

Hi, Jamie

It's good to hear from you. You sound a lot like me when I was 28; just couldn't wait to get the next clue that would help me improve. I learned a few years before that, in theory & guitar lessons from the most amazing teacher I've ever known, about one of the greatest gifts that music offers. It's the fact that if you stay curious, if you keep your desire to improve and grow alive, you can enjoy this wonderful game of musical discovery for the rest of your life. I don't have quite the same energy level I did at that age, but I'm still just as excited about that discovery. I hope it works out that way for you over the years.

I currently teach a few online students and two local people here at the studio in Nashville (my studio was built for photography, but it functions really well for lessons, and even rehearsals if the group isn't larger than about six pieces). With two of the online students and one of the local people, the focus is on jazz improv. That's what they came to me for. The others are trumpet students.

I would be happy to work with you on the ideas in the 19/30s discussion. Skype can work really well for this. Check out what I've written for you here, and then let's correspond about the lesson thing. BTW, my e-mail is [russpix@comcast.net](mailto:russpix@comcast.net).

So, here we go.

I think one of the keys that may be missing for you is a different approach to the kind of ideas where just knowing how to do something doesn't make you able to do it. I know many people around your age who are challenged by that. You've grown up in a very "quick-take" world (thanks to the speed of communications and information delivery via the internet). A question that once took days or weeks to find the answer to can now be cleared up in minutes or seconds with a few clicks. There are tremendous benefits from that, of course. We live in a constant stream of great information and ideas. But it also fosters the habit of grabbing the next answer and moving on. This is a wonderful thing, usually, but some things don't work so well that way. Trumpet playing is the best example of that I can think of.

(This is not one of those admonitions to "practice, practice, practice." While I believe in that, it's not what I'm talking about here. Keep reading.)

If we're going to honestly explore the basic premise of our concept, that the person-plus-trumpet mechanism [i]wants[/i] to work, is designed to work at a basic, sound-producing level, *without manipulation*, we first have to make sure that we're eliminating the manipulation that would alter part of the design (us!). That's the relaxation part. By the time you've played long enough to be in the school band, by the time you've put in even a few hours of practice as a beginner, you've already begun to lock in all kinds of manipulation. From the very first notes we play, when it doesn't sound quite right, we try "something." The tone isn't great, so we must be doing something wrong, or not doing some essential "right" thing. We tighten one

thing, move another, roll, tuck, jut... almost always something in the area of the embouchure. Maybe a teacher suggests something to try, or maybe it's another student, or it could be just something we've read about on the internet or thought up on our own. A band director has to get us sounding reasonably good as quickly as possible! And of course we want that too. We believe that if we just do the [i]right[/i] combination of manipulations, a good sound will pop out. If it's not good, we manipulate something else. NOW. Right now, to "fix" it.

The 19/30s concept, when you play "into" it or through it via the exercise and it sort of clicks in and starts working for you, presents a different model. In that model, the "want to" or workable design of the person-plus-trumpet system takes a little while to blossom. Not weeks, or days, or even a full day for most people. For me, if I'm in shape and I'm not dealing with badly beat-up chops from hard playing the day before, the "blossom" starts to happen around the A in the descending series (four notes into it). If I'm out of shape or had a rough day the day before, it might take a little longer. It's surely going to be different for each person, but for the sake of example, let's say it takes an average of ten minutes. And let's say I could guarantee (I can't, but let's say that for now) that if you actually play the exercise for only ten minutes as described, really not manipulating anything, the sound will begin to blossom.

From our very first notes, we trumpet players are not programmed to wait nearly that long to hear things start to happen. We try to play, it doesn't happen, and our teacher, or another player, or our own brain, springs into action: DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT! This really happens within seconds. Think about it - that's how we operate! Wait ten minutes for the answer to emerge? Are you kidding me?

Even old guys like me, who didn't grow up on the instant-answer system of the internet, find it really, really hard to wait that long. For younger people who haven't known anything but that quick-fix world, it's unimaginable!

Here's an analogy that stretches the idea out for a much, much longer time, hopefully illustrates how things that are designed to work a certain way take time to do so. I have a magnolia tree in my yard. Most of the year, it drops these grenade-like seed "pods" all over the ground. We all know that when the seed pod drops, it's designed to work its way into the ground, deposit seeds, and they'll grow into newly-sprouting, baby magnolia trees. Shoots. Saplings. Whatever they call baby magnolia trees. But it doesn't happen instantly. If I'm standing near the tree, and see a pod drop, I wouldn't expect to walk over there and see a shoot coming up through the ground. If I started screwing with the pod in one way or another to make that happen NOW, I'd be working against the design of the pod-plus-ground system, and it probably wouldn't work as designed.

Still with me? Good. The concept behind the 19/30s exercise is best understood, as you [i]play[/i] it, by avoiding a lot of analysis. But we'll engage in a little analysis here to try to help you better understand the approach. The magnolia pod has to go

through some steps to become a magnolia shoot. Germination, and all that. And the change-able part of our player-plus-trumpet system has to do the same (not germination... other stuff).

