

# 6 POINT CHECKLIST FOR HORN PLAYERS

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Posture  
Right hand Position  
Mouthpiece and Embouchure  
Air  
Tone  
Pitch

## **POSTURE**

The bell should be placed to the side of the body. We want our sound to project well, so the bell mustn't face into the body. Sit on the edge of the chair and with the horn off the knee if it's comfortable and not too heavy. If it is too heavy, spend some time every day with the bell off the knee to build up muscles so that it is comfortable. Until then, rest the bell on the right leg with the knee to the side of the chair. The sound will then project better.

## **RIGHT HAND POSITION**

Shake your friend's hand or catch some rain! Proper right hand position is like doing these things. Our right hand is cupped with no gaps between the fingers (like holding water) and placed in the bell with the knuckles against the opposite side of the bell. How far in the hand goes depends on the size of the hand, the size of the bell, and the desired tone quality-but usually it's about where the bell begins to flare.

## **MOUTHPIECE AND EMOUCHURE**

Since the mouthpiece is where the sound takes place, the action here is very important. The mouthpiece is placed high on the lips. Say "m&m" and hold the syllable putting the mouthpiece over the lips so that more upper lip is in behind the mouthpiece than lower. Sound is produced by "spitting a seed" through the mouthpiece and releasing the air stream.

## **AIR**

"How-to" and "oh-ho" are two really good ways to think of inhalation and exhalation. In both cases, the inhalation has the oral cavity, or inside of the mouth, open with the throat relaxed. The exhalation should be as equally relaxed. Saying "to" after you inhale sets up the tongue and lips for starting a note. Combine the shape of your "to" with a bit of "mmm" syllable and you will have just the right set up for good air. Practice good breaths with "how-to" and "oh-ho" by filling up with great big breaths that feel deep and relaxed, similar to yawning.

## **TONE**

Try to hear the ideal tone in your mind. A good way to develop ideals is to listen to lots of music; horn soloists, symphonies, live concerts – are all great resources to use in determining your "ideal." What words would you use to describe good tone? Warm? Rich? Velvet? Dark? Pure? These are all excellent words to think of when considering good tone. Think of how you wish to sound and mimic it when you practice long tones. Experiment with the shape of your mouth and where your tongue is to achieve good tone. An open oral cavity and keeping the tongue out of the way of the air stream are things that help with good tone.

## **PITCH**

Pitch had two meanings for horn players especially. Pitch means to play in tune, but first we must hit the right note. Hitting the right note requires a good ear, which can be developed, and it requires lip memory, which is memorizing how notes feel. In order to have the same note played time and time again accurately, we must buzz the same pitch consistently. The same frequency of sound must be reproduced.

The best way to insure hitting the right note when tonalities of music (like key signatures) can change is to memorize how all of the notes feel. The shape of your embouchure, placement of your tongue, and size of your aperture are the constant. These things never change to hit the same note over and over again. There are a couple of things that horn players can do to play pitches in tune better too. The first thing to consider is that consistent practice with a tuner improves pitch. Having a tuner on your music stand while you practice makes you aware of your intonation tendencies. And once you know of your tendencies of playing some notes flat and others sharp, you can work to fix them. Once they are in tune then you can "imprint" how the notes feel and what right hand position is best.

It is also good to know your role in music that you play. Do you have the melody? Or are you playing supportive material? Are you playing whole notes in a chord? If so, what part of the chord are you? Certain notes in chords sound better, and in tune, when they are played a bit on the flat side, or low, and others a bit on the sharp side, or high. For example, if you have an E natural in a major C, E, G chord, then you'll play it a bit low. However, if the chord is a minor C, E-flat, G chord, then you'll play the E-flat a bit high. When you have whole notes, you can practice moving the note in and out of tune to find where the pitch sounds the best.