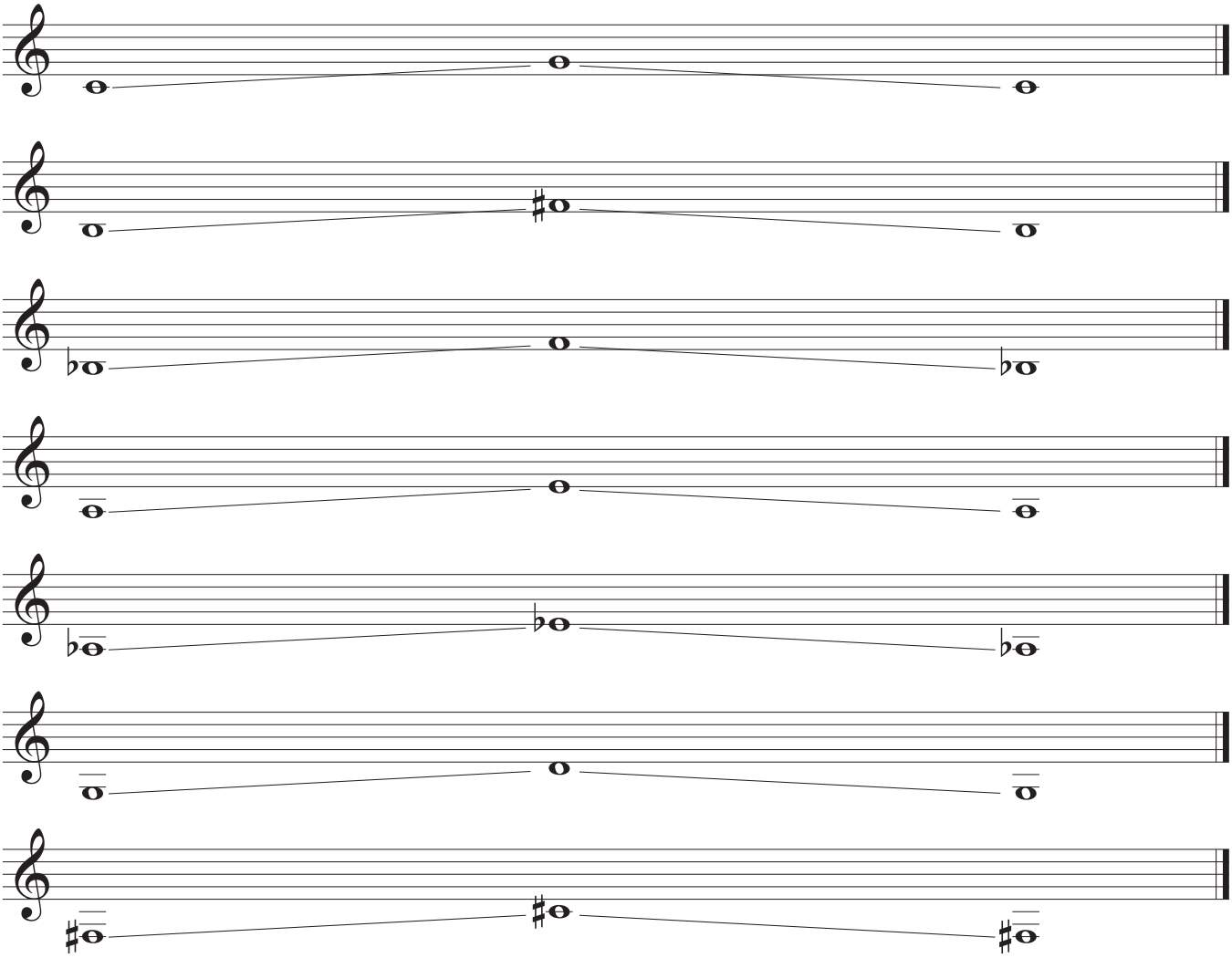
The Way of the Trumpet

Mouthpiece: Level 1

Partial definition exercises

The first level of mouthpiece exercises begins on the equivalent of the first open partial of the Bb trumpet. Begin by trying to create a solid buzzing sound with no fading or extra emphasis. With the help of a tuner, find C (concert Bb) and maintain the pitch. When able to keep the C stable with a beautiful sound, progress through the following exercises, using slow, gradual *glissandi* to transition between notes. Always keep an eye on the tuner, and keep **both** ears listening for inconsistencies in sound and pitch.



Note: For those of you armed with an iDevice or Android, I **highly** recommend the app called Tonal Energy. At the time of this writing, it sells for $3.99 on both the iOS App Store and Google Play. This app has a function that will allow the player to observe the smooth transitions between pitches by way of a pitch wheel, and this is the best way to determine if transitions are being performed correctly.

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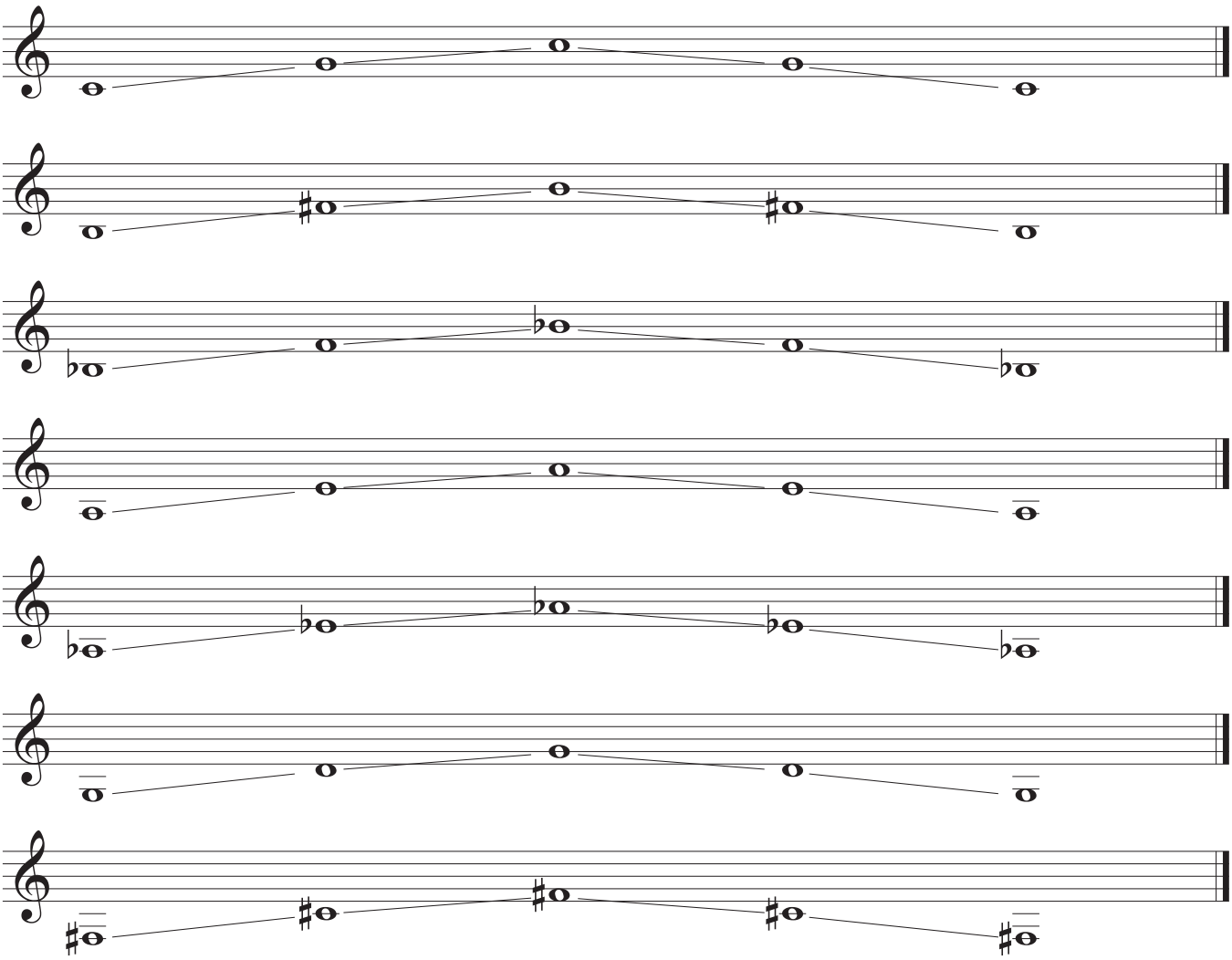
The Way of the Trumpet