\*As the air first begins to flow over/through the lips, the tissue surface is hard, and won't vibrate easily. Now, you [i]can[/i] make some adjustments to "goose" that vibration. To prime the well, as it were. Press the lips together more tightly to force a "buzz." Roll one lip out far enough to access the softer, suppler tissue toward the inside. DON'T. Trust the "want to" of the system.

\*The areas around the mouthpiece, all the way to the cheeks, carry some tension from the day's activity. Talking, singing, whistling, the kinds of tension that can seep into all muscles when we're stressed or working hard mentally in a class or on a work project. We *can* make adjustments that will compensate, and perhaps get the tone going. Flex this or move that or whatever. DON'T. You're screwing with the way the system is designed.

\*Even the air being released from your lungs is subject to tension, from abdominal muscles, neck and shoulder muscles, etc. We *can* manipulate even this, by blowing harder, forcing the air. We can try to *make* the air release in a steady stream, by bringing all those muscles to bear on it. DON'T. In the numbered suggestions in the original PDF, I talk about the first step that I do in playing every day: Without the horn or mouthpiece, take a full, easy breath and *let* it flow out of your lungs, restricted *only* by your relaxed, gently-closed lips. The first breath-and-release might be a little shaky. A jitter here and there, perhaps. Or you notice that you're trying to force something. Do it again, remembering that we want everything in this part of the system to be relaxed. By the third time or so, you should start to notice things settling in. You'll letting that portion – of the "person" portion – of the system acclimate.

If we trust the system as designed, if we stay with it and allow it to "get there" on its own, it will. That's the acclimating part. We are allowing the changeable part of the system (the person in the person-plus-trumpet system) to acclimate to its role. That's the idea behind the 19/30s exercise.

Notice, in the first Flow video from Urban Agnas, that he completely airballs his first note of the day. This is a world-class player, one of the best in Europe. Airball. When it happens, he stops long enough to tell us to "accept" this when it happens, and then he resumes playing. By "accepting" it, I believe he's saying that we need to keep doing what we're doing - not apply a stack of manipulations that will change the system. Mr. Agnas is allowing his part of the system to acclimate.

So now to your specific issue, Jamie. You're having trouble with the air escaping from your corners. First of all, I hope you'll re-read the part of the PDF about corners. Many of us (I did, and you clearly still do) come to think of the "corners" as the ends of the lips – the corners of the *mouth*. Start thinking of the "corners" as the

corners of your *embouchure*. This is a different piece of real estate. Make a big smile in the mirror, and notice where your eye teeth are. They'll be at or near the place where your palette – the “horseshoe” made by your upper teeth – starts the bend or curve around to the back-teeth portion of the palette. (You can stop smiling in the mirror now). Imagine a circle or oval with its border defined by that place. The eye teeth or the “curve.” The circle or oval will be a little larger than the outside rim of your mouthpiece. THOSE are your “corners.” The corners of the embouchure. If we're gonna talk corners, we should be talking about the same thing.

As for the corners of your *mouth*, where the lips end, there's not much positive work you can do with that. You can tighten it or flex it or do just about anything with it, and except for *slightly* influencing the area right around the mouthpiece, it's just not going to have much impact. The only exception to that reality happens if you stretch those mouth corners *back*, into a smile. And I'm sure you know that's not a good thing. Again, please re-read the part in the PDF where I talk about that area. As you progress, you'll be bringing this area into play.

So. Let's see if we can stop the air from escaping from the corners of your *mouth* when you do the exercise. Note that in the numbered suggestions, I talk about not allowing any tension or flexing of the lips or face, *other than what it takes to keep them from going flaccid*. We're not talking about rubber face. We're talking about the same way you would hold your mouth if you were sitting with a friend, listening to something they were saying. You wouldn't sit there with drool running down your face because your whole setup was completely drooping, right? So, we'll assume that you already had that together, or that you do now. There are two little techniques that I've found to be really helpful for your issue. The first is a really, really simple visualization technique. And again (sorry), it relates to something you can dig out of the PDF. Remember the idea that you think of nothing except the air flowing out of the lungs, through the lips, and *into/through the horn*? Visualize that last part: *through the horn*. That's a much more narrow path that “out of your mouth.” I've seen just this little visualization clear up the issue for some people.

The second technique is about sensation. Like the exercise/concept itself, it should allow you to experience the sensation of making that narrower stream *with your lips & face relaxed*. Put your horn down, so you can use your hands. Now, with your whole face *really* relaxed, put your index finger in the center of your lips (they're together, but not held there tightly), take a full, easy breath, and let the air flow out. The finger is *making* the air flow out of the corners of your mouth. So we get a glaring example of *that* sensation. Okay, now take the first to fingers of *each* hand, like a Cub Scout salute, or the letter U in sign language, and place them *gently* on the corners of your mouth – just enough “weight” there to hold the corners in place as you blow. You are *making* the air flow through the center. Do it a few times, and then do it with the fingers off, then on, then off. Remember, when you take them off, that your lips are still relaxed. But as you do the off/on/off/on thing, you should become more and more aware of the *sensation* of that center stream.

See if that helps. Hope so!

Rusty Russell