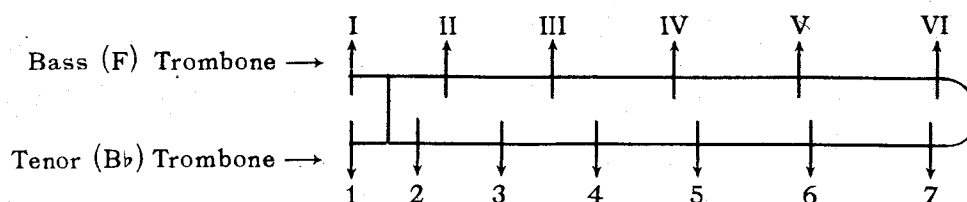


Figure 4. Drawing showing the approximate location of the seven tenor trombone positions and the relative location of the six bass (or F) trombone positions.

One school of bass trombone playing calls the six positions I - II - III - V - VI - VII, and omits (or suppresses) the fourth position.

Another school designates the positions as follows: I - II - IV - V - VI - VII, and omits the third position.

The writer feels that the seventh position is the logical position to drop, inasmuch as NO CHROMATIC HALF STEP is omitted when the player proceeds downward from first position to the end of the slide. WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS is obvious: the slide is not long enough to permit the seventh position to be played!

Therefore, the bass trombone positions in this manual will be called first (I), second (II), third (III), fourth (IV), fifth (V), and sixth (VI).

Many bass trombonists agree that the most practical use for the F attachment lies in the use of the low register notes which are found below the range of the tenor trombone (from low E to pedal Bb). These notes are the lowest ones shown in each position as illustrated in Fig. 5. The players of the tenor trombone with the F attachment find, as mentioned earlier, that the use of the thumb valve facilitates technical passages in the middle and upper register in particular.

As in the case with many notes on the tenor trombone, many of the most usable notes on the bass trombone (or F attachment) are out of tune in varying degrees and should be corrected by the use of altered positions.

Figure 5. Chart showing notes possible in each of the six positions, and with altered positions (marked with a minus sign if they are to be shortened and a plus sign if they are to be lengthened). Note again that Bass Trombone positions are indicated with ROMAN NUMERALS.

SECTION II

EXERCISE 1 - C major scale and chords.

Exercise 1 consists of four staves of music in bass clef with a common time signature. The notes of the C major scale are written across the staves. Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV, V, VI) and Arabic numerals (+I, +II) are placed below the notes to indicate the corresponding chords for each scale degree.

Short Exercise in C

Short Exercise in C consists of two staves of music in bass clef with a common time signature. The notes of the C major scale are written across the staves. Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV, V, VI) and Arabic numerals (+I, +II) are placed below the notes to indicate the corresponding chords for each scale degree.

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS

- Bass Trombone Positions are indicated with Roman Numerals.
- Tenor Trombone Positions are indicated with Arabic Numerals.
- WHEN NO POSITION INDICATIONS ARE GIVEN, the notes are to be played on Tenor Trombone
- Short Positions are indicated with a Minus (-).
- Long Positions are indicated with a Plus (+).

EXERCISE 2 - F major scale and chords.

Short Exercise in F

EXERCISE 3 - B \flat major scale and chords.

Short Exercise in Bb

Two staves of musical notation in bass clef, Bb major, common time. The first staff contains a sequence of notes with fingering: I, +I, I, +I, +I, +I, I, III, IV, VI, I. The second staff continues the sequence with: +I, I, III, I, I, III, VI, IV, I, +I.

EXERCISE 4 — Eb major scale and chords.

Four staves of musical notation in bass clef, Eb major, common time. The first staff shows a scale with fingering: III, I, +I. The second staff shows a scale with fingering: +I, I, III. The third staff shows a scale with fingering: III. The fourth staff shows a scale with fingering: I, IV, IV, I, 1 (Pedal).

Short Exercise in Eb

Moderato

Four staves of musical notation in bass clef, Eb major, 2/4 time, marked Moderato. The first staff has a dynamic marking > and a fingering V. The second staff has a dynamic marking > and a fingering III. The third staff has a dynamic marking > and a fingering III. The fourth staff has a dynamic marking > and a fingering III. The notation includes various chords and a pedal point.