Mouthpiece: Level 2

Partial definition exercises

The second level of mouthpiece exercises begins in the same place as the first, but progresses one partial higher. Use a smooth *glissando* to transition between partials. It may be tempting to stop on each partial as you try to stabilize the pitch, but the goal of this exercise is to achieve smooth transitions, which means no stopping. The written notes are transitory, so don't treat them like plateaus. Spend no more than a brief moment on the top before beginning your descent.



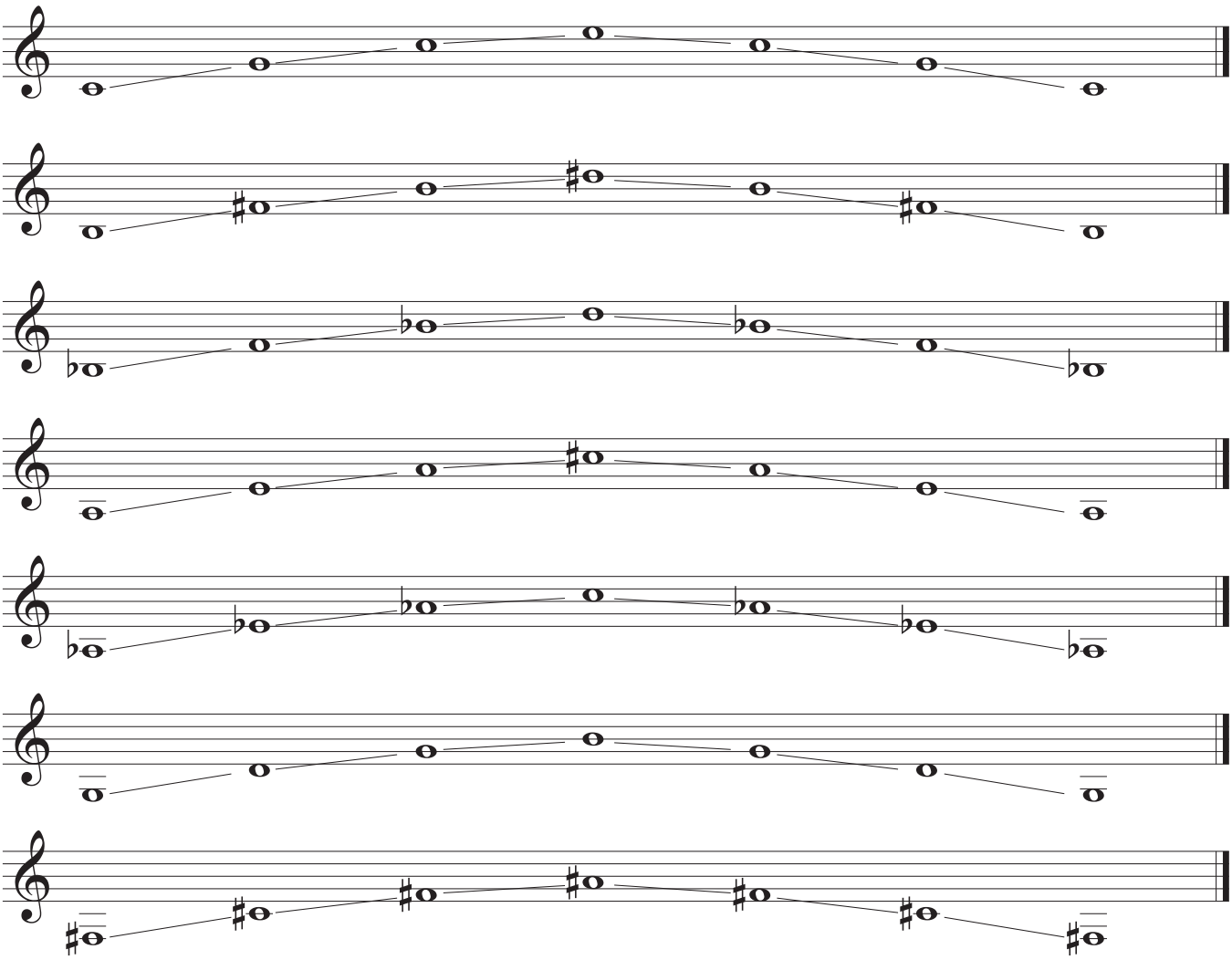
Note: The rhythmic values have not changed, but the exercise has gotten appreciably longer. Ideally, you should be able to play each exercise in one breath. This means that as we add partials in later exercises, you will be required to move more quickly through each marker. If you are having trouble pacing yourself without a pulse, you may temporarily use a metronome as a guide. Just be sure that as you are paying attention to the pulse, your focus, on both pitch and sound, does not waver.

