Seven Steps to a Better Horn Section

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1. Mouthpiece position
   1. Lip proportions
      1. Correct: 1/3 lower lip, 1/3 upper lip
      2. Incorrect for horn, correct for trumpet: 50/50 upper/lower lip
   2. Angle
      1. Embouchure support comes from lower lip
      2. Angle horn mouthpiece and leadpipe slightly down
      3. In marching band, upwards angle from neck/back, not pressure on upper lip
2. Posture / playing position
   1. Sit/stand naturally, bring instrument to face with correct leadpipe angle
   2. Young children
      1. Body position: left leg forward, right leg to side (books under foot if needed), bell rests on leg
      2. Right hand: flat on bottom of bell or flat on side close to body
   3. Other players
      1. Off the leg – leadpipe at correct angle, bell touches side of torso or hip, depending on player’s height
      2. Right hand
         1. Fingers straight, knuckles bent at 135º angle, tuck in thumb
         2. Horn rests on knuckles, hand on far side of bell
         3. Depth of insertion depends on player’s hand size; experiment and listen for optimal tone quality
3. Tone
   1. Teach horn and trumpet separately, if possible
   2. Correct right hand position
   3. Correct fingerings (see below)
   4. Help student hear better tone
      1. Demonstrate (band teacher or private teacher)
      2. Listen to recordings
      3. Experiment without judgement
   5. Improving resonance
      1. Better use of air
      2. Tongue position
         1. Experiment with higher and lower placement for resonance
         2. Changes based on pitch
   6. Making your horn section sound better in your band
      1. Don’t point bells into percussion or fabric
      2. Hard surfaces should be 4-12 feet from bells
      3. Avoid pointing directly towards audience
4. Warming up
   1. Scales are not an effective warm up for brass
   2. Typical full-band warm-ups 4th higher or 5th lower than optimal warm-up range = students aren’t effectively warmed up
   3. When playing flexibility exercises, don’t skip notes – practice good use of air and accuracy
   4. Recommended text: *Progressive Studies in Flexibility and Range Development for French Horn* by Fred W. Teuber (Medici Music Press)
5. Correct use of double horn
   1. Horn students need to understand concert pitch vs. horn pitch
   2. Correct fingerings give optimal horn tone, intonation, accuracy
   3. Teaching only B-flat fingerings maybe easier in combined class with trumpets, but sacrifices tone and intonation
   4. Relearn fingerings when switching from single to double horn
   5. Standard fingerings – see other handout
6. Register / range
   1. Most beginning band books focus around F
   2. Best for horn to start on C Major triad
   3. Start horns separately from other brass if possible
   4. Check individual pieces for appropriate beginner range
7. Dental problems
   1. Orthodontia
      1. Mouthpiece pressure biggest issue
      2. Focus on air helps students with braces
      3. Good use of air especially important in developing high register
      4. Comfort rim for orthodontia: Neill Sanders rim ($100, Osmun Music)
   2. Wisdom teeth – encourage students to remove them *before* college

Notes:

* All pitches in horn/written pitch, not concert pitch