

North Tyneside Brass in Schools

Trombone positions

A trombone slide can be moved continuously to any position. As the outer slide is moved out, the note being played will lower in pitch as the length of tubing increases.

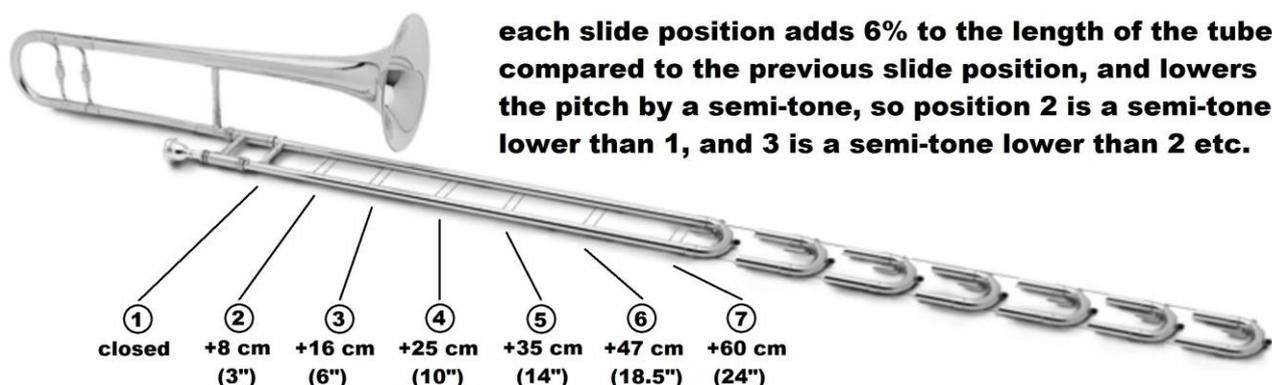
Comical effects can be produced by playing while moving the slide out and back in and allowing the note to continually lower as the slide is moved out and then get higher again as the slide is pulled back in. These effects are known as “glissandos” or “gliss” for short. Some music makes good use of them but mostly they are to be avoided!

Instead, the trombone slide should be moved quickly to the correct “position” before the next note is played.

The trombone has seven “positions” where notes can be played in tune. In practice this is a simplification, but it will serve the beginner very well to learn these seven positions and the notes that can be played with them.

The important thing for the trombone player, as for any musician, is to learn to listen to the notes you produce and how they sound with the other players around you, and learn to hear whether they are in tune or not. An experienced player learns not only the positions where the notes are usually played, but also to adjust these slightly when required to make the note sound right!

All the measurements given below are approximate.



Young trombone players will probably not be able to reach beyond 5th position. If this becomes a problem, a handle can be provided to allow them to reach 6th and 7th positions. Alternatively, a trombone with an “F trigger” will allow most notes to be played without having to reach 6th or 7th positions.

More than one note can be played in the same position. E.g. with the slide closed in 1st position, you can play low C, and increasingly higher notes including G, a higher C, then E etc. These are called “harmonics”. The pitch is controlled by the way the player buzzes their lips: blowing faster with tighter lips will produce a higher note, while blowing slower with more relaxed lips will produce a lower note. This takes practice!

You will discover that some notes can be played in more than one position. E.g. G is normally played in 1st position but can (if your arms will reach) be played in 6th position. Similarly, the higher C note is normally played in 1st position but can be played in 5th position. Unfortunately, there are no alternative positions for awkward notes like D in 6th position!

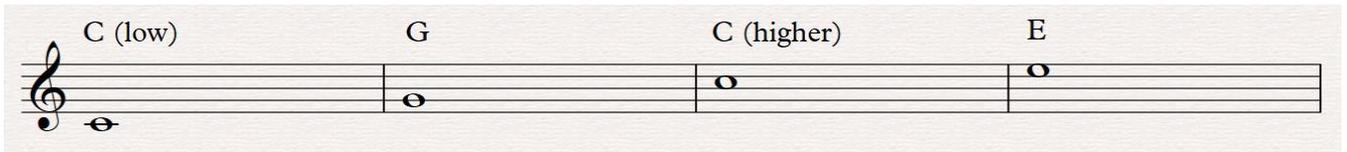
The pictures below show where each slide position is. Start by learning where 4th and 6th positions are (see below), then 2nd and 3rd positions are about 1/3rd and 2/3rds of the way between 1st and 4th positions, and 5th position is about half-way between 4th and 6th position. 7th position is nearly as far as you can push the slide out, without it falling off the end!