The Way of the Trumpet

Mouthpiece: Level 3

Partial definition exercises

As the range demands increase, be wary of the temptation to use pressure rather than air speed to reach the top pitches. If you are struggling near the top, you may find yourself reacting by playing louder. This is counterproductive. If you are struggling at this point, it may be because your facial muscles lack the strength to maintain a proper aperture, and playing louder (more air) will only push your lips farther apart, resulting in a lower pitch. Play softer, and focus on air speed, not air volume.



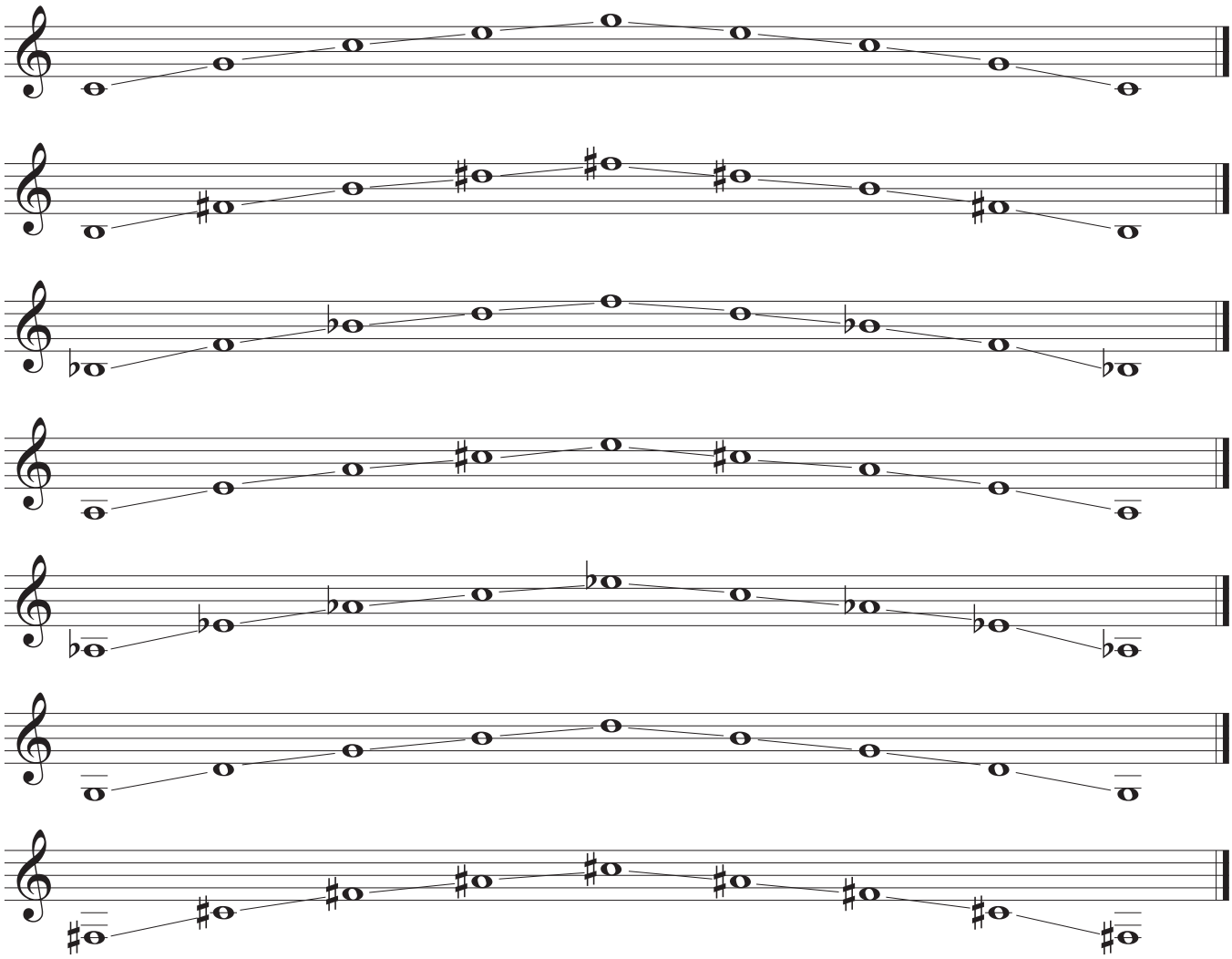
Note: At this point, it can be beneficial for a player to use a tone generator, like the aforementioned app Tonal Energy, or even a keyboard of some kind. The top partial is the third of the chord, which can be difficult to pin down for beginning students, so hearing the pitches beforehand can be helpful. Make sure that any method you use accounts for the key of the Bb trumpet. Tonal Energy has a transposition module, allowing for tones to be played in concert pitch or Bb trumpet pitch!

The Way of the Trumpet

Mouthpiece: Level 4

Partial definition exercises

We extend the exercise by one partial in the fourth level, up to G above the staff. This should be attempted once previous levels have achieved smooth transitions. Once you can reliably perform the previous exercises in one breath, attempt the same here. As we add notes to the progression, the tendency to rush becomes apparent. Avoid the temptation to speed through lower intervals in order to have enough air and strength for the highest partial, as that defeats the purpose of the exercise.