EXERCISE 5— Ab major scale and chords.

Ab major scale and chords. Four staves of music in bass clef, 4/4 time, Ab major key. The first staff shows the scale ascending and descending with fingerings. The second staff shows chords: Ab, Bb, C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab. The third staff shows chords: Ab, Bb, C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab. The fourth staff shows chords: Ab, Bb, C, D, Eb, F, G, Ab.

Short Exercise in Ab

Slow (in 6)

Short Exercise in Ab. Two staves of music in bass clef, 6/8 time, Ab major key. The first staff shows a melodic line with chords: III, III, +I, +I, +I, III, I III V, III VI. The second staff shows a bass line with chords: V, VI III, III, I, III, I V VI V III I, III II I.

EXERCISE 6— Db major scale and chords.

Db major scale and chords. Four staves of music in bass clef, 4/4 time, Db major key. The first staff shows the scale ascending and descending with fingerings. The second staff shows chords: Db, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb, C, Db. The third staff shows chords: Db, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb, C, Db. The fourth staff shows chords: Db, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb, C, Db.

Short Exercise in D \flat

EXERCISE 7 - G major scale and chords.

Short Exercise in G

12 **EXERCISE 8** — D major scale and chords.

Short Exercise in D

EXERCISE 9 — A major scale and chords.

Short Exercise in A

Marcato

IV II IV V II +II +II II

EXERCISE 10 - E major scale and chords.

II +II II

II +II +II II

+II III +II +II +II

Short Exercise in E

+II II +II II III II +II +II II III II

V III II +II +II II +II III II

EXERCISE 11— B major scale and chords.

Exercise 11 consists of four staves of music in bass clef, 4/4 time, showing the B major scale and its chords. The first staff shows the ascending scale with chords: +II (V), III, II, +II. The second staff shows the descending scale with chords: +II, II, III, V, +II, II, III, V, +II. The third staff shows the ascending scale with chords: +II, III, +II, +II, VI, +II. The fourth staff shows the ascending scale with chords: +III or 1, -3.

Short Exercise in B

Short Exercise in B consists of four staves of music in bass clef, 2/4 time, showing the B major scale and its chords. The first staff shows the ascending scale with chords: +II, +II, III, II, +II. The second staff shows the descending scale with chords: +II, +II, III, V, +V, V, 5. The third staff shows the ascending scale with chords: +II, +II, II, II, III. The fourth staff shows the ascending scale with chords: V, II, III, II, +II, +II, +II.

EXERCISE 12 — G \flat major scale and chords.

Exercise 12 consists of four staves of music in G \flat major (three flats: B \flat , E \flat , A \flat) and common time (C). The first staff shows the ascending scale with a +II chord (B \flat major) under the second measure and a -3 chord (G \flat major) at the end. The second staff shows the descending scale with a -3 chord (G \flat major) at the beginning and a +II chord (B \flat major) under the second measure. The third staff shows the ascending scale with a III or I chord (E \flat major) under the first measure, a -3 chord (G \flat major) under the second measure, a +III chord (B \flat major) under the fifth measure, and a V chord (D \flat major) at the end. The fourth staff shows the descending scale with a V chord (D \flat major) at the beginning, a I chord (G \flat major) under the second measure, a +II chord (B \flat major) under the third measure, and a V chord (D \flat major) at the end.

EXERCISE 13 — F \sharp major scale and chords.

Exercise 13 consists of four staves of music in F \sharp major (three sharps: F \sharp , C \sharp , G \sharp) and common time (C). The first staff shows the ascending scale with a +II chord (C \sharp major) under the second measure and a -3 chord (F \sharp major) at the end. The second staff shows the descending scale with a -3 chord (F \sharp major) at the beginning and a +II chord (C \sharp major) under the second measure. The third staff shows the ascending scale with a +III or I chord (C \sharp major) under the first measure, a -3 chord (F \sharp major) under the second measure, a +III or I chord (C \sharp major) under the fifth measure, and a V chord (D \sharp major) at the end. The fourth staff shows the descending scale with a V chord (D \sharp major) at the beginning, a I or 6 chord (F \sharp major) under the second measure, a +II chord (C \sharp major) under the third measure, and a V chord (D \sharp major) at the end.

