

# HOW TO COMPOSE ETUDES

by Dr. Brian A. Shook

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*Etude: a musical composition, usually instrumental, intended mainly for the practice of some point of technique. (Dictionary.com)*

## I. Two Main Types of Etudes

### A. Borrowed Inspiration

- Take an excerpt or motive by a composer and develop it into an entire etude
- Only very minimal direct quoting allowed
- Ex. – Brandt No. 11; Snedecor No. 17

### B. Original

- Unique to you with no borrowed material
- Ex. – Shook No. 2

## II. Have a Specific Purpose in Mind

A. What level of ability? (college, high school, professional, etc.)

B. What style or genre?

1. Lyrical (ex. Charlier No. 2)
2. Rhythmical (ex. Longinotti No. 3)
3. Technical (ex. Clarke No. 86; Charlier No. 14)
4. Transposition (ex. Bordogni No. 3)
5. Classical, Baroque, Romantic, 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Serial, Modern, Programmatic, etc.
  - Ex. – Broiles No. 2 (Baroque)
6. Articulation (ex. Charlier No. 5)
7. Waltz, March, Jazz (not improv), Fanfare, etc.

C. Incorporate one or two specific challenges—these are the ***purpose*** of the etude

1. Finger Dexterity (ex. Clarke No. 86)
2. Range, Low and/or High (ex. Snedecor No. 17; Lichtmann No. 1)
3. Wide Leaps (ex. Fricke No. 33)
4. Specific Interval - TT, M6, m3, etc. (ex. Charlier No. 3)
5. Multiple Articulation (ex. Charlier No. 16)
6. Phrasing (ex. Petit No. 14)
7. Odd Meter (ex. Vannetelbosch No. 8)
8. Meter Changes (ex. Longinotti No. 7)

### III. How to Start

- A. Look at all of the examples in this packet
- B. Answer the questions above to narrow your focus
- C. Acquire a pencil and staff paper
- D. Begin improvising ideas
- E. Write down your improvised ideas even if they are only one measure long
- F. Compose coherent music by using these ideas and creating links between them
- G. If you still need inspiration, listen to other music and look at a variety of etudes to see what styles, rhythms, etc. composers use. Listen to and read the music as a *composer*, not a *trumpet player* and your eyes and ears will be opened to new possibilities.

### III. Requirements

- A. Etude must be at least one minute in length (no long tones!)
- B. If you are borrowing an idea, you must include a photocopy of the original
- C. *Must* be composed in Finale or Sibelius. If you have not had that class, then submit your etude on manuscript paper. The final copy is to be legible and look professional.
- D. ***On the sheet music***, indicate:
  - 1. Level of ability
  - 2. Style/genre
  - 3. Specific challenges you are addressing (approximately 2–3)
  - 4. Dynamics, articulations, etc.
  - 5. Needs to look publishable
  - 6. Use Shook Etude No. 2 as your format model
- E. Perform the etude in studio class
- F. Bring two (2) complete copies of your etude