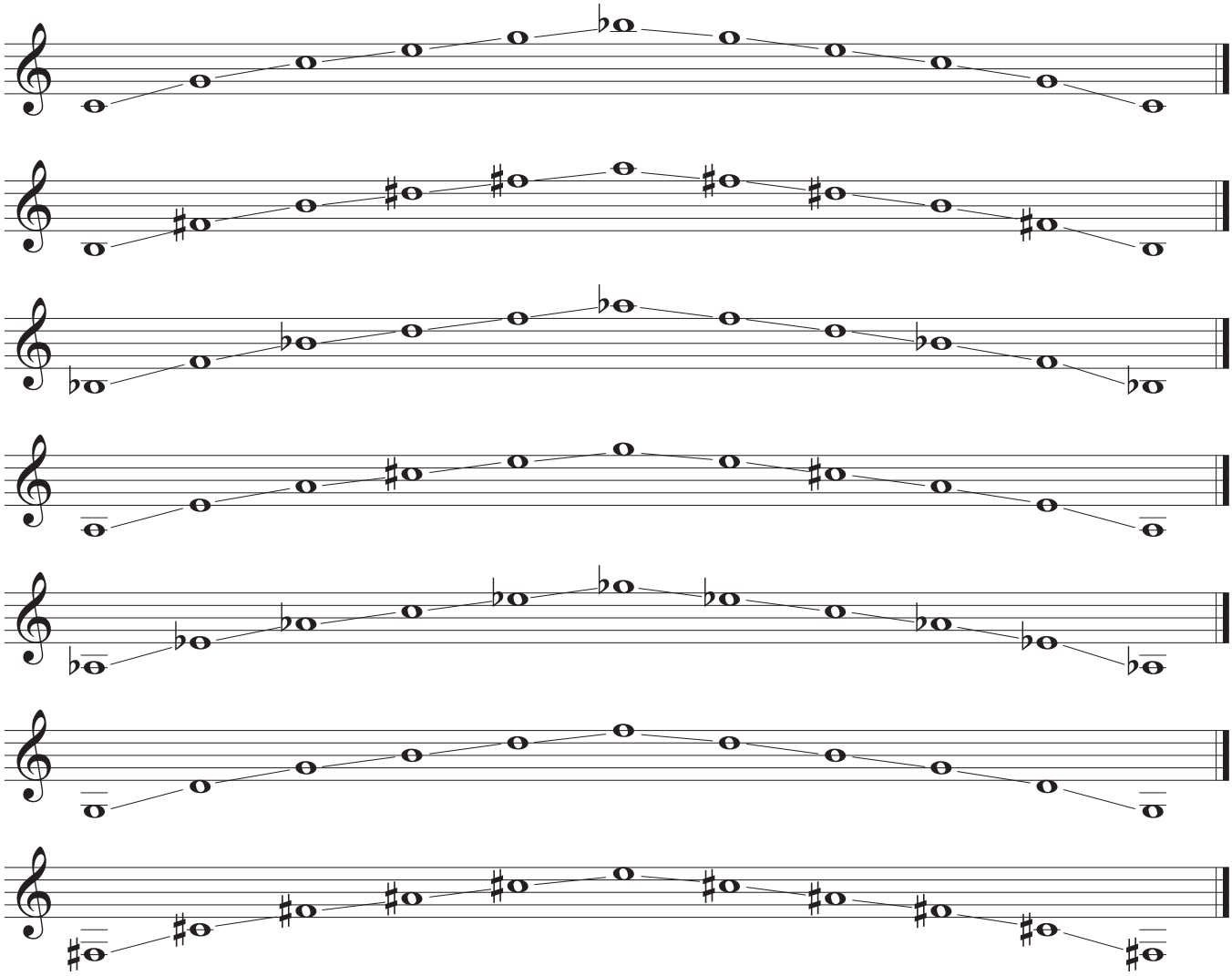


The Way of the Trumpet

Mouthpiece: Level 5

Partial definition exercises

As we approach the end of a trumpet's standard range, it is important for it to not **sound** like the end of a trumpet's standard range. For many players, habitual tightness associated with playing high notes becomes the greatest barrier to improvement. Playing this exercise in the most relaxed manner possible is the only way to succeed. If you are struggling to play the top partial without tension, give it time, but don't give up.



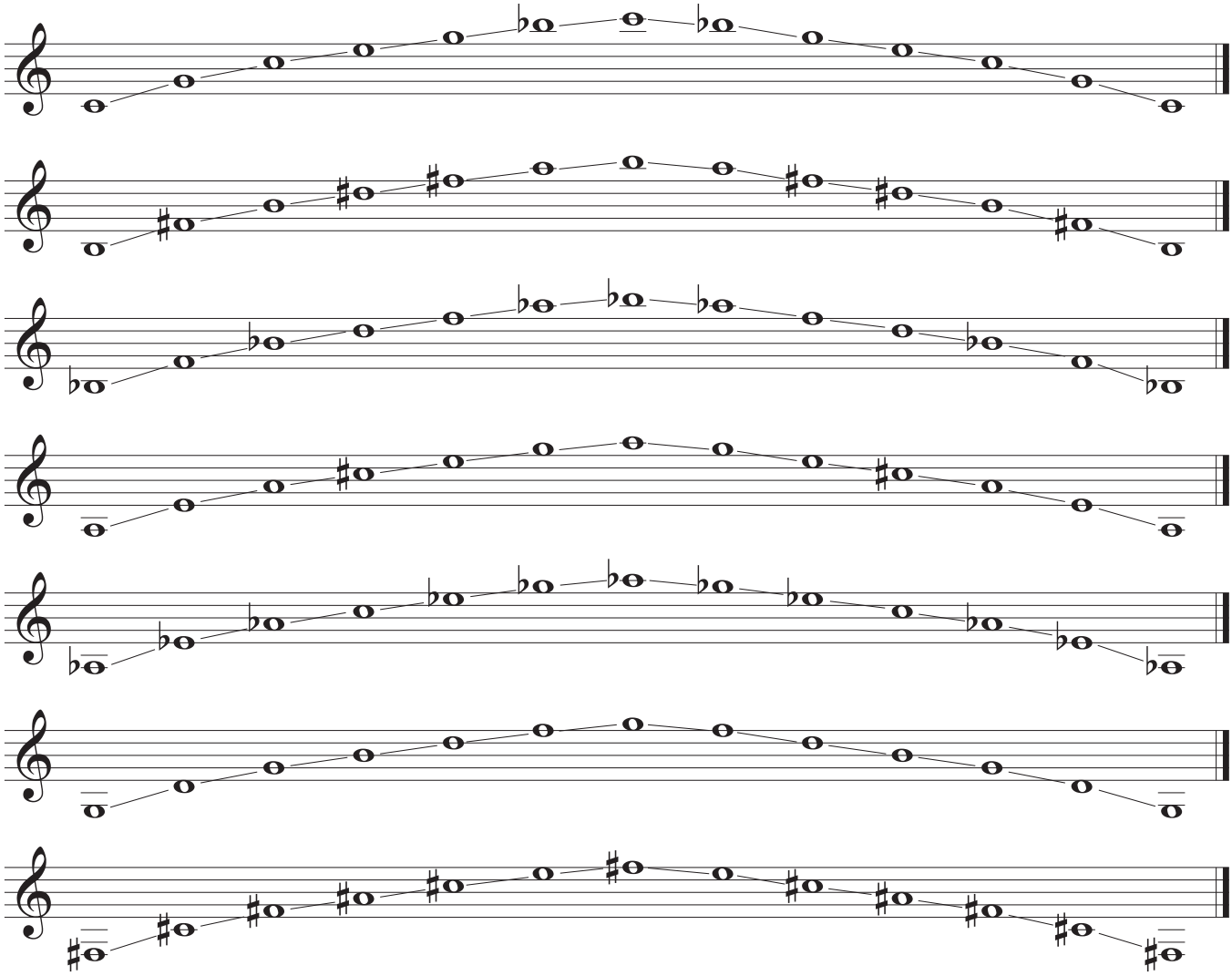
Note: Notice the top note here is a Bb. Why? That Bb can be played open on trumpet, and if this exercise were to be played on trumpet (as it will be later) the Bb will be a valid step on the way to C above the staff.

