

PRACTICE TIPS & TECHNIQUES

THE PRACTICE COMMANDMENTS

- Practice everyday. Short daily practice sessions are more effective than long practice sessions once or twice a week.
- Set realistic short and long-range goals; this ensures progress and focus.
- Focus on accomplishing something during each practice session.
- Play everything musically with a good tone as if you are performing for others.
- Practice slowly, relax, and breathe properly with a good posture.
- Write in your practice log to help you monitor your progress
- Keep a positive attitude and don't overreact to mistakes.
- Look for connections between your music and other aspects of your life.
- Focus on improving difficult sections of assigned private lesson, theory and ensemble music. Work on your challenges, don't ignore the tough stuff!
- Combine repertoire, theory, and improvisation with technical skill to maximize the benefits of the practice session.
- Know how to practice. Unfocused practice is negative practicing!

PERSONALIZED PRACTICE AREA HAVEN

This is your dedicated practice area. It is very important for you to take the time to set up your space properly, so that getting to the point where you're actually playing music requires very little time. Save your focus and energy for practicing and learning the music; not searching for a lamp, pencil or metronome. You will look forward to stepping into your personalized, well functioning, peaceful practice haven each day. Here are some suggestions for creating your dedicated practice space:

- Create a comfortable, welcoming practice space in a separate, uncluttered location away from distractions.
 - Make sure your space is set up with proper lighting.
 - Include inspirational pictures, posters, awards, musical gifts.
 - Include a music stand to display your music.
 - Give yourself easy access to your instrument with an instrument stand. Don't put your instrument somewhere where it will get sat on, fall over, slide off, or in some other way damaged.
 - Use a good chair that supports proper posture.
 - Position a mirror to monitor your technique and posture.
 - Keep practice tools accessible. Tools include: computer, metronome, clock, practice log, pencils, music paper, recording device, sound system (for computer, mp3 player, CDs etc.)
 - Dampen sound reflection. (Ex. Use fabric wall hangings, open closet doors to expose clothes, fill cracks around doors, add insulation to walls, etc.)
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3 PRACTICE SESSION CHOICES

SHORT PRACTICE SESSION – (10 TO 15 MINUTES)

This short practice session can be a playing practice session or a quiet practice session. It can also occur during TV commercial breaks, while commuting or as a break from school homework and other non-musical activities. Don't discount the benefits of a short practice session. Short sessions are useful- they definitely start to add up and can give you musical ideas to think about throughout the day.

5 MINUTES: Warm-up exercises - Breathing, Relaxation, and Focus Exercises. Examples include: piano scales, guitar fingering exercises, drum rudiments, saxophone overtone exercises, trumpet lip flexibility exercises, and lip trills and vocal slides for singers. Jump in and warm up- it's fun!

5-10 MINUTES: Review Homework (e.g. scales, chords, licks, songs, etc.) from Private Lesson Assignments, Theory Assignments, Ensemble Assignments.

MEDIUM PRACTICE SESSION – (15 TO 40 MINUTES)

This can be a focused playing session alone, with a partner or as part of an ensemble rehearsal. It can be more effective if it is consistently scheduled within a daily routine such as during school, between school homework tasks, or during a time that fits in with family routines.

15-20 MINUTES: Warm-up exercises - Breathing, Relaxation, and Focus Exercises. Examples include: piano scales, guitar fingering exercises, drum rudiments, saxophone overtone exercises, trumpet lip flexibility exercises, and lip trills and vocal slides for singers.

Technique drills - Play chords, chord progressions, scales and licks through the Circle of 5ths. Try rhythmic sight-reading, or solfege sight-reading. Do you always warm up with just one type of scale? If it is always major scales, next try minor, or blues or pentatonic.. be sure you are always expanding your scale horizons! Use etudes, transcriptions, and other exercises to gauge and improve technical skill. Always try to get more out of your session by combining theory with technique.

15-20 MINUTES: Review Homework (e.g. scales, chords, licks, songs, etc.) from Private Lesson Assignments, Theory Assignments, Ensemble Assignments

10-15 MINUTES: Play a musical "barometer" - This is a challenging piece or exercise that you play to test your ability and playing level on any given day. Use etude, solo transcription, exercise from assigned (Level-based) repertoire.

EXTENDED PRACTICE SESSION – (40 MINUTES OR MORE WITH BREAKS)

This is a combination of short and medium length practice sessions separated by breaks. Use an extended session for a performance, audition, competition, or recording session. Include some creative time for improvising, playing songs, composing, or exploring. Use play-a-long recordings or performance resources on the PULSE website, or make time for self-recording and assessment. Most importantly have fun and enjoy playing your instrument!!

QUIET PRACTICING TECHNIQUES

Use these techniques when playing aloud is not possible, such as when you are commuting, when you have time before rehearsals, or when you do not want to disturb others near you. These are very valid and useful forms of practice!

CREATIVE MIND EXERCISES WITHOUT WRITTEN MUSIC

- Listening - Focus on listening to music related to private lesson, theory, and ensemble materials.
- Imagining - Imagine yourself playing the chords changes to a song, or performing comfortably on stage.
- Reading - Read inspirational books and articles about music or other subjects that apply to your instrument or broaden your creativity.

CREATIVE MIND EXERCISES WITH MUSIC

- Audiating - Use the "inner ear" to hear the music inside your head
- Solfege - Read music using syllables (do, re, mi, etc.)

PHYSICAL EXERCISES WITHOUT AN INSTRUMENT

- Breathing Exercises - Deep breathing, short bursts of air, etc.
- Relaxation Techniques - Meditative exercises, peaceful mental images.
- Stretching - Whole body exercises.
- Range of Motion- Exercises based on specific muscle groups with a different focus for different instrumentalists.

PHYSICAL EXERCISES WITH INSTRUMENT

- Holding Instrument - Practice fingerings silently while "improvising" and reading music internally.
- Breathing air through the instrument - Practice holding air through passages and increase lung capacity.

PRACTICE SESSION PEP TALK

- Celebrate small accomplishments! Congratulate yourself as you incrementally work to improve your tone, control, reading and improvisational skills.
 - Continue to expand your repertoire (jazz, contemporary, traditional literature) You can learn so much from exploring various styles of music, and you will never get bored!
 - Work on memorization; pick songs you love to play!
 - Continue to challenge your professional goals by increasing your range, speed, and endurance.
 - Keep at it, have fun! Be patient and persistent and watch yourself blossom into a better musician each week.
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