



Lip Flexibilities for the Advanced Jazz Trombonist

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Good lip flexibility, meaning the ability to change quickly and smoothly between pitches, is an essential ability for any trombonist. The jazz trombonist, however, may find good flexibility a particularly important ability, especially when improvising at faster tempos. Even though many flexibility exercises are good for both the classical and jazz trombonist, there are some techniques which are more or less unique to the jazz trombonist. This article is designed to help the jazz trombonist, although classical trombonists will find many of the exercises and routines described here helpful for developing all around good lip flexibility.



This article has been written to supplement the 50 minute routine as described by Buddy Baker in his book, *Tenor Trombone Method, An Approach to Trombone Basics, Warm-Up, and Daily Routine For Tenor Trombone With Or Without F-Attachment*. Trombonists not familiar with this book should be able to adapt the exercises and routines described herein to enhance their own routine as well. In order to facilitate this, however, some explanation of Baker's 50 minute routine may be helpful.

One of the strengths of Baker's routines is its completeness. Through six basic exercises the routine covers virtually every technical demand a trombonist would be likely to need while performing most music. The routine begins first with the warm-up, slow descending chord arpeggios. This is essentially where the trombonist warms up the embouchure and breathing muscles, and prepares for the rest of the routine. From there the routine moves to legato scales and chord arpeggios throughout the player's entire range. After a brief rest the trombonist works on lip flexibility, which I will describe in more detail shortly. Following another brief rest the trombonist moves to staccato scales and chord arpeggios and then another short rest. Multiple tonguing is the next exercise after which follows the warm-down. The quality of scales and arpeggios to be played, as well as with pitches to start on, are varied throughout the routine and from day to day. For more detail into this I refer you to the book.

Another strength of Baker's routine is its adaptability. The general routine is designed to be able to easily modifiable to build on each individual's technical strengths and to

isolate and focus on technical weaknesses. The lip flexibility exercises are one way I have adapted this routine for my student's and own use.

Baker's lip flexibility section consists of two different types of exercises, a group of four overtone series exercises and a group of lip trill exercises. Baker recommends alternating between each group every other day. Both of these sets of exercises are very similar to lip flexibility exercises developed by Remington, Kitzman, Arbans, and many other brass pedagogues.

The following jazz flexibility exercises are designed to be alternated with Baker's exercises, so that the trombonist plays each type of flexibility study every third day. Before beginning to work on these jazz flexibility exercises the trombonist should have the ability to play correctly the overtone series studies and the lip trill studies with at least a moderate level of success.

Some Thoughts on Air, Embouchure, Tongue, and Slide Technique

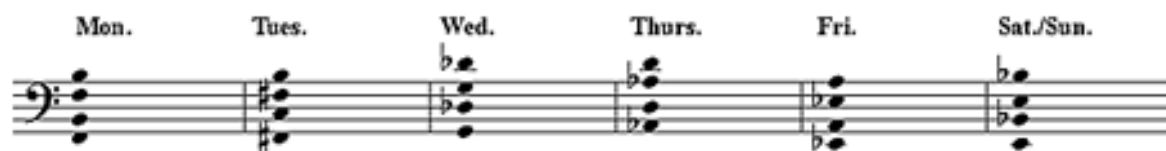
It is outside the scope of this article to get too in depth with the above mentioned technical aspects of playing the trombone, but they deserve some mention before moving on. In order for the following exercises to be mastered all four of these techniques must work in conjunction. Poor ability at these exercises after sufficient time and effort could be related to improper technique in any of these four areas. Trombonists who are having difficulties should seek the advice and guidance of an experienced and open-minded teacher.

Most of these exercises also require some facility with alternate positions. Again, since it is outside the scope of this article to cover alternate positions and intonation adjustments, trombonists unsure of these techniques should seek the guidance of an appropriate book or better still a teacher. *All slide position markings in this article are approximate, the ear should be the final judge as to whether or not the position needs to be raised or lowered slightly.*

Organization

I have broken these exercises into three different sections, Fretting, Turns, and Combinations of both. I begin my routine with jazz flexibility in that order. The tonality which I play each exercise is based on the system of scale and chord arpeggios quality dictated by Baker's routine where one quality of scale and its accompanying chord arpeggio is practiced for two days in a row before moving on to the next one. For more information concerning this see Buddy Baker's *Tenor Trombone Method*.

