

Doodle Tonguing

A beginner's guide by Jack Courtright

Doodle tonguing is a technique that many brass players go their whole lives without ever learning, and these players turn out just fine. That being said, it is a versatile technique and isn't as difficult to learn as many players assume it is. It has made a major impact on my own playing in jazz, classical and commercial/popular styles – as it turns out, a super-legato multiple tongue can lend itself to a very wide variety of music. For the purpose of this packet I've broken down the process of learning to doodle tongue into five objectives and a series of exercises to help achieve these objectives. These exercises are not intended to be a strict routine, but rather a jumping-off point for you to develop a more personalized approach.

1. Syllables and first notes

For starters, you have to be able to say the syllables correctly. Sometimes players assume that the syllables are just as the word 'doodle' is spoken. This may work for some, but I prefer to think 'dah-dul' – this allows the mouth to stay in a more natural playing position. In any case the most important thing here is the second syllable, which is created when the tongue flips to create the 'dul' sound. The tip of the tongue should make contact with the roof of the mouth toward the front, almost where the teeth meet the roof. (Note that it is easy to make an 'L' sound without the tongue touching the roof of the mouth. This is useless for articulation purposes, so make sure there is contact between the tongue and the roof.) Once you can say the syllables comfortably, practice them with a wind pattern on your hand. Simply blow a relaxed air stream and think 'dah-dul-dah-dul'. Once you can do this, try exercises 1-3 to get used to making a sound on the horn with this articulation.

2. Moving the slide

Once you can make a relatively consistent sound while doodling, it's time to start developing some mobility. Use exercises 4-6 to move around the horn with as even and open a sound as possible.

3. Moving between partials

One of the trickiest steps for many players is developing the ability to change partials mid-doodle – that is to say the 'dah' note is in one partial and the 'dul' note is in another. Two kinds of exercises are particularly helpful with this step. Exercise 7 is a variation on exercises that develop the lip trill, working in higher partials that are very close together. Exercises 8 and 9 are meant to be buzzed on the mouthpiece first, then played on the horn – practicing on a version of the instrument that is essentially one giant partial can help ease the

transition into moving between partials on the horn.

4. Getting around the horn

Exercises 10-12 are meant to develop more control of the doodle tongue by demanding partial skips and long scalar patterns with no repeated notes.

5. Playing real music

When you first buy a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Doodle tonguing is not meant to be an every-note sort of technique, though playing every note with this articulation will certainly help to develop it quickly. In practice, it is up to you to discern when and how to apply it. I use it for jazz passages that are heavy on eighth and sixteenth notes, for ornamentation in lyrical music, for fast passages meant for string/woodwind instruments, and a variety of other contexts.

Like I said earlier, the exercises I outline here are not intended to be a daily routine. They are prototypical exercises for developing this technique, meant to show what sort of work develops each different aspect of the technique. I encourage you to come up with your own variations on them suited to your own needs. In general they should start around 72 bpm, and you should incrementally increase the tempo as you see fit. They are also generally focused in the mid-range of the horn because I feel that this is the best place to start. Once you are comfortable with the concepts, apply the same exercises to higher and lower ranges of the horn.