EXERCISE 14 — C \flat major scale and chords.

Exercise 14 consists of four staves of music in C \flat major (three flats: B \flat , E \flat , A \flat). The first staff shows the ascending scale with fingerings: +II (V), III, II, +II. The second staff shows the descending scale with fingerings: +II, II, III, V, and a note marked (E) Trom VI Pos. The third staff shows the ascending scale with fingerings: +II, III, +II, +II, III, +II. The fourth staff shows the descending scale with fingerings: I or +III, 2, -3, 2.

EXERCISE 15 — C \sharp major scale and chords.

Exercise 15 consists of four staves of music in C \sharp major (three sharps: F \sharp , C \sharp , G \sharp). The first staff shows the ascending scale with fingerings: V, III, I, +I. The second staff shows the descending scale with fingerings: +I, I, III, V. The third staff shows the ascending scale with fingerings: V, I, I, or 6, V. The fourth staff shows the descending scale with fingerings: +I, -3, 3, -3.

SECTION III

Mechanisms designed to develop basic technique

Repeat each measure six times. Bass trombone positions indicated by Roman Numerals:

GROUP I

Musical notation for Group I, consisting of six measures. The notes are: 1st measure: G2, A2, B2; 2nd measure: G2, F2, E2; 3rd measure: G2, F2, E2; 4th measure: G2, A2, B2; 5th measure: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3; 6th measure: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3. Roman numerals below the notes are: 1 +I 1, 1 +II 1, 1 -I 1, 1 +I 1, 1 +I 1, 1 -I 1.

GROUP II

Musical notation for Group II, consisting of four measures. The notes are: 1st measure: G2, A2, B2; 2nd measure: G2, F2, E2; 3rd measure: G2, F2, E2, D2; 4th measure: G2, F2, E2, D2. Roman numerals below the notes are: 1 +I 1, 1 I 1, 1 +II 1, 1 II 1.

Musical notation for Group II continuation, consisting of four measures. The notes are: 1st measure: G2, F2, E2, D2; 2nd measure: G2, F2, E2, D2; 3rd measure: G2, F2, E2, D2; 4th measure: G2, F2, E2, D2. Roman numerals below the notes are: 1 III 1, 1 IV 1, 1 V 1, 1 VI 1.

GROUP III

Musical notation for Group III, consisting of seven measures. The notes are: 1st measure: G2, A2, B2; 2nd measure: G2, F2, E2; 3rd measure: G2, F2, E2; 4th measure: G2, A2, B2; 5th measure: G2, A2, B2, C3; 6th measure: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3; 7th measure: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3. Roman numerals below the notes are: I +I I, I +II I, I 1 I, I 2 I, I 3 I, I 4 I, 6 5 6.

GROUP IV

Musical notation for Group IV, consisting of five measures. The notes are: 1st measure: G2, A2, B2; 2nd measure: G2, F2, E2; 3rd measure: G2, A2, B2; 4th measure: G2, A2, B2, C3; 5th measure: G2, A2, B2, C3, D3. Roman numerals below the notes are: I II I, I III I, I IV I, I V I, I VI I.

The B \flat , F and E Bass Trombone

The F trombone attachment, as explained in Section IV, does not permit the player to play the low "B natural" (third ledger space below the bass clef) since the lowest note which can be played in bass trombone sixth position is the low "C". However, several orchestral works and a number of concert band compositions call for the low B natural, which is possible *only* if the tuning slide on the F attachment is drawn out so as to lower all of the positions a half-step. The key then becomes "E" and the notes in the six bass trombone positions become as shown in Figure 6.