1st position

Also called “closed” position. The slide is pulled all the way in, as shown:



Notes that can be played in 1st position include:

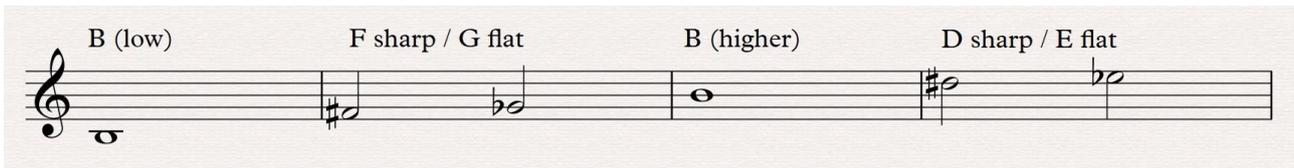


2nd position

The outer slide is moved out about 8 cm (3 inches) to the 2nd position, as shown. 2nd position is about 1/3rd of the way between 1st and 4th positions.



Notes that can be played in 2nd position include:

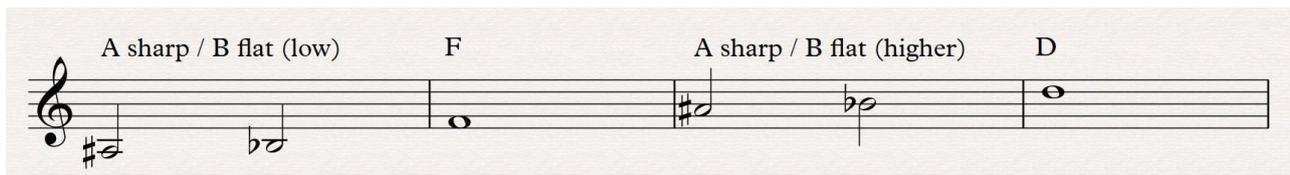


3rd position

The slide is moved out about 16 cm (6 inches) to the 3rd position, as shown. 3rd position is about 2/3rds of the way between 1st and 4th positions.



Notes that can be played in 3rd position include:

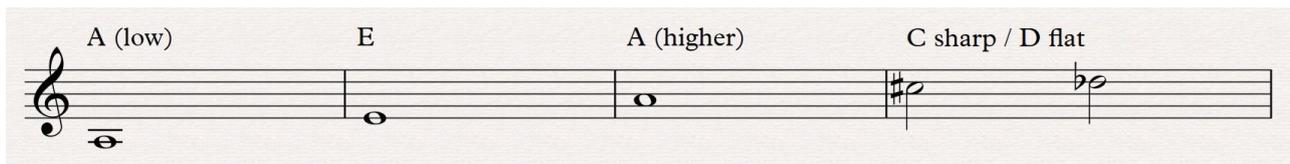


4th position

The slide is moved out about 25cm (10 inches) until the top of the outer slide is just beyond the end of the bell, as shown:



Notes that can be played in 4th position include:



5th position

The slide is moved out about 35 cm (14 inches) to the 5th position, as shown. 5th position is about half-way between 4th and 6th positions.



Notes that can be played in 5th position include:

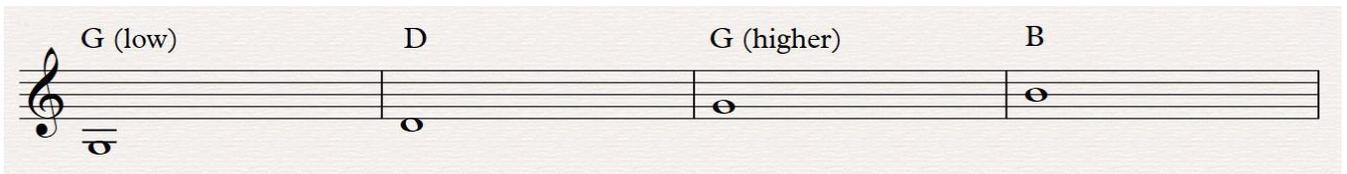


6th position

The slide is moved out about 47 cm (18.5 inches) to the 6th position, as shown. If you can see the brass “stockings” at the end of the inner slide, then you’ve gone a little too far!



Notes that can be played in 6th position include:



7th position

The outer slide is moved out almost as far as it will go before coming off the end of the inner slide! That’s about 60 cm (24 inches). Notice that the brass “stockings” are visible.



Notes that can be played in 7th position include:

