

Home Practice Guide

It is important for musicians to understand how to practice their instruments to get the maximum result in the allotted time. How and what you practice are almost more important than how long you practice. While time is an important part of practicing, understanding how to plan and organize a practice session, diagnose problems, prescribe solutions and establish habits should be the main focus of any great musician. This guide will help you in accomplishing your goals in the most efficient way possible.

With every exercise, line of music or assignment, you must have the following:

- **Purpose (Goal)** - ask yourself "Why am I doing this exercise?"
- **Mental Image (Model)** - you must create an image of what you want to sound like in your mind. Without that image, you will never know if you are reaching your goal.
- **Diagnosis (Grade yourself)** - simply giving yourself your honest opinion about your performance. What were the positives and what were the negatives?
- **Prescription (Solution or Correction)** - you must determine what techniques have been used in class to solve your particular problems.
- **Establish a Habit (Correct Repetition)** - once you have corrected the problem, you must repeat the correction many times (20 or so) to make the correction a natural part of your playing.

Sports Analogy

Imagine yourself as a sports team. Only every time you play a piece of music correctly (up