The Way of the Trumpet

Mouthpiece: Level 6

Partial definition exercises

The final level incorporates two full octaves of mouthpiece buzzing. Attempting this level means you can successfully perform the previous levels in one breath, with no pitch breaks, and with a beautiful sound. When able to play this exercise, gradually increase the speed until it is a smooth, quick *glissando* from bottom to top, and back down again.



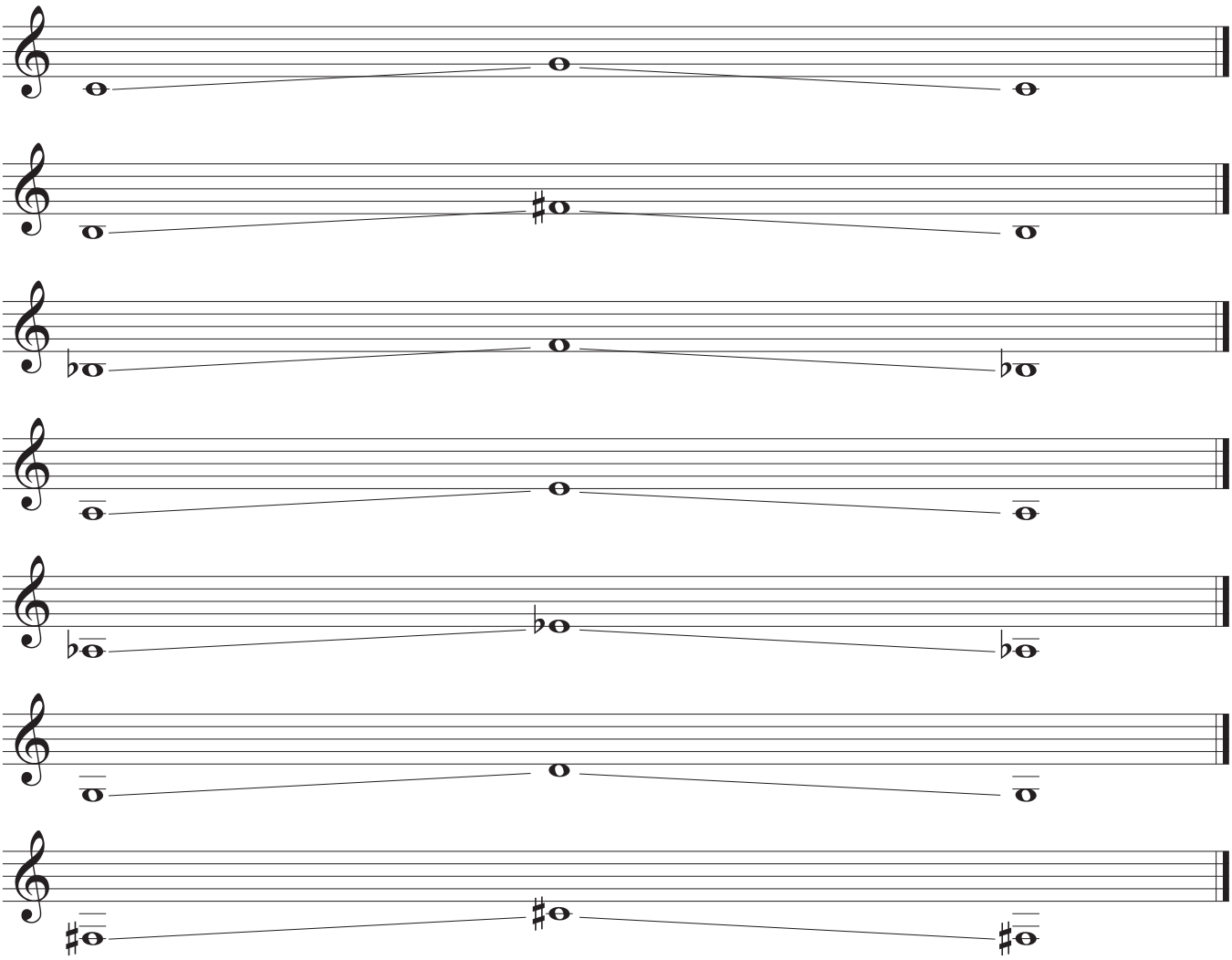
Note: If any specific intervals have given you trouble up to this point, it is acceptable to isolate them from the rest of the exercise in order to more accurately determine the problem. Frequently, an interval is troublesome because, whether consciously or subconsciously, a player will quickly tighten the embouchure, as if they are aiming for a specific note, rather than approaching the note gradually. These intervals are meant to be performed smoothly, and a sudden change in embouchure can result in whisper tones, a double buzz, or even a sudden and unwanted jump in pitch.

The Way of the Trumpet

Trumpet: Level 1

Partial definition exercises

In these exercises, we take what we have learned from the mouthpiece buzzing and apply it to slurs on the trumpet. In this first exercise, try to recreate the feeling of smoothly traversing the lowest partials on the mouthpiece. The physical mechanism should be identical between the mouthpiece and trumpet exercises, with the only difference being the addition of about 4 and a half feet of tubing.

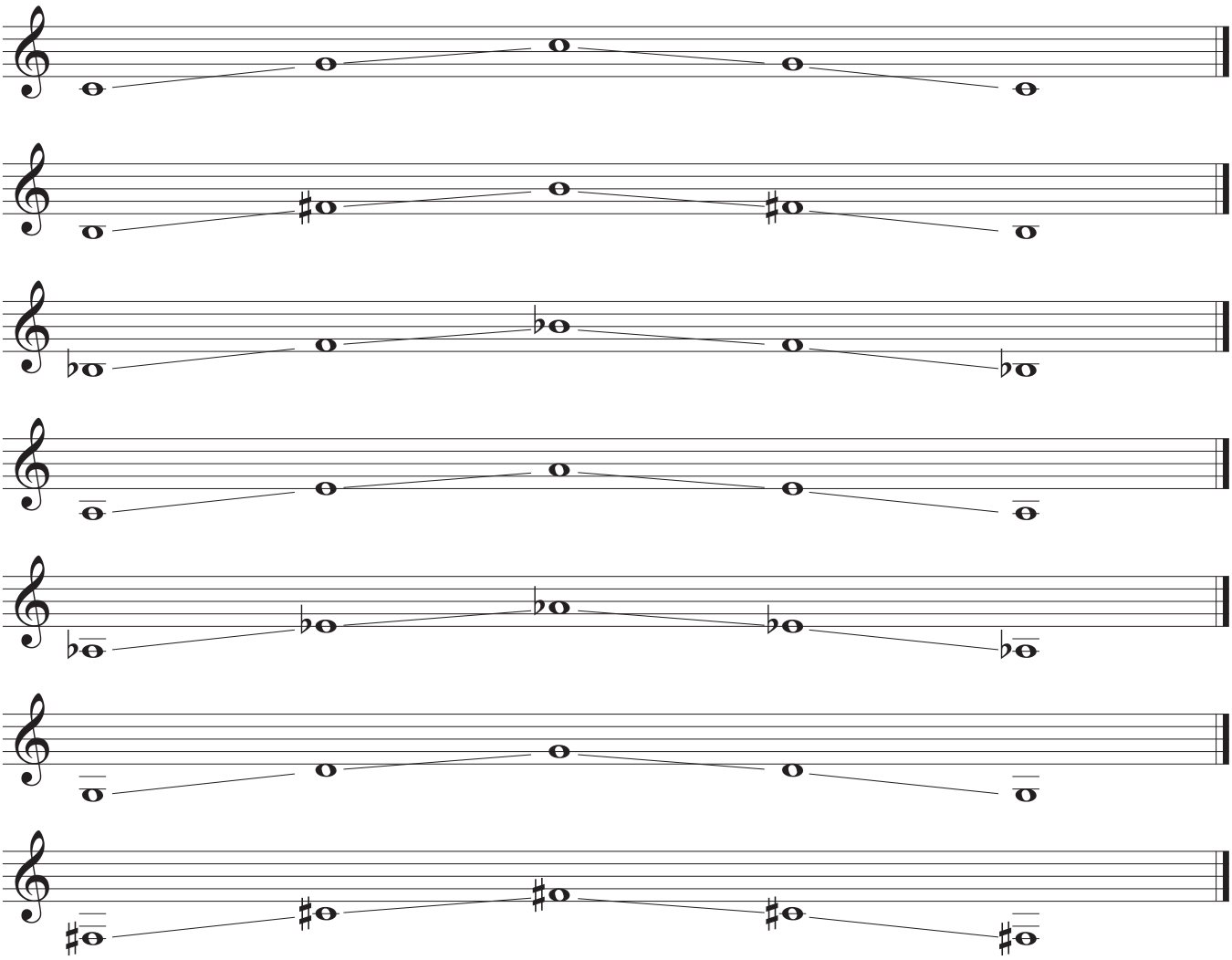


Note: This exercise should be performed with as little tension as possible! It may seem comparatively low, but many students begin every exercise with the same amount of tension, regardless of difficulty. Limit the tension in this exercise, and the level of tension in the final exercise will be significantly less.

Trumpet: Level 2

Partial definition exercises

We add the third partial here, extending the range to C in the staff. Many beginners feel the need to accent the top C, and use more air. As counterproductive as this is, it is extremely common. Remember, the purpose of this exercise is not solely hitting the right notes! More importantly, the purpose is to examine the method of transition between notes.

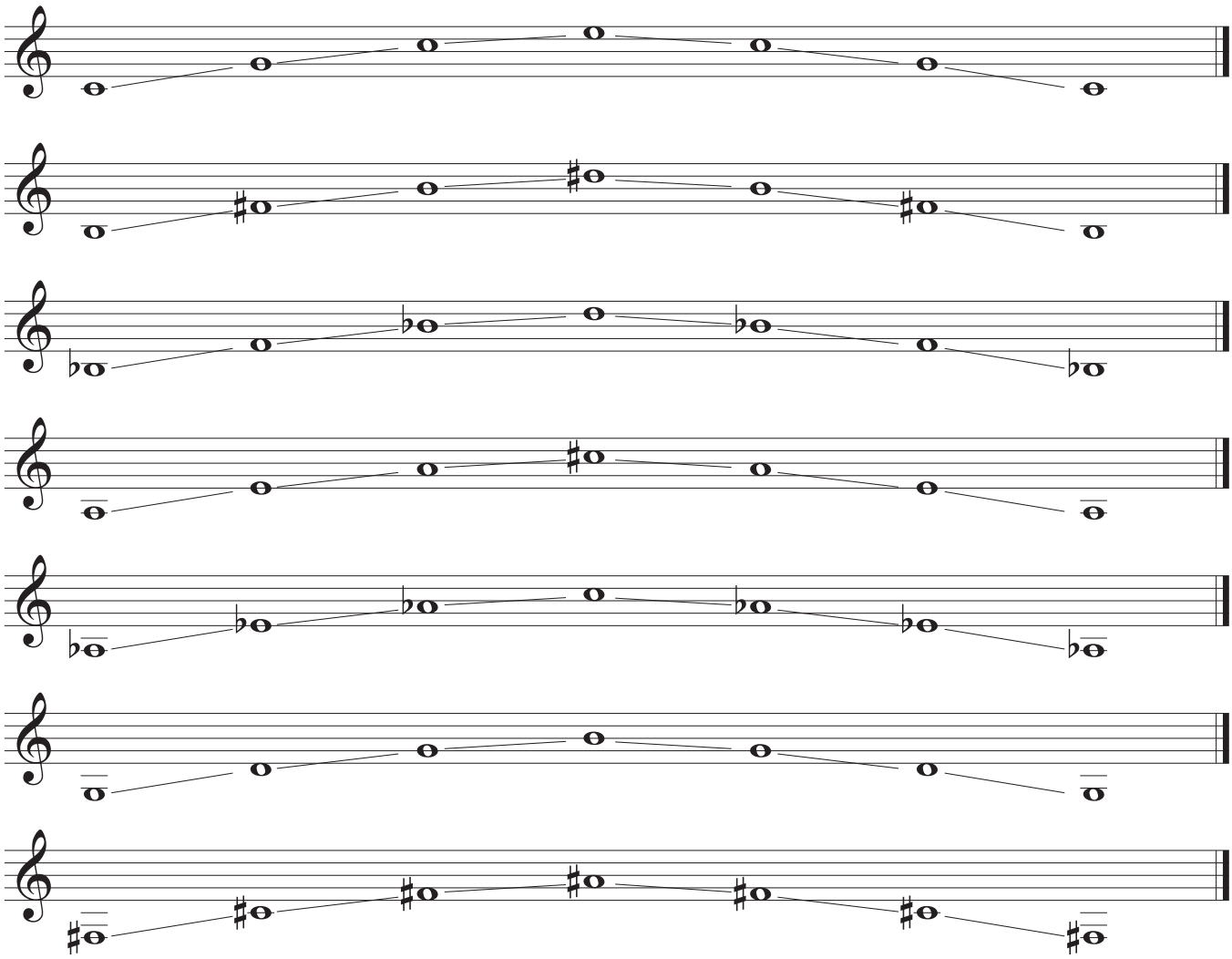


Note: Feel like you are playing flat or sharp between notes? Good! The transitions between notes should sound as much like a mouthpiece *glissando* as possible. Fight the tendency to play these transitions timidly, as this will often stop the sound. **There should be no breaks in sound between pitches!** If anything, this is where the emphasis *should* be!