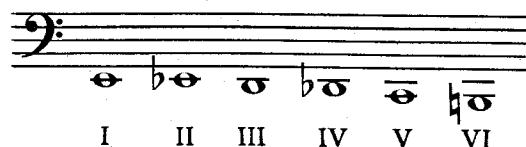


Figure 6. Sequence of low notes on E Bass Trombone.

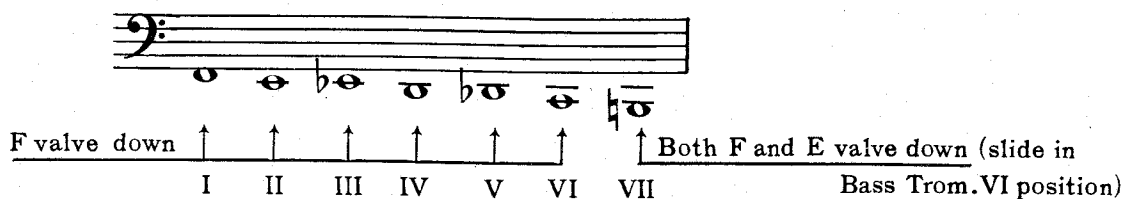


Figure 7. Sketch showing use of F and E valve in playing chromatic scale.

Since the player usually finds that the low B natural comes during a phrase or at the end of one, he has no time to draw out the slide in time to play the only note which cannot be played on the F attachment. Hence it becomes necessary for him to spend a considerable period of time studying the bass trombone as combination instrument in B \flat and E. Another glance at Figure 6 will confirm the statement that a player is forced to spend hours of practice developing a secure technique on the B \flat -E trombone in preparation for the very few times when he will be called upon to play the low B natural. This is very obviously a great waste of time.

The F. E. Olds Company has recently developed a bass trombone with TWO THUMB VALVES. One cuts in the F attachment; when both are depressed, the instrument is lowered to E. This type of instrument enables the player to develop a basic technique on the B \flat -F trombone, using the E trombone when it becomes necessary to play the low B natural. There are perhaps a few passages which might be a bit easier to play on the E trombone than on the F. However, most players will probably find it more convenient to play the passage on the B \flat -F trombone, using the second trigger in order to play the low B. See Fig. 7.

It would appear safe to state that the "double trigger" can save the bass trombonist months of practice since it is no longer necessary to develop technique on the B \flat -E trombone.

SECTION V

Conclusion and Suggested Materials

Listed below are several points for the beginning bass trombonist to keep in mind:

1. Read the instructions carefully so that you will UNDERSTAND the instrument.
2. Practice slowly.
3. Do *not* practice softly at first. Many players fail to learn the proper location of positions because they underblow the instrument. Underblowing results in playing *flat*; if the player has a good ear, he will compensate for the underblowing by SHORTENING THE POSITIONS. Then when loud playing is attempted he will play SHARP.

DON'T UNDERBLOW — but DON'T OVERBLOW

4. Pay careful attention to the notes which are marked SHORT (-) or LONG (+). The amount of shortening or lengthening of the positions will depend upon the particular note involved and the way the player blows. *LISTEN CAREFULLY AT ALL TIMES.*
5. The low register is the one which offers the greatest difficulty. It is best not to start practice for the day by attempting low notes.
It is better to start in the middle register and work downward to the low register.
The use of a moderate amount of lower jaw thrust will sometimes free up the response in this range.
6. Do not try to use a small tenor trombone mouthpiece (with an adapter) on a large bore instrument. To do so will multiply the problems of response on the low notes.
7. Do not expect that you will be able to play the low register notes from the beginning of your work on the instrument. They must be developed with slow, careful practice.
8. *In this manual all notes which have no position indication are to be played on the tenor trombone (with the thumb UP).*
9. Supplementary books should be used in connection with this manual. This book, as stated in the introduction, is merely a guide, and does not contain enough exercises to permit the development of an adequate technique.
10. If the materials given in this manual are studied and practiced carefully, the use of several *TUBA METHODS* will be of great assistance in developing bass trombone technique. *The sections of the tuba books which are best suited for the bass trombone are those which are particularly written for the E^b tuba.*