

# Trumpet Lesson Handbook

Jonah Kappraff 2023-2024

Congratulations on your interest in offering private trumpet lessons to your child! Studying a musical instrument is a challenging and rewarding way to experience the wonderful world of music and private study is essential for developing the proper techniques to play efficiently and beautifully. Studying an instrument also helps develop important skills that are applicable to all areas of a student's development, including self-esteem, discipline, problem-solving, teamwork, and, most of all, PATIENCE!

This short handbook will serve as a useful reference to my approach and expectations. I hope it will answer many questions you may have over the course of the year, but please feel free to discuss any questions or concerns with me.

## How I view my job

Though I am a very active performer, I have come to view myself more and more as an educator. It is my constant objective to develop my teaching methods for increased success. The two goals of private instruction can be summed up as nurturing motivation and developing musicality. The latter is quite often lost as a result of the challenge of technical development on the trumpet. A great teacher once reminded me, "Learners like to master a technical challenge, but what they love is music—that's what keeps them pouring themselves into the science of those challenges." I aim to maintain a balance between addressing musical and technical issues, often solving one through attention to the other.

*Nurturing motivation* is an element of the private lesson that has direct implications on other aspects of a student's growth. Skills such as experimentation, problem-solving, and self-assessment help to actively involve the student in the learning process and engender a lasting sense of ownership. In this way, I feel that the private lesson is a fantastic way to remind a student that practicing an instrument is not like homework. Research has shown that proof of the efficacy of homework is uncertain and that socializing play may actually be a better use of after-school time. Just as sports require practice, it takes diligent practice to master many musical skills. But sports have friends and teams and socializing play; since much music practice doesn't, we need to support our students to find "play" on their own. I aim to design elements of a student's practice that resemble "play" more than tedious, mindless homework. I use improvisation, composition, and other student generated activities to maintain a joyful outlook on practicing.

The private lesson has been called an "improvised teaching and learning duet." All students have different needs and require personalized instruction. I challenge myself to assess a student's interests, goals, and needs for the instrument. From there, I work with him/her to turn those into realizable and authentic practice routines.

## Practice

We all wish for our students/children to practice eagerly and diligently once they have chosen an instrument that they like. The fact is that most kids choose their instrument based on some combination of peer involvement, parental pressure, or some vague concept of the sound. Occasionally, a live concert or influential recording played by a parent or friend will spark interest. Whatever the motivation, it is the rare student who can even conceive of the sort of work that it takes to truly master an instrument. Luckily, at the beginner level true “mastery” is not the main goal. The main goals are the development of good playing habits (embouchure, tonguing, range, etc.), good practice habits, ear training/music theory knowledge, and increased knowledge of styles and repertoire. This is no small task, but neither is it out of the reach of the beginning trumpet player. While every player begins with me at a certain level, my goal is for each of those elements to improve significantly during their course of study.

It is necessary for good practice habits to be insisted upon. Whether a student picks up the trumpet due to a true desire to play or because of peer or parental pressure, once lessons start the practice agreement must be the same. I am more interested in consistent daily practice than concentrated long sessions a few times per week. There are many reasons for this. First, just as physical exercise concentrates on the development of large muscle groups, brass playing focuses on small muscle groups. Therefore, the more that those muscles are used, the sooner they will strengthen. Additionally, long periods of practice to make up for missed days puts undo strain on under-developed muscles. Therefore, multiple short sessions are preferable to one long session. Next, and also like exercise, if a student learns to practice regularly it will become a habit. If there is a set “trumpet time” built into the daily schedule, it becomes less likely that the student will forget to play (or claim that there was no time).

As a young piano and trumpet student, I found (with the help of my parents...) that the best time for practicing was early in the morning before school. All through middle school and high school I practiced piano from 7-8 and starting in high school I tacked on at least a half-hour of trumpet warm-ups from 6:15-6:45 (in the basement). This worked for me. I encourage you to find something that works for your child. I suggest that you do not let your young child dictate when they will practice. We all know what that can turn into! A lack of desire to practice should not be interpreted as a lack of desire to play. Instead, it should be seen as a request for a structured practice time. Once practice becomes a habit and practice time increases, the student will likely become BETTER and therefore WANT to practice. This paradigm also works in reverse, if you catch my drift.

For the beginning student, a lot will depend on what has been assigned when deciding how long practice sessions should be. Early on, there may be less trumpet playing and more ear training and listening. Soon enough, I suggest that a MINIMUM practice time amount to approximately 30 min. per day. This can take the form of two shorter sessions with a break in between. A well-structured session should include:

- Warm-up
- Technique
- Etudes/Repertoire/Band music

The details of these three elements will be elaborated on in lessons.