Trumpet: Level 3

Partial definition exercises

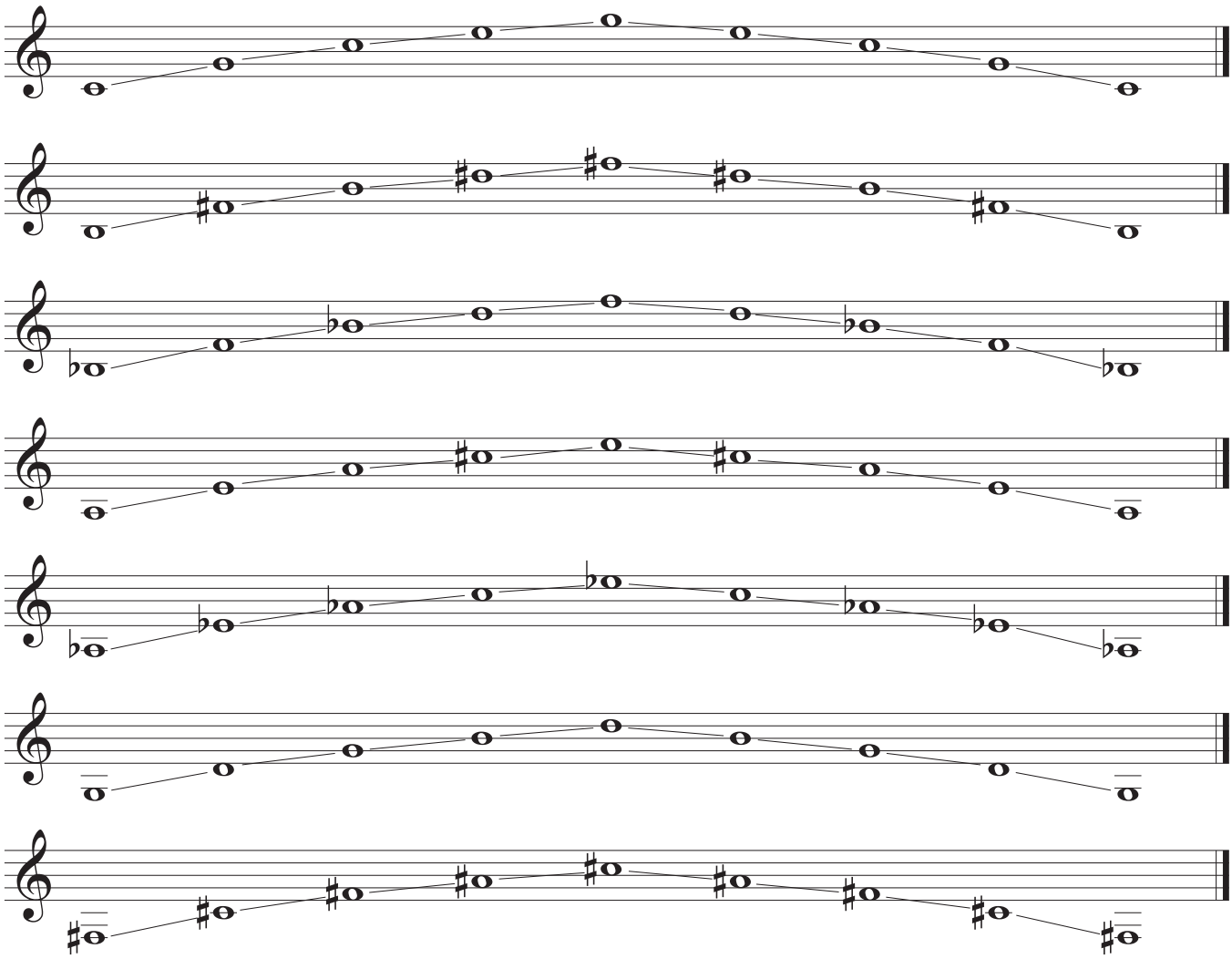
Level 3 adds the third on top. If you find that you are struggling at this point, return to the mouthpiece, and use a pitch generator to find the note. Alternatively, begin the exercise on the lowest fingering, that is, the low F#, and move up from there.



Trumpet: Level 4

Partial definition exercises

The purpose of this exercise is to slowly make our way upwards with absolute minimum force and tension. Many students are tempted to hold back on the low notes to save air and strength for the top notes. As mentioned before, this is not ideal. Instead, try to *diminuendo* as you ascend, taking advantage of less air volume to maintain better control of your aperture. This will help avoid an embouchure too spread to function properly and will help play the top notes without a harsh sound.

