Proper Care for Brass Instruments

General Maintenance Thoughts/Tips

- A clean instrument will sound better and help you achieve your goals more easily
- Never leave an instrument in a frozen or enclosed environment (like the car) for a long period of time
- Do not let other people play your instrument – people who are not properly trained can easily damage instruments
- Do not chew gum, eat food or drink anything (other than water) while playing your instrument

Daily Maintenance

- All brass players:
  - Rinse your mouth or brush your teeth (especially if you’ve just eaten) before playing to prevent food particles from building up inside your instrument
  - Make sure to empty all the water from your instrument before putting it back in the case
  - Wipe the dirt and oil from your hands off of your instrument with a polishing cloth when you’re done using it to protect the finish

- Trumpet, baritone, and piston valve tuba players - if your valves are sticky and need valve oil:
  - Unscrew the valve cap and pull the valve about halfway out and apply a few drops of valve oil
  - Twist valve back and forth to spread the oil around and then push valve back into position and tighten valve cap
  - NOTE: You need to be careful how you line up your valves when you put them back in - most valves have a guide that will click to get them back into position - generally, if there is a number etched into your valve, that should face toward the mouthpiece

- French horn and rotary valve tuba players - if your valves are sticky and need valve oil:
  - Unscrew the caps which cover the tops of the valves - do not mix them up
  - Put a drop or two on the center of each valve and replace the valve caps
  - If this doesn’t work for you, the valves can be oiled by putting a few drops of oil in each of the valve slides
  - Once each week it’s also good to:
    - Place a drop of oil on each of the springs at the top of the keys
    - Place a drop of oil in the gap on the rotor post which is visible just above the cork or neoprene - this post rotates when the valve is pressed, so it is easy to find
    - Place the horn in playing position and pull and push the tuning slides in and out three or four times without pushing the valves - this draws some of the oil to the interior of the valve

- Trombone players - if your slide doesn’t move freely or makes noise when you move it:
  - Take off the outer slide and wipe off the inner slide
  - Add a small amount of slide cream to the inner slide - NOT TUNING SLIDE GREASE
  - Be extremely careful while doing this - the smallest bump or dent in the slide can interfere with its proper movement
  - A small spray bottle with a little water in it will often help “reactivate” the cream and get the slide moving again
Weekly Maintenance
● Clean the mouthpiece with a mouthpiece brush and/or put it in the dishwasher
● Check the tuning slides and grease them if necessary

Other Maintenance Tips
● Never try to pound dents out yourself - always take it to a repair shop to be fixed.
● Never try to pull out a stuck mouthpiece with pliers. Always have your director use a mouthpiece puller to get it out properly or take it to a music store.
● If your tuning slides get stuck, try to use a towel to loosen them. Do not use any tools to try to loosen them.
● Always place your instrument down on its side or on an instrument stand when not playing - the bell is not designed to hold your instrument up on one end.
● Store your instrument in the case and make sure the latches are closed.
● Do not sit or stand on your case and never place objects, like books or folders, between your instrument and the lid of the case.

Long Term Maintenance and Deeper Cleaning

Once every few months it’s good for trumpet, trombone, and baritone players to carefully disassemble their instruments and give them a bath. Once a year it would be good for all brass players to get their instruments chemically flushed and cleaned. The service department at the music store can do this and take care of any other repairs that need to be done. If you are renting an instrument, this may be included in the rental program. Early summer is a great time to do this.

If it’s bath time for your instrument, follow these steps to safely disassemble, clean, and reassemble it:
1. Use a container large enough to let your instrument soak - a bathtub with a towel down to protect it from scratches works well.
2. Carefully remove all slides, valves, and valve caps, keeping them in order to remember where everything goes when you’re done. If anything is stuck, take it to your teacher or the music store.
3. Place all parts, EXCEPT FOR THE VALVES, in warm water and let them soak for 20-60 minutes, depending on how long it’s been since the last time you bathed your instrument. Using hot water may ruin the finish on your instrument - if it’s too hot for you, it’s too hot for your instrument.
4. While all of that is soaking, run some warm water over the valves while being careful not to get the felt wet. Use a valve cleaning brush to clean out all the openings. Shake the water off and sent them aside to dry. Be sure to keep them in order - your valves are not interchangeable!
5. Use the snake brush to clean out all of the slides, the leadpipe on the trumpet, and the inner and outer slides on the trombone. Remove any debris you see in the bottom valve caps.
6. Rinse the entire instrument with clean water and let it dry. It is very important to let all of the parts completely dry before reassembling the instrument!
7. Once everything is dry, you can reassemble the instrument. Apply a good amount of oil to the valves since they are now completely dry and put a small amount of slide grease on the tuning slides. Wipe away any extra grease that squeezes out when you put your slides back in. If you play trombone, be sure to use the cream on the playing slide, not slide grease!
8. Enjoy your clean, well lubricated, and well functioning instrument!