I apply Baker's method of organizing scales for multiple tonguing to the following exercises in order to ensure that I am getting sufficient practice in all keys over the long term. Here is how Baker chooses the pitches to base each exercise on:



(Baker, 1983, p. 85)

Click on the images to see a larger version.

When beginning this routine a trombonist may find it better to focus on one or two keys and one or two scale qualities for every exercise. With space considerations in mind I have chosen to write out these exercises based on just a few keys and scale qualities. Trombonists sufficiently advanced should be able to figure how to apply these exercises in any key and scale.

Fretting

The following exercises are based on the overtone series of the trombone and some possible combinations of breaking across the partials through the use of the lips alone or with a combination of the lip and slide. This technique is often referred to as "fretting," because it allows the trombonist to play a pattern and transpose it down by half steps merely by bringing all the slide positions down by one position, similar to a guitarist transposing a pattern by moving the fingering up or down by one fret on the finger board.

Although most the following fretting exercises are based on chord arpeggios they can easily be applied to scale patterns as well. After developing facility in this technique and understanding of alternate positions trombonists should begin to develop their own patterns.

The following exercises should be played slowly at first, with attention to a good sound, smooth transitions between notes, and accurate rhythms. Once they can be played slowly the trombonist should begin developing the ability to play these studies at any tempo, from very slow to as fast as possible.

Play these studies by only tonguing the initial attack and allowing the natural break to produce the rest of the pitches. Once some facility has been developed this way advanced trombonists may want to experiment by lightly single tonguing or using a light multiple tongue appropriate to the rhythms.

Fretting Studies Using 3 Partial

Assuming that today is Friday and that today's routine is based on a major scale and major chord arpeggios I would begin this portion of my routine by working on my fretting using three partials and would base them on the major chord arpeggio. Here are the four basic possible exercises based on A and E flat.

Note the following things about these exercises. Positions are indicated for pitches when they are to be played in a position other than the primary (closest) position. Additionally, when a slide position change is necessary the slide positions move outward when the pitches ascend and closer when the pitches descend. This helps to put each pitch on a different partial.

Depending on the ability level of the trombonist or the desired approach to this exercise, the above exercises can and should be practiced by moving each chord arpeggio up and down by half steps until the pattern of slide positions is no longer possible. For example, the first line of the above exercise can be played in two different keys.

The fretting pattern starting on 3rd partial E flat can be played in five different keys.

The image shows five staves of musical notation for lip flexibility exercises. Each staff contains a sequence of notes with fingerings (5, 6, 7) and accidentals (b, #) in the bass clef. The exercises involve moving between different fingerings and accidentals across the staff.

The other two chord arpeggios should be worked on in a similar manner as above.

Fretting Using 4 Partial

The next step after working on fretting using three partials is to add a partial to the pattern while still remaining in the key being practiced. For the purpose of this example I will base the exercise on a natural minor scale and assume that it is Saturday, meaning that the keys to be practice are B flat minor and E minor.

Here are four possible fretting exercises based on a natural minor scale on the pitches of B flat and E which form a minor 7th chord arpeggio.

The image shows four staves of musical notation for fretting exercises based on a natural minor scale. Each staff contains a sequence of notes with fingerings (3, 4, 5) and accidentals (b) in the bass clef. The exercises involve moving between different fingerings and accidentals across the staff.

A minor 7th chord arpeggio is not the only possible combination of pitches which can

be formed based on the natural minor scale. Another possible fretting exercise could form the first, third, fourth, and fifth pitches of the B flat minor scale.



You should experiment and develop patterns which utilize different intervals but still remain diatonic to the scale.

These exercises should be practiced in a similar manner as the 3 partial fretting examples earlier.

Fretting Using 5 Partial

For the purpose of demonstrating fretting using five partials I will assume that today is Monday, giving us tonic pitches of F and B, and that the scale to be practiced today is the mixolydian scale.

Note that in these examples I have not given an example starting on third partial B because the resulting pattern would not really resemble the suggested mixolydian tonality, assuming that you don't use an F-attachment. Furthermore, the pattern starting on third partial F is different from the other two. These patterns are not the only possible patterns using five partials based on mixolydian scales in these keys either. Develop your own as you become more familiar with these exercises.

These exercises should be practice in a similar manner as the other fretting studies.

Variations on Fretting

Once you are sufficiently comfortable and familiar with how these patterns can be developed you should create your own variations on these exercises. Here are some possible ways to vary these patterns with some notated examples.

Begin the pattern on the top pitch and reverse the direction of the exercise

Here is an example of fretting over 4 partials based on an A flat major scale.



Begin the pattern on a pitch other than the top or bottom pitch

Here is an example of fretting over 5 partials based on a D flat whole tone scale starting on the second pitch and ascending first.



Alter the rhythm or time signature of the pattern

Here is an example of fretting over 4 partials based on an A dorian scale starting on the third pitch and descending first. This pattern also makes use of the partial below the tonic pitch. Instead of using the triplet rhythms first introduced with fretting over 4 partials this pattern makes use of eighth notes instead.



This same example could also have altered the time signature.



These are just some possible variations. You should create your own and alter them accordingly as you progress.

Trombonist Greg Waits has written a book with some similar exercises called *Advanced Flexibility Studies for Jazz Trombonists*. For those interested in further studying the technique of fretting this book is highly recommended.

Turns

The technique of surrounding two pitches with an ornament similar to a *gruppetto* is often referred to as a "turn." It is commonly notated with the following symbol, but it can also be notated with the precise pitches played.



Many trombonists when first learning this technique try to emphasize the top note being played, which is 4th position D in the above example. This note should be ghosted, as the important pitches are the downbeat and last pitch, C and A in the above example. The first note of each turn should be tongued, but allow each of the other pitches to be produced by the air, lip, and slide motion.

Turns, Foundation Exercises

Before beginning work on the more advanced turn exercises you should be comfortable playing some basic turns on different partials. Here are three exercises starting on three different partials. The two important pitches of each turn are only one position distant from each other.



Practice these exercises slowly at first, with attention on a good sound, smooth transitions between pitches, and rhythmic accuracy. Be sure to "sweep" the air through the entire turn. These exercises should be practiced moving down as far as the patterns of slide positions is possible. Remember to tongue the first note of each turn.

Here are some examples of turns of which the distance between slide positions is greater than one position.



A more difficult turn to play involves a turn where the two target notes are played in



Continue adding turns based on the next pitches of the major scale. Here is how the exercise would look beginning on F down to B flat.



Below is how this exercise would look extending the turns all the way up from high B flat.



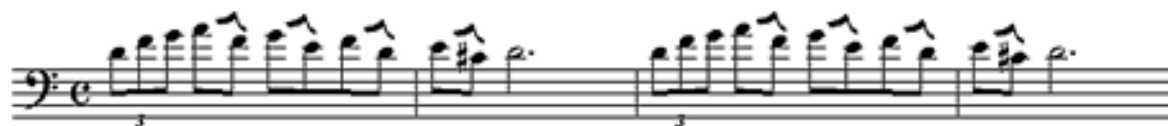
Notice that in the above example I have altered the key slightly to play E naturals when making the turn starting on G. This is altered to facilitate a cleaner turn. At a fast enough speed this alteration is barely noticeable.

Combination Exercises

After developing some facility with both the fretting and turn exercises you will want to work on combining the two. Again, we can base the exercise on the scale/chord arpeggio quality being practiced this day, and choose the key by what day of the week it is. I will base the following exercises on the D dorian scale. Similar patterns can be developed using any scale quality starting on any pitch.

Fretting to Turn Combination

Begin with a fretting pattern that ascends and then descend down the scale using turns.



Tonguing becomes much trickier in these combination exercises. The initial attack should be tongued, and the first note of each turn as well. Some will find tonguing

the A of the first turn difficult. If you have difficulty with this work on cleanly making this turn without tonguing the A. Each successive turn will probably be easier by tonguing the downbeats.

Note the turn from E to C sharp, which is not part of the D dorian scale. Similar to the earlier example, this turn is chromatically altered to facilitate a smoother turn and should not be very noticeable at a faster speed.

Turn to Fretting Combination

This exercise reverses the pattern from above.



Fretting to Turn to Fretting Combination

This combination exercise starts with a fretting pattern and moves to a set of turns followed by the same fretting pattern which was started with.



Other possible variations include starting an exercise with a set of turns moving to a fretting pattern and finishing with turns. You should be creative and try out variations using a different number of turns or fretting patterns involving different numbers of partials. The variations are virtually endless.