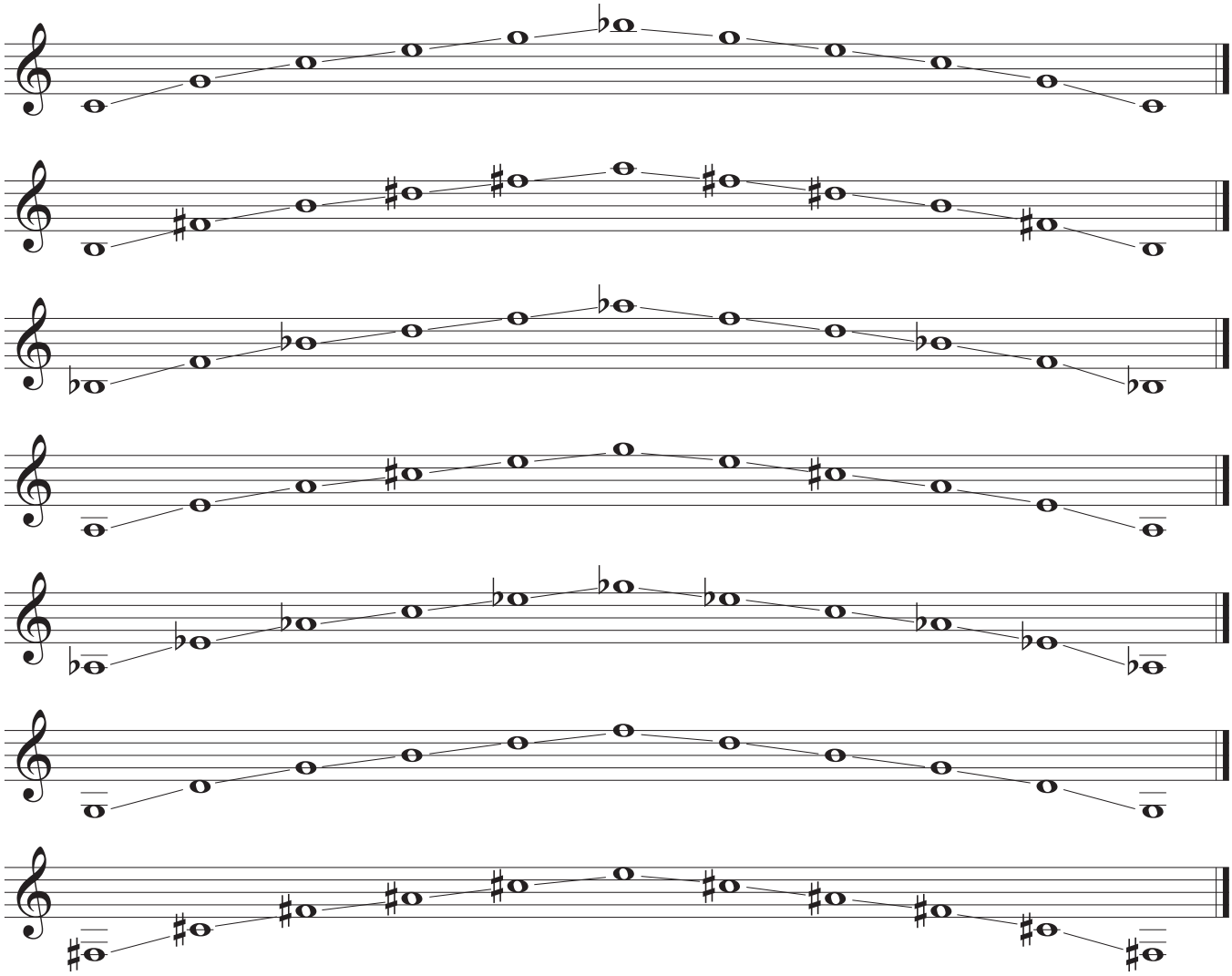


The Way of the Trumpet

Trumpet: Level 5

Partial definition exercises

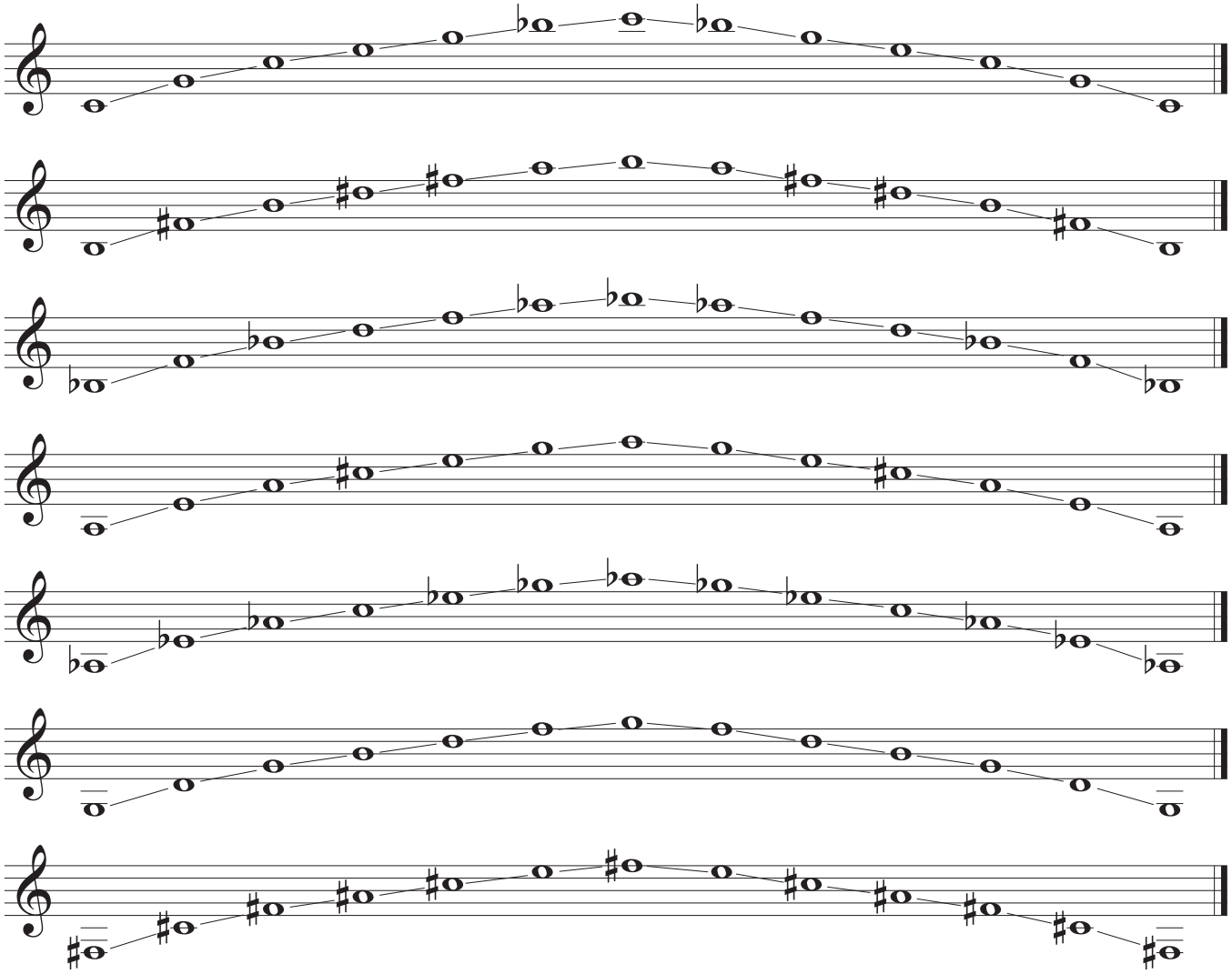
While the Bb above the staff is not usually played open, it should be in this exercise. It is a valid step to C above the staff, and being comfortable playing it open means you will almost certainly be comfortable playing it first valve. As we approach the top of standard trumpet range, the sound cannot be allowed to spread or whimper. Maintaining control of our air pressure and aperture is critical.



Trumpet: Level 6

Partial definition exercises

Playing this final exercise means the previous exercises can be played in one breath with a beautiful, uninterrupted sound. C above staff is the final note here, but these exercises can be extended to include notes well into the stratosphere. As always, pay close attention to the transitions, more so than the notes themselves. And remember, this is **NOT** a high note contest...



For Advanced Students: Gradually increase the speed of these exercises until they can be played multiple times in the span of one breath. At higher speeds, it should resemble a true *glissando*, and when played quickly and efficiently, it can result in remarkably improved slurring capabilities.