

## **Rhythmic Precision and Accuracy**

Some tips from Dan Cherry, Western Carolina University  
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After any musician learns the basics of reading rhythms, time should be spent on developing rhythmic precision and accuracy. Low brass players frequently are accused of having bad rhythm (or at least being late in our ensemble entrances!) so it is worth developing some strategies and techniques to improve rhythm skills. Important areas to consider are:

- Both the mental and physical aspects of performing rhythms
- Understanding and using subdivision
- Anticipating problems – ties, dots, rests, syncopations, and unusual groupings
- Metronome techniques

### **Let's Get Physical!**

Meter and Rhythm must be “physicalized” to be performed accurately. Along with the familiar concepts of foot tapping, clapping and conducting, low brass players must consciously develop the kinesthetic aspects of our rhythm performance:

- breathing
- tonguing
- fingers (valves) and/or arm (slide)

### **Subdivision**

Get to know and love the rhythm syllables you use in Aural Skills! Be sure to count out loud with accurate use of these syllables as a regular part of your practice. Internalize these syllables and let the voices in your head (aaah!) count along as you practice rhythmic passages on your instrument. Keep a steady, continuous count of the smallest subdivision used in the rhythms you're playing. Try playing a continuous subdivision, accenting the start of each written note.

### **Problem Areas**

Players are often inaccurate (usually late) after ties, dots and rests – proper performance of these rhythms requires deliberate counting of all subdivisions as well as “feeling” the pulse on the tie, dot or rest. Try the following techniques in your practice:

- Play an extra, repeated pitch on the tie, dot or rest
- Without articulating, pulse your air (breath accent) on the tie or dot
- Place an accented foot tap (stomp!) on the tie, dot or rest
  - Syncopations can be approached in this same way – deliberately tap your foot or pulse your air on the strong beats that are otherwise sustained through

## Using Your Metronome

There are several ways to use your metronome; the basic speed adjustment is use to control tempo, but there are other tools to build rhythmic accuracy. Set your metronome to play:

- All (smallest) subdivisions
- Beat divisions only (i.e. 8<sup>th</sup> notes in a 16<sup>th</sup> note passage)
- Off beats only (various possibilities)
- 1 click per measure (helps check rhythmic accuracy within measures)

\*Be sure to perform passages with the metronome *off* at the end of your practice to ensure that you internalize your own sense of pulse and subdivision.

## Good Resources for Rhythm Studies:

### **Books:**

Shelley Jagow, *Developing the Complete Band Program*, Section II: “Circulatory System.” Published by Meredith Music Publications.

Daniel L. Kohut, *Instrumental Music Pedagogy*, Chapter 2: “Teaching Musical Notation.” Published by Prentice-Hall, Inc.

### **Etudes:**

Jean Baptiste Arban, *Complete Method for Trombone & Euphonium*

- Studies on Syncopation, p. 29
- Studies on Dotted Eighth and Sixteenth Notes, p. 32

Marcel Bitsch, *Fifteen Rhythmical Studies for Trombone*

Vladislav Blazhevich, *Sequences: 26 Melodic Exercises in Various Rhythms & Keys*

Bordogni/Rochut, *Melodious Etudes Book 1*

Some good examples include:

- #4 for triplets, dotted rhythms, and ties
- #8 for 3/8 meter and various dotted rhythms

Elliot Del Borgo, *Contemporary Rhythm and Meter Studies for Bass Clef Instruments*