

How to Clean and Lube Your Trombone Slide Quickly, Safely, and Effectively

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Getting your slide in top shape is one of the best things that you can do for yourself as a trombonist. If your slide is a little sticky, don't practice! Instead, spend the 5-10 minutes to lube your slide properly, and then enjoy playing on a wonderful slide!

Supplies

Cloth or rag – cotton or microfiber
Sink or bathtub
Cup or container to pour water
Slide-O-Mix, or other trombone lube
Trombone Cleaning Snake – optional

Overview

1. Slush the slide out with water three times.
2. Clean the contact surfaces with a cloth.
3. Apply the lube.



The slide comes in two parts.

Left - Inner Side, Right - Outer slide

Be very careful as you clean the slide. The slide tubes are very thin and easily dented or bent. Even the smallest dent can make the slide difficult to move.

STEPS



1. Pour about ½ cup warm water into the slide.



2. Slush the slide back and forth vigorously for 10 seconds to loosen and rinse out any dirt inside the tubes. Dump the water and repeat the pouring and slushing a total of three times. Do this over a sink or tub because some water usually splashes out. Remove the outer slide and set it aside (somewhere safe).



3. If you want to use your snake to clean out the leadpipe (tube you put your mouthpiece into) you can do this on the first rinse. Fill the slide entirely

full of warm water. You can add a drop or two of a mild dishwashing liquid like Joy or Dawn. Insert the snake into the mouthpiece receiver and work it up and down through the tubes to loosen any dirt. Repeat at the other tube opening (where you would attach the bell). Dump the dirty water out and rinse the slide thoroughly. Then do two or three of the “slush and dumps” as described in step two.



4. Use a cloth to polish the inner slide clean. Use a firm pressure, and really buff the slide until the metal feels slippery. Take care to use straight up and down polishing motion so you don't bend the slide out of alignment. Make sure you get the stocking thoroughly clean, but be careful because you have the most leverage down there to accidentally bend the slide.

Now that the slide is as clean as possible, you are ready to apply the lube.



If Using Slide-O-Mix

I highly recommend Slide-O-Mix. I have found that it works the best and lasts the longest. It is more forgiving than cream if you put too much or too little on. It helps slides with minor dents or misalignment to function decently until repairs can be made. You can reapply just a little if you want a quick “re-charge”. I also like Slide-O-Mix Rapid Comfort which is specifically designed to be a one step recharge. However, see below for directions if you are using a different kind of lube.



5. Put about 6 small drops of the small Slide-O-Mix bottle on the stocking (bottom four inches) of each of the two inner slide tubes.



6. Put one tube of the outer slide on at a time and work the slide up and down and in a circular motion to get the Slide-O-Mix evenly distributed. Attach both tubes of the outer slide normally.



7. Shake up the big bottle of Slide-O-Mix, and apply two or three ten inch strips of liquid. Point the bottle down as you do this, so you don't just get thinner liquid from the top of the bottle. You will need to experiment with how much to put on. If you put on too little, the slide will scrape more. If you put on too much, it will slow the slide motion (like molasses). If you do put on too much, you

can wipe a little off, and spray the slide with a few drops of water.

If Using Cream – Superslick, Formula Three Cream, Trombotine, etc

Place the inner slide only on your lap. Put a piece of cream on your finger the size of the tip of a wooden match. Distribute this evenly around the stocking (bottom four inches) only of both slide tubes. Put one tube of the outer slide on at a time and work the slide up and down and in a circular motion to get the cream evenly distributed. Attach both tubes of the outer slide normally.

You will need to experiment with how much cream to put on. If you put on too little, the slide will scrape more. If you put on too much, it will slow the slide motion (like molasses). If you do put on too much, you can wipe a little off, and spray the slide with a few drops of water.

If Using “Regular” Slide Oil

I have found that most bottles of slide lube marketed towards beginners perform poorly (and combination valve oil/slide lube works even worse). However, if you are using that, you would follow the cleaning steps above, and then apply the liquid generously to the slide outside of the inner slide. (Move the outer slide out to around 6th or 7th position to expose the inner slide.)

Notes

A well lubed slide (with Slide-O-Mix) should last one to two weeks. If you skimp on the cleaning, it may just last a day or two. The whole process can be done in under five minutes.

You can spray the slide with a little water when the slide is starting to go dry and scratchy, but this tends to rinse off the existing lube slightly. A water spray bottle is more necessary when using cream lubricants.

If you have a dent in one of the tubes, or your slide is out of alignment, you should take it to an experienced repair person, with a good track record specifically with trombone slides. I list recommended shops in the Boston area on my website at www.brassstages.com/advanced/stores.html

Keeping your slide well lubed is one of the best things you can do for your development as a player. It is a joy to play a smooth slide.

It is often said not to use hot water when cleaning brass instruments because it will remove the

lacquer (clear protective coating). However, I have used very hot water on my instruments without having a problem with this.

Good luck with all your trombone cleaning and playing endeavors!

Brian Kay is a trombone performer and teacher based in Natick, Massachusetts. Please check out www.brassstages.com for information on Brian, his teaching, and his trombone method books.