

# BRASS CLEANING GUIDE

A practical and safe way to care for your musical investment

For Trumpet, French Horn, Trombone, Baritone, Euphonium, and Tuba

A musical instrument is quite an investment. Proper care will keep it working well for years to come. Read this page before attempting any cleaning or maintenance on your instrument. When in doubt, ask the band director – he/she is there to help and would be happy to give any advice.

All brass instruments require the same basic care procedures. First some major rules for all woodwinds:

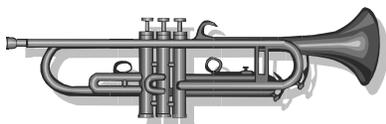
- Never use any type of polish on your instrument (no liquid or cloths unless it is made specifically for a musical instrument). The finishes may look like regular silver or brass, but they are not quite the same and the chemicals in most polishes will damage the instrument.
- Try not to let your instrument sit in extreme temperatures – for example, leaving it in the car overnight or on a hot afternoon is not a good idea – this can cause the metal parts to contract or expand and will affect the tiny adjustments that are necessary to proper playing.
- Avoid keeping large items in your case – such as loose parts, music, books, etc. These can rattle around or put pressure on your instrument and cause damage after a while.

## Daily Care

For daily use and care of your instrument follow these simple steps.

- If a valve ‘sticks’ or does not move up and down smoothly and quickly, put valve oil on it. How to do this has been discussed in class.
  - o Be careful when you put the valve back in to make sure it is facing the correct direction. If you blow air through the trumpet and it feels ‘stuck’, then a valve is in backwards. If you don’t know which is incorrect, just blow through your instrument and press each valve. When you feel the air change, you’ve found the valve that needs to be turned around.
- Every couple weeks slide the tuning slides partially out and back in – do not remove them completely. This will ensure that they don’t ‘freeze’ up before you need to use them. If they are already stuck, do not force them – later in these instructions we will talk about giving your horn a bath. If after that they are still stuck, take it to your band director.
- Use a soft, dry cloth to wipe off any finger prints a few times a week. This will help preserve the finish on your trumpet and keep it from tarnishing or discoloring.
- If you are playing and hear a ‘bubbly’ sound, you will need to empty your water key. Simply press and blow till all the water falls out of the horn.
- You should clean your mouthpiece about once a month or after you’ve eaten or been sick. This can be cleaned in warm, soapy water. The use of a mouthpiece brush is strongly recommended as well.

**\*\* NEVER** try to adjust or fix something yourself. It is much simpler to let the band director – who has special tools and training to deal with the mechanism - look at it. A very common mistake is when people try to use household tools to fix things themselves and end up breaking something that is often unseen.



## Deep Cleaning

“Giving your horn a bath” only needs to be one about once a year – depending on how much you play. For the first couple years, you may not need to do it at all. Reasons to give your horn a bath include:

- You’ve oiled the valves and they still stick a lot – and your band director told you to clean it
- You’ve been playing in marching band and pep band and your instrument has been outside a lot or you’ve been eating before you play
- It begins to smell like something is rotting inside

Giving your horn a bath is a big process and takes a lot of time and care. An adult should supervise to ensure that no parts get damaged. If you follow the directions below carefully, your instrument should be back to new playing condition. If you have any questions about this process, ask your band director first!

Brass Instrument ‘bathing’ instructions:

- 1) Place a large towel in the bottom of your bathtub
- 2) Fill your tub with about 3 inches of LUKEWARM water (you’ll need a bit more water for larger instruments like baritone or tuba). If your instrument is very dirty or if it’s been many years since it has been cleaned, you can add about 2 tablespoons of a mild dish soap (Palmolive, Joy, etc... do not use bath soaps or soaps with perfumes in them).
- 3) Remove all valves from your instrument and set them aside (not in the water, and somewhere where they won’t fall or get bumped – these are the most fragile and expensive part of your instrument!!). Be sure to keep track of which valve is which – especially if they do not have number engraved on them!
- 4) Gently place the rest of your instrument into the bathtub.
- 5) Let soak for about 10 minutes.
- 6) Return to instrument and take out each slide. Set these aside in the water to continue soaking. Be sure you can remember which one goes where!
- 7) Remove the caps off the bottom of the valve casings (the hole where the valves were).
- 8) When everything is removed, let it all soak for about 10 more minutes.
- 9) While these are soaking, get a cup and scoop some water from the tub into it. This will be for your valves – do not fill higher than the top of the valve. You do not want the felt pad to get wet – only the bottom half! Place your three valves in the cup of water.
  - a. Tip: If your valves are not numbered, use three different cups to keep them separate and in order.
- 10) Go back to the tub. Use your long snake and begin running it into every opening in your horn. Slide it in as far as it will go – but don’t force it! It may not make it around some of the curves.
  - a. Hint: The leadpipe (the part where you put your mouthpiece is usually the dirtiest).
- 11) Put the snake through all of the tuning slides.
- 12) Use the big valve casing brush to clean out the valve casings.
- 13) After everything is scrubbed out, drain the tub and run fresh water to rinse the horn. This is best to do straight from the faucet – not filling the tub again. Make sure everything is well rinsed and drain the water from all parts.
- 14) Set all pieces aside on a dry towel. It is very important that these are left to dry completely. It is best for them to air dry – don’t try to shove a towel into the parts to dry them. And don’t put it back together while it is all still wet. It will take a few hours to dry completely.
- 15) After the rest of the instrument is set aside to dry, use a clean, soft cloth to wipe off the outsides of each valve. Once these are cleaned, set them aside to dry as well.
- 16) After everything is dry, it’s time to put it back together.
  - a. Put a *small* dab of slide *grease* on the end of each tuning slide and put it back in the proper spot – sliding it back and forth to make sure it is well spread.
  - b. Put the caps back on the bottom of the valve casings.
  - c. Put a generous amount of oil on the valves and put them back into the casings.
    - i. Check that the valves are in correct by blowing through the instrument.