

Trumpet in the orchestra: the stand sheet

Six things to remember when you sit down in the section.

1 The quiet entry is the hard one

The trumpet's reputation is for power, but its hardest orchestral moments are the soft ones: a quiet, exactly placed entry after a long rest. Several notes live on each fingering, drawn from the harmonic series, so the right one answers only if you have heard it first: sing or buzz the entry before you play it. Then find the nerve to play it softly and exactly rather than safely and loud.

2 Learn the slide choreography

The valves give you the notes but not always in tune. The clearest case is the low register: the notes using first and third valves together, and all three at once, sit sharp, and the fix is a small push of the third-valve slide, out and back, exactly as you play them. Practise those slowly against a drone until the hand learns the distance and makes the movement by reflex.

3 You are heard whether or not you are loud

The trumpet cuts through everything, so a dynamic printed on your part does not mean what it means on a string part. Where you are accompanying rather than leading, the marking is a starting point and the balance in the room is the answer. Judge by whether the section beneath you can still be heard.

4 Rest as much as you play

Endurance is not built by grinding, it is built by recovering: the lip rebuilds in the gaps, not under constant load. Efficient, well-supported air does far more for stamina than extra pressure, which only tires the lip and closes the sound. A fresh lip is also an accurate lip.

5 A mute changes the pitch, not only the colour

Most straight mutes push the pitch sharp, and the tighter the mute the more so, because that shape shortens the air column. The bucket mute is the exception and tends flat, and some modern designs hold the pitch, so check yours against a drone. Pull the tuning slide for the mute and push it back after, allowing room for both, and buy time by going in early and out late.

6 Ensemble is a matter of sight

Across a large platform sound arrives late, so playing by ear alone puts you behind the beat. Take the beat from the conductor and your ensemble from the principal of your own section, kept at the edge of your vision while you read. Where what you hear and what you see disagree, follow your eyes.