## **Listening**

For young players, a truly great trumpet sound is often a mystery (at least until their first trumpet lesson!). Even after weekly lessons begin, it is of utmost importance that the student be exposed to fine examples of performance on their instrument. I always provide a Google Drive folder that covers a variety of styles from Classical to Jazz and I encourage my students to listen regularly and alert me to their favorite tracks. They may listen passively (while doing their homework, or getting ready for bed) or actively (focusing on the music or even looking at a score of the piece itself). Either way, a concept of the palette of sounds possible, as well as exposure to various styles of music, are invaluable areas to develop. Certainly, it would be as silly to buy a child a baseball, mitt, and bat and ask them to work on throwing, catching and hitting without ever showing them the game of baseball!

I will expand on parental involvement below, but in the case of listening this is a very useful tool. I can be pretty certain that any adults who enjoy listening to music listen to albums that at some point feature the trumpet (don't forget *Penny Lane*...). The trumpet is one of the most versatile and popular instruments and it has played a key role in most musical genres. I believe that listening with your child can have the same affect as reading with your child. When started early and made into a habit, it can help to form a lifelong addiction to good music! Also, please take your child to concerts. I try to let my students know when I will be performing, but there are numerous opportunities for attending live musical events in the Susquehanna region (not just with trumpet either!). Not only does this make palpable the music that has already been enjoyed in the living room, but also supporting live music is ESSENTIAL to its sustainability.

## **Parental involvement**

Unlike many other activities that your child picks up, their journey in music must also be yours! Regardless of your musical background, my hope is for the parent to become involved actively in the learning process. In the most celebrated pedagogical system for piano and stringed instruments, the Suzuki method, the parent is in attendance at each lesson, actively taking notes. At home, the parent serves as the "home teacher," reinforcing proper techniques during the practice session. I *do not* teach Suzuki trumpet. However, I encourage parents to sit in on lessons if they choose (occasionally, I insist...) and I suggest that the student not always merely be left alone to practice. If the parent is aware of the week's assignment, and even some element of how it should be done, then the practice time can be guided.

The parent's job is to serve as a constant motivational force. Practicing can often feel lonely and frustrating and kids want fast results. Positive reinforcement from the teacher can only provide some of that motivation once a week. Please let your child know how impressed you are with the work that he/she is doing and when you hear progress. Just the same, it is important that your praise not be empty. When practice is neglected or unfocused, help your child to get back on track. I always like to remind parents that Olympic athletes train with a coach for several hours *each day*. This is the norm in sports, but not in music. Yet, musical instrument study is no less demanding. While your child may not be training for the Olympics of music (yet), he/she must become aware that the teacher comes to check in and guide their progress once a week and hopefully inspire them to practice. I am NOT there to practice for the student or to do work that

was ignored all week. I expect that my students come prepared to show me how much work they did during the week so we can then move on and build from there. Occasionally, life gets in the way and I understand this well. However, the moment that practice time becomes unimportant, some reassessment of priorities must take place.

## Materials

I do not require many materials of my students, yet there are certain essentials that cannot go unmentioned.

First and foremost: **a working trumpet!** Whether you are renting or have purchased a student horn, it is essential that the instrument works and is well taken care of. Most horns come with a small **care and maintenance kit**. If not, one can be purchased at any music store. Though the trumpet looks not unlike the plumbing underneath your kitchen sink, it is actually quite delicate. When a trumpet is dropped, it can cause serious damage. Even the most insignificant dings or dents can change the sound the instrument or, in some cases, render it unplayable. Insist that the trumpet is kept in the case when not in use and make sure to address any serious problems sooner than later.

I also recommend a **1” 3-ring binder** specifically for trumpet lessons. Many students have a band music folder, but I do not recommend mixing band music and lesson music. The binder should have a few tabs separating into warm-ups, technical studies, and music. Also, the front of the binder should contain music paper that can be printed off for free at [www.blanksheetmusic.net](http://www.blanksheetmusic.net)

All students need a **folding music stand**.

Their trumpet case should contain a few **pencils** (not pens), **valve oil** (I recommend Al Cass-Fast Oil), a **small, T-shirt-thin rag**, and **slide grease**.

All students must own a **metronome**. Good time (rhythm) is impossible to develop without an infallible reference point. Metronomes are cheap and easy to find! There are also good metronome apps for smart phones.

When it comes to method books and music I have a few favorites that I usually purchase for students. Payment for these books can be added to the normal lesson payment and they rarely exceed \$12.

