

How to Clean a Trumpet

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Students should clean their entire horn approximately every 6-8 weeks. This is rarely done!

Cleaning the mouthpiece, lead pipe, and main tuning slide should occur at least every other week. Once per week is better. It makes sense because of size, curvature, and, most of all, proximity to the mouth, these parts get the dirtiest the fastest.

Before you start, assemble your work area. You'll need a sink or tub filled with moderately warm [*not hot*] water with a small amount of liquid dish soap added, a plastic cup or glass, a cleaning snake or brass brush, some soft cloths, and lubricants [*slide grease, valve oil*]. A valve casing brush is also a good tool. Also, I like to have a large towel spread out on which to place the various parts of the instrument.

- *Do not use dishwasher detergent. [Cascade, etc.]*
- *Do not use powder or liquid laundry soap. [Tide, All, etc.]*

Disassemble the trumpet. Start by removing the valves, and carefully placing them on the towel in order [1, 2, 3]. Remove all the slides, and the bottom valve caps.

- *You may have to remove stop screws or other retainers on the third slide.*
- *If the trumpet has bottom valve springs, be careful not to lose them.*

If any of the slides are stuck, don't force them. Simply continue the cleaning process with the slide in place. Later, it can be removed by a qualified repair person.

Place all the slides in the soapy water for a minute or so. Then, pull the snake or brass brush through each one.

If you're using a tub, you may place the body of the trumpet in the water to soak for a minute or two. If you're using a sink, you may pour water through the instrument using the glass. [*Be careful, water comes out in strange places when the slides and valves are removed!*] Clean the lead pipe and the main tuning slide with the snake. Use the small end of the valve casing brush on the smaller slide tubes. Use the larger end of the valve casing brush on each valve casing.

Next, drain the soapy water, and replace it with warm, clear water. Rinse the inside of the instrument; either immerse in water or use the glass again. If there is a spray nozzle handy, it works well for rinsing the outside of the instrument.

Gently dry the slides and body of the trumpet. This is where a soft, cotton cloth is useful.

Prior to reinserting the slides, you may want to remove residue build up on the tubes. I use Flitz Polish or Brasso and an old cloth to remove this gunk. Don't use sandpaper, steel wool or emery cloth.

Slides are now ready be greased. Just apply a very thin coat with your finger, and spread it around the tube. Reinsert each slide after it is cleaned and lubricated. Remember to reinstall any stop screws and retainers.

- *There are lots of acceptable slide grease brands available---Hetman, Schilke, Ultra Pure, Superslick, etc.*
- *Many players use anhydrous lanolin or lanolin cream. [Lanolin is one of the main ingredients in Schilke Slide Grease.]*

- *DON'T use cold cream, wheel packing grease, cod liver oil, Chapstick or cork grease.*
- *STP is an alternative, but can be messy.*
- *There seems to be continuing debate as to whether or not to use Vaseline.*
- *After the slides have been reinserted, take a cloth and wipe off the excess that always seems to squeeze out.*

You might want to add some valve oil to the greased third slide to help make it move more freely. Or, you can use lighter grease on this slide [*Hetman #4, Ultra Pure Lite*].

Replace the bottom valve caps. First, check these for grime, and clean accordingly. A tiny bit of slide grease on the threads will help ensure these don't become stuck. These caps should be finger tightened only!

Finally, carefully clean each valve. Use a little dish soap and warm running water. DO NOT GET THE TOP PART OF VALVE WET!!! The top of the valve has felt pads and/or corks that can compress if gotten wet, and cause the valves to become misaligned. Make sure the ports [*holes*] are clean, as gunk tends to build up in them.

After cleaning, rinse with clear water. Do not dry the valves. A cloth may leave small lint particles that will make the valves move slowly or stick.

Put a few drops of oil on each valve, and reinsert. Be sure the valve guides are lined up properly.

Wipe off all excess water, grease, oil, etc. left on the outside of the instrument with a soft cloth.

- *Lightly grease the top and bottom caps with slide grease.*
- *A very small amount of slide grease on the mouthpiece shank at the insertion point may help keep it from becoming stuck.*
- *If you can find them, old cloth baby diapers are great for trumpet cleaning/polishing.*
- *100% cotton Diaper Soft Cloths are available in the automotive section at Westlake Ace Hardware stores. These are excellent for cleaning/polishing.*
- *Use a quality valve lubricant [oil or synthetic]. Don't mix brands. Not all types of lubricants are compatible with each other, and will cause the valves to become sluggish or stick entirely. Some quality brands include Blue Juice, Al Cass, Hetman, Alisyn, Fat Cat and Spacefiller. However, lubricants branded as Holton, Yamaha, Jupiter and Selmer that are often supplied with instruments are acceptable.*
- *Trumpet manufacturer David Monette recommends oiling the valves after playing. This is to counteract the effects of saliva while the instrument is stored.*
- *Amado water keys should be lubricated with a drop of valve lubricant every few days.*
- *Water key [spit valve] drain holes should occasionally be cleaned with a tooth pick.*
- *Silver polish: I use Hagerty Spray Silver Polish.*
- *Lacquer polish: I use Lemon Pledge.*

