

There is an old anecdote about a young musician who travels to New York City to hear his musical hero live in concert. As he makes his way through the streets of NYC he gets lost and inquires to a gentleman sitting on a park bench. "Excuse me!" "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?" The older gentleman looks up and responds, "Practice man, Practice!"

The reality is...most students do not practice; they play what they already know.

WHAT IS PRACTICE?

Practice is the opportunity to make a habit of perfect playing. We must strive to play it perfectly the first time.

**"Practice does not make perfect, PRACTICE makes PERMANENT!
PERFECT practice makes PERFECT!"**

Many people confuse sitting in a practice room with their instrument in their lap for an extended period of time as practice. Practice involves working on areas that need improvement, while maintaining the areas that we already do well. **Practice requires actual work!** Practice is not always fun, but is necessary to becoming a better musician.

*Amateurs practice until they play it right.
Professionals practice until they cannot play it wrong!*

The KEY to success is DEVELOPING POSITIVE PRACTICE HABITS!

AREN'T PRACTICING AND REHEARSING THE SAME THING?

NO! Practice is done outside of rehearsal and is designed to prepare the performer to contribute musically/emotionally to the ensemble experience. In general, we learn our music (notes, rhythms, dynamics, etc.) at home, but we put it all together and create an ensemble at school. Practice is when we get better as individuals! Rehearsal is when we get better as a group!

WHERE SHOULD I PRACTICE?

Musicians will have more focused and effective practice with the creation of a specific practice area. A great practice area should include:

- Good chair - Comfortable, but flat, keeping the legs straight and the body seated upright
 - *Knees should never be higher than the waist
 - ***Do Not** use the back of the chair
- Good lighting - Sunlight is best!
- Fresh Air/Fresh Water
- Instrument Stand - Having your instrument readily available is a key!
- Good Music Stand - Height adjustable - Desk Angle adjustable
- Music Accessories
- Quiet location
 - *Void of distractions
 - *Neat/Organized
 - *Know where everything is so you are not spending your time looking for something.

WHAT MUSIC ACCESSORIES SHOULD I OWN?

In addition to a quality musical instrument, all serious students should own the following music accessories.

- Pencil, Notebook
- Quality Working Instrument
- Metronome (See Instrument Requirements Handout)
- Tuner (See Instrument requirements Handout)
- Recording Equipment (It does not have to be state-of-the-art.)
- Music Stand, Instrument Stand
- Pocket Music Dictionary
- Cleaning Supplies
- Instrument specific needs (See Instrument Requirements Handout)

WHEN SHOULD I PRACTICE?

Try to create a practice routine that allows you a consistent schedule everyday. **YES, EVERY DAY!** If you are someone who schedules in a planner, make it a point to pencil in practice as a daily commitment. A consistent practice regimen is one of the best tools for success available to musicians.

HOW LONG SHOULD I PRACTICE?

As a high school musician, a student should practice somewhere between thirty (30 to forty-five (45) minutes every day. **YES, EVERY DAY!** Students who wish to excel in the top ensembles, All-State, and select ensembles may need to schedule even more practice. No matter how much time is spent practicing, the key is to practice everyday. (Ten minutes everyday is much better than 90 minutes once a week.)

Remember, practice is the time spent improving your ability on your instrument, not the amount of time that you are in the practice room. Thinking about practicing does not count!0) Practice is a physical activity and should be approached as such. (Be sure to rest as much as you play!)

A great way to approach your practice is... **Don't Set a Clock; SET A GOAL!**

*Keep in mind that the bigger the goal, the more time it will take to achieve.

WHAT SHOULD I PRACTICE?

High school musicians **ALWAYS** have stuff to work on, even during school holidays and throughout the summer. Practicing the following materials will make every practice session positive and productive. Utilize a tuner and a metronome to really make it happen.

- Breathing
 - *Planned breathing during a musical passage "If you fail to plan your breathing, plan to fail playing musically!"
- Long Tones/Remington Exercises
- Scales
- Articulation Exercises
 - *Mendez Tonguing Exercise - Set the metronome to a comfortable tempo and tongue 4 sixteenth notes pre click for exactly one minute. Never take a break longer than one beat to breath. Use your middle register at a medium dynamic.
- Flexibilities/Range Extension
- Ensemble Music
 - *Work on the music that you cannot already play, **not the stuff that already sounds good.**
- Private Lesson Material
- Sight-Reading
- Play-Alongs / Improvisation

WHAT SHOULD I LISTEN FOR DURING MY PRACTICE?

Students should be listening for all of the musical concepts that we discuss during an ensemble rehearsal. The goal is to get everyone to sound the same on their particular instrument. Your practice session could be broken down into four areas of concentration.

- 1) Sound
- 2) Rhythm
- 3) Technique
- 4) Interpretation

Ask yourself these questions.

- Is the sound consistent in all registers/ranges?
- Is the sound beautiful (Warm, dark, rich, etc.)
- Is the sound clear?
- Is the tempo consistent?
- Am I playing the correct notes?
- Am I playing the correct rhythms?
- Am I playing the correct dynamics?
- Am I using proper technique, posture, hand positions, embouchure placement, etc.?
- Am I getting better, or am I wasting time?

Your first practice session with a new piece of music should be broken up into short passages that need to be worked out. As you become more familiar with a piece and closer to performance, the phrases should get longer until you are performing the entire piece.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT I CAN DO TO ENHANCE MY PRACTICE SESSION?

- I expect students to perform perfectly!! So should you. We cannot take a timeout in the middle of a performance if things aren't going well. We can't substitute new players in if the performers on stage are having a bad night. Everyone must strive for perfection.
*If there are one hundred performers on stage and everyone misses just one note, we have missed one hundred notes during a piece of music. In English class this means that everyone gets a 99% and an A for the course. In music, this means that people stop coming to our concerts.
"Strive for Perfection...Accept Nothing Less!!"
- Repetition...The key to developing greater expertise lies in the willingness to invest personal time and energy with a disciplined desire to accomplish a higher degree of competence.
"Practice makes Permanent...Perfect Practice makes Perfect."
- Always practice in a positive frame of mind!
- Record yourself. Recordings do not lie! Here is a chance for you to really evaluate what you sound like. Look beyond correct notes and rhythms and listen to whether you are playing musical phrases, dynamics, articulations, breathing correctly, etc.
- Transcribe! Use your ears and recreate the music of the masters!
- Practice with a partner. You can critique each other, play together, enjoy duets, etc.
- Practice with a pro. There are so many resources today that allow you to "play-along", take advantage of the opportunity to learn from a master.
- Listen, Listen, Listen! Make a point of exposing yourself to great music, performed by great players and great ensembles. Build a recordings library of professional performers and ensembles.

DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS/TRICKS FOR PRACTICING?

There are no gimmicks that will help you become a better musician. Great performances come from great performers who have "Paid their Dues". Here are some tips/tricks which may help you when practicing.

- Don't always start at the beginning. Begin with the problem passages.
- Slow it down. A LOT!!!! This means...as slowly as necessary to play everything perfectly, then gradually speed it up to performance tempo. The best way to do this is 2-4 clicks at a time. Play it at a given tempo until it is perfect and then bump it up 2-4 clicks. If you miss something, take it back down and do it again.
- Speed it up. This means...play a slow passage faster than written and gradually slow it down to performance tempo.
- Count it aloud! "If you can't count it, you can't play it...If you can't play it, you can't perform it."
- Write in the beats, or use arrows if needed
- Say it...then Play it! Say the notes aloud. Say the notes aloud while fingering (Slam down the valves/keys). Play it.
- Change the articulation. This is one of my favorites...Tongue a slurred passage to line the fingers up with the tongue. It will stop you from rushing slurred passages
- Add a note. Play the passage slowly (with a metronome) by beginning with one note and then adding notes one at a time.
- Back to basics (Tone Production is key!). Focus on sound quality above all else to keep you focused when you get distracted.
- Attitude is Everything! If you are not motivated to practice, DON'T. You are just wasting your time and reinforcing a negative connotation.
- Be Patient...Greatness takes time.
- Be consistent!
- Set goals! Challenge yourself!
- Have fun!

DO YOU WANT TO GET REALLY GOOD?

Are you up for the challenge? Try this exercise for two weeks and see how drastically your performance improves.

PENNY EXERCISE

- Place a stack of (20) pennies on the music stand.
*You can use less depending on how brave you are!
- Play the passage you are trying to perfect.
- Every time you play the passage perfectly, move a penny to the other side of the stand.
- Variation #1 (Low Stress Option)
*Play until all 20 pennies have been moved to the other side of the stand.
- Variation #2 (High Stress Option)
*Play until all 20 pennies have been moved to the other side of the stand, but every time you make a mistake you must move all of the pennies back to the starting point.

*This exercise will only work if you commit to not leave the practice room until you have accomplished your goal. Remember...If you can play your music perfectly 4 out of 5 times, your are playing incorrectly 20% of the time.

**The penny exercise is also great when working towards an audition or recording session.

“PRO”*ACTIVE* PRACTICE

Many young musicians mistakenly equate the methods of music practice with those of music performance. They sit down, play their music from beginning to end, and are done – and they call it practice. Most students do not realize that they are wasting a tremendous amount of time and energy by “practicing” this way. As you try to improve, you repeat the same mistakes over and over, needlessly performing parts that you already perform well and wastefully passing over parts that need real work. The mistakes that you are hoping to fix are eventually repeated incorrectly so many times that the mistakes become ingrained and very difficult to correct. Consequently, the music seems much harder than it really is. A 20-minute practice session feels like two hours of drudgery, and you finish the practice session in frustration rather than with a sense of accomplishment.

“PRO”*Active* Practice

“PRO” refers to a professional approach. “*Active*” refers to being engaged in getting better.

“PRO”*Active* Practice encourages musicians to make intelligent decisions before ever playing a note. These decisions may relate to technique, rhythm, phrasing, interpretation, or style, etc. In this method, students approach music like a large puzzle that they dissect, interpret, reassemble, and demonstrate. This efficient and effective method of music mastery can lead to great musicianship and personal reward.

STEP ONE - Make life easier... Mark your music!

- Write in accidentals, counting, intonation tendencies, etc.
- Bracket sections to be worked on

STEP TWO - Budget your time!

- Set small reachable goals that can be attained in the practice time you have available.

STEP THREE - Learn the feel!

- Determine a successful practice tempo for each difficult passage and “Woodshed”
- Repeat, Repeat, Repeat! The goal is to gain control and fluency...not speed.

STEP FOUR - Evaluate!

- Good enough?

Someone who practices correctly for one year
will become a better player than someone who practices incorrectly for five years.

**Practice does not make perfect,
Practice makes permanent.
Perfect practice makes perfect!!**