## Lesson length

I offer lessons in three different time lengths:

30 min.- \$30

45 min.- \$40

60 min.- \$50

Usually the first question that I am asked is, “How long should my child’s lessons be?” This is not an easy question, but I do have strong opinions on the matter. For the youngest beginner, 30-minute lessons are adequate. This mainly has to do with attention span and commitment level. If

your child seems really eager to get good fast and you know them to be able to focus relatively well, I would encourage a longer lesson time.

As the student enters their second year of lessons, I strongly encourage extending the lesson time to 45 minutes. It becomes very clear, very fast, that 30 minutes once a week is hardly enough time to cover the range of concepts and materials that are essential for progress. Believe it or not, the extra 15 minutes makes a huge difference. I would strongly suggest 45 min. for any student who shows even the smallest amount of personal drive.

60 min. Lessons are the standard for committed high school students and the occasional middle school student who shows unusual dedication. We can transition to that length whenever it feels right!

### **Payment and cancellation**

I no longer insist on each month's payment up front at the first lesson of the month. If you wish to do it this way, I can accommodate it, but I have found that this can get complicated when we are unable to seamlessly make up missed lessons. I do ask of 24-hour notice for a cancelled lesson. On my end, I will try to be as flexible as I can to accommodate unforeseen schedule changes and I will also alert you when I cannot make a lesson. If your family will be away during a scheduled lesson, advanced notice is requested.

Additionally, "Johnny did not have a chance to practice this week" is **not** an adequate reason to cancel a lesson. Please understand that consistent weekly lessons are essential in the early stages of development.

### **Extracurricular musical activities**

Many students involved in private lessons will soon discover that they are much better than the other kids in their trumpet section in the school band. This should not come as a surprise, but neither does it mean that they are doomed to be unchallenged by ensemble music until high school. Instead, there are opportunities for extracurricular performance in most communities that should be considered. Community bands are one possible option to consider as well as more selective district and all-state bands. Also, most school band programs have a jazz ensemble that is open to more experienced players. Playing with others is much more fun than just practicing alone and the sooner that students play with other good trumpeters, the sooner they will become inspired to work hard and improve. Please ask me about opportunities in your county.

Additionally, Peabody Preparatory ensembles are even open to students who do not take lessons through the Prep (I am also on faculty there).

### **Recitals**

I usually arrange one recital at the end of the year for all of my students, which takes place at the Peabody Institute. The benefits of performance are myriad and I make sure that all of my students are fully prepared for the event. The recital is an informal way for my students and parents to meet each other and for the students to show off what they have been working on.

Studying repertoire is essential and hard work should ideally culminate in a performance! Recital preparation also presents a short-term goal to work towards even while addressing many long-term goals.

Many performers, new and seasoned, have problems with nervousness (performance anxiety). I anticipate that many students will have similar problems, especially during their very first performance. The best tool that a student has to alleviate anxiety is adequate preparation and practice performing. Prior to the recital, I suggest a performance for the family! I believe that experience performing at a young age will help to create a fearless attitude to performing that has wide-ranging benefits throughout a child's development.

**Jonah Kappraff** is a trumpet player and private instructor based in Baltimore, MD. Following training at the Oberlin Conservatory and Boston University he spent a decade freelancing in Boston before relocating to central Pennsylvania in 2015. In Boston, Jonah was a regular member of the Lexington Symphony, Marsh Chapel Collegium Musicum, and the avant-garde Boston Modern Brass Quintet, and performed frequently with the Boston Ballet, the Boston Pops, the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and Odyssey Opera. In Pennsylvania, Jonah performed with the Williamsport Symphony, York Symphony, Pennsylvania Chamber Orchestra, and the Penn's Woods Music Festival. Additionally, he was featured as a guest soloist with the Penn Central Wind Band in 2017, and in performances of Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto no. 2* with the Allegretto Chamber Orchestra and the Nantucket Baroque Festival. Jonah is principal trumpet with the Boston-based Ambient Orchestra (dir. Evan Ziporyn), a group with whom he has recorded and toured nationally and internationally. Alongside freelancing from Philadelphia through Washington D.C., Jonah maintains a private studio serving over twenty students from age 8 to 75. He also serves as trumpet faculty at the Peabody Preparatory, music education faculty at the Peabody Institute, and is a lecturer at Stevenson University.

[www.jonahkappraff.com](http://www.jonahkappraff.com)

## Authorization/Agreement

By signing this contract, you agree that you have reviewed the above information and agree to these conditions.

Signature of Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please fill out the following information:

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's/Guardian's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Father's/Guardian's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address (very important for communication and updates) \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Birthday \_\_\_\_\_

Student's School \_\_\_\_\_