Routine Development

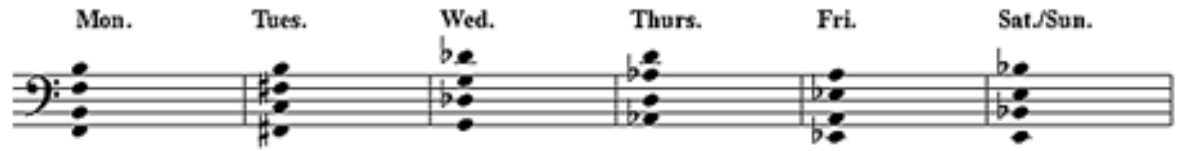
Now that I have described the three basic sets of flexibility exercises I will go into more detail on how to incorporate these studies into your basic routine.

As I described earlier, I designed these exercises to work in conjunction with Buddy Baker's *Tenor Trombone Method*. These jazz flexibility studies can be played in place of the overtone series exercises or lip trill exercises Baker recommends. One way to incorporate the jazz flexibility exercises is to alternate the three exercises each day, so that you repeat the same series of exercises every third day. Trombonists who want to spend more time on jazz flexibility could alternate these studies every other day with either the overtone series or lip trill exercises.

Trombonists not familiar with Baker's routine or who desire to incorporate these exercises into a different routine should endeavor to strike a balance between these exercises and other essential lip flexibility studies. Strong ability in overtone series exercises and lip trills will enhance these jazz flexibilities and vice versa, so be sure not to neglect anything.

I prefer to base the jazz flexibility exercises on the scale quality I'm working on for that day. The pitches I begin these exercises on changes depending on the day of the

week in order to ensure that I am getting sufficient practice in all keys over the long term. Once again, the pitches for each day of the week as suggested by Baker are as follows.



If you desire you can choose just one quality of scale, such as a major scale, and practice jazz flexibility exercises following the above chart. If that proves to be too difficult for you at first, just focus on one or two scales for a time, such as B flat and F major. You should begin working on all twelve keys and other scale qualities as quickly as possible, however.

Just how long you should practice these exercises depends on each individual, your practice goals, and the amount of playing you plan on doing during this day. I generally don't recommend any more than 15 minutes a day on these exercises, and 5 to 10 minutes daily can be very effective if done diligently. Always pay attention to how your lips feel and don't practice past the point of fatigue without some rest. Short rests of anywhere from 10 seconds to 3 minutes in the middle of your routine can help avoid tearing down your muscles when you want to be building them up.

Sample Routines

You should work on developing your own routine based on these exercises, but a few sample routines to try may help you learn what you need to spend more time on and what may not need as much work. You should also be able to work out which exercises, if any, are too difficult for you right now and leave them out for the time being.

A 5 to 10 minute routine for the trombonist new to jazz flexibility

Choose the scale quality and starting pitch or pitches for the day. Practice all exercises slowly with emphasis on good sound, smooth transition between notes, and rhythmic accuracy. A metronome may be helpful when working towards rhythmic accuracy.

1. Two [fretting patterns over 3 partials](#) in a comfortable range. Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.
2. Two [fretting patterns over 4 partials](#) extending the patterns from number 1 by one partial. Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.
3. One or two [fretting patterns over 5 partials](#) extending the patterns from number 2 by one partial. Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.
4. Rest briefly.
5. Two [foundation turn patterns](#) beginning on different partials utilizing two adjacent positions (i.e., D flat above the staff to B flat on the top of the staff, or 2nd position to

1st position). Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.

6. Two [foundation turn patterns](#) beginning on different partials utilizing two positions not adjacent (i.e., middle C above the staff to B flat on the top of the staff, or 3rd position to 1st position). Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.

7. Rest briefly and then move on to other topics.

A 10 to 15 minute routine for the intermediate jazz trombonist

Choose the scale quality and starting pitch or pitches for the day. Begin to expand the tempo on these exercises both slower and faster. A metronome may be helpful when working towards rhythmic accuracy.

1. Three [fretting patterns over 3 partials](#) being sure to expand your comfortable range of flexibility. Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.

2. Three [fretting patterns over 4 partials](#) extending the patterns from number 1 by one partial. Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.

3. Two or three [fretting patterns over 5 partials](#) extending the patterns from number 2 by one partial. Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.

4. Rest briefly.

5. Three [foundation turn patterns](#) beginning on different partials utilizing two adjacent positions (i.e., D flat above the staff to B flat on the top of the staff, or 2nd position to 1st position). Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.

6. Three [foundation turn patterns](#) beginning on different partials utilizing two positions not adjacent (i.e., middle C above the staff to B flat on the top of the staff, or 3rd position to 1st position). Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.

7. One [foundation turn pattern](#) utilizing pitches played in the same position (i.e., D above the staff to B flat on the top of the staff, or 1st position to 1st position). Play chromatically down from 1st position to 7th position.

8. Rest briefly and then move on to other topics.

A 10 to 15 minute routine for the advanced jazz trombonist

Choose the scale quality and starting pitch or pitches for the day. Continue expanding the tempo on these exercises in both directions.

1. Three or four [fretting patterns over 3 partials](#) being sure to expand your comfortable range of flexibility. Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.

2. Three or four [fretting patterns over 4 partials](#) extending the patterns from number 1

by one partial. Play these patterns in a variation, either rhythmically, the starting direction (ascending or descending first), and/or with the pitch to start on (beginning the pattern on the second or third note, etc.). Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.

3. Three or four fretting patterns over 5 partials extending the patterns from number 2 by one partial. Play with a different variation from number 2. Play chromatically down from the closest positions to the furthest.

4. Rest briefly.

5. One advanced turn exercise based on one scale. Play the exercise up to one octave, or as close to one octave as possible.

6. Two or three combination exercises based on the same scale quality, but in a different key than number 5 (i.e., if number 5 was practiced on an A locrian scale play these combination exercises based on E flat locrian scales).

7. Rest briefly and then move on to other topics.

Again, these routines are just suggestions to get you started on developing your own system of practicing jazz flexibility. Modify, add, and subtract each exercise to suit your own needs and learning abilities.

Practical Application

Although the earlier exercises can be used primarily to improve lip flexibility, when approached correctly they can also have practical application towards jazz improvisation. As the astute reader may have already realized, practicing these flexibility exercises by basing them on a scale or chord arpeggio will allow you to apply these patterns as licks in your improvisation. Many great jazz trombonists make effective use of similar flexibility patterns in their improvisations. Here are a few examples.

Frank Rosolino

Perhaps the jazz trombonist best known for utilizing his incredible flexibility in his improvisations, Rosolino frequently played patterns in his improvisations which are very similar to the earlier exercises. Here is an excerpt from Rosolino's solo on the blues in F, *Now's the Time* which utilizes a set of turns and finishes with a fretting pattern.



Following is an excerpt from the same solo which utilizes a fretting pattern.

remember that you should become your own best teacher. Find the approach that works the best for you and continue to evaluate and improve upon your system. Over time you will be able to create your own unique style to playing jazz trombone.

Many of the techniques and ideas discussed in this article are not new or unique to the author. Readers who desire further information on general lip flexibility, jazz flexibility, and general trombone technique are directed to the following sources.

Arban, *Arban's Famous Conservatory Method for Trombone*. ed. Charles L. Randall and Simone Mantia. New York, NY: Calr Fischer, 1936.

Baker, Buddy. *Tenor Trombone Method, An Approach to Trombone Basics, Warm-Up, and Daily Routine For Tenor Trombone With or Without F-Attachment*. Miami, FL: Studio P/R, 1983.

Burtis, Sam. *The American Trombone*. Sam Burtis, 2001.

Kleinhammer, Edward. *The Art Of Trombone Playing*. Miami, FL: Summy-Birchard Inc., 1963.

Remington, Emory. *The Remington Warm-Up Studies, An Annotated Collection of the Famous Daily Routine Developed by Emory Remington at the Eastman School of Music*. ed. Donald Hunsberger. Athens, OH: Accura Music, 1980.

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Lip Flexibility for the Advanced Jazz Trombonist

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*** Pitch Organization**

Use the following chart to organize the pitches to start each day's routine.

* From Buddy Baker's *Tenor Trombone Method*, 1983, p. 85

Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat./Sun.

Fretting Studies Using 3 Partial

The first study consists of four staves of eighth-note patterns. The first staff has a '7' above the notes. The second staff has a '5' above the notes. The third staff has a sharp sign above the notes. The fourth staff has '4' and '5' above the notes, indicating fretting positions.

Fretting Using 3 Partial

Variation by transposing by half steps

The first study consists of two staves of eighth-note patterns. The first staff has a '7' above the notes. The second staff has a '6' above the notes, indicating a transposition by half step.

Fretting Using 3 Partial
Variation by transposing by half steps

Five staves of musical notation in bass clef, showing fretting variations for a 3-part fretting technique. The first staff uses the 5th fret with a flat key signature. The second staff uses the 6th fret with a sharp key signature. The third staff uses the 6th and 7th frets with a flat key signature. The fourth staff uses the 6th fret with a sharp key signature. The fifth staff uses the 6th fret with a natural key signature. Each staff contains two measures of eighth-note patterns and a final whole note chord.

Fretting Using 4 Partial

Three staves of musical notation in bass clef, showing fretting variations for a 4-part fretting technique. The first staff uses the 6th and 7th frets with a flat key signature, featuring triplets of eighth notes. The second staff uses the 4th fret with a flat key signature, also featuring triplets. The third staff uses the 4th and 5th frets with a flat key signature, featuring triplets. Each staff contains two measures of eighth-note patterns and a final whole note chord.

Fretting Using 4 Partial

Two staves of musical notation in bass clef. The first staff shows a sequence of four groups of four notes each, with a '4' above each group and a '3' below. The second staff shows a similar sequence with a '4' above each group and a '3' below. The notes are quarter notes, and the sequence ends with a whole note.

Fretting Using 5 Partial

Three staves of musical notation in bass clef. The first staff shows a sequence of four groups of five notes each, with a '4' and a '6' above each group and a '4' below. The second staff shows a sequence of four groups of five notes each, with a '5', a '6', and a '7' above each group and a '5' below. The third staff shows a sequence of four groups of five notes each, with a '3' above each group and a '3' below. The notes are quarter notes, and the sequence ends with a whole note.

Fretting Variations

Vary fretting patterns by starting on different pitches in the sequence and varying the rhythms and time signature

Two staves of musical notation in bass clef. The first staff shows a sequence of four groups of four notes each, with a '4' above each group and a '3' below. The second staff shows a sequence of four groups of four notes each, with a '4' above each group and a '3' below. The notes are quarter notes, and the sequence ends with a whole note.

Fretting Variations

Vary fretting patterns by starting on different pitches in the sequence and varying the rhythms and time signature

A single staff of music in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. The piece consists of a sequence of eighth notes, with the number '4' written above the first, third, and fifth measures, indicating a four-fret interval. The sequence ends with a whole note.

Turns

A single staff of music in bass clef with a common time signature (C). The first two measures are labeled 'notated' and show eighth notes with slurs. The next four measures are labeled 'played' and show a four-fret interval with the number '4' above each measure.

Turns, Foundation Exercises

Turns with adjacent positions

Three staves of music in bass clef. Each staff contains four measures of eighth notes with slurs, demonstrating turns between adjacent fret positions. The first staff uses a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff uses a key signature of two flats (Bb). The third staff uses a key signature of one flat (Bb) and includes a four-fret interval in the third measure.

Turns, Foundation Exercises

Turns with distances greater than one position

A single staff of music in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It contains four measures of eighth notes with slurs, demonstrating turns between fret positions that are more than one fret apart. A five-fret interval is indicated in the third measure.

Turns, Foundation Exercises

Turns on the same position

A single staff of music in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It contains four measures of eighth notes with slurs, demonstrating turns that occur on the same fret position across different strings.

Variations on Turns, Foundation Exercises

Two staves of musical notation. The first staff contains four measures of eighth-note runs with slurs and accents, each ending with a fermata. The second staff contains four measures of eighth-note runs with slurs and accents, each starting with a '4' indicating a four-measure turn and ending with a fermata.

Advanced Turn Exercises

Six staves of musical notation. The first staff has three measures of eighth-note runs with slurs and accents, each ending with a fermata. The second staff has three measures of eighth-note runs with slurs and accents, each ending with a fermata. The third staff has three measures of eighth-note runs with slurs and accents, each ending with a fermata. The fourth staff has three measures of eighth-note runs with slurs and accents, each ending with a fermata. The fifth staff has three measures of eighth-note runs with slurs and accents, each ending with a fermata. The sixth staff has three measures of eighth-note runs with slurs and accents, each ending with a fermata.

Combination Exercises

Practical Application
 Frank Rosolino's *Now's the Time*

Carl Fontana's *A Beautiful Friendship*

Conrad Herwig's *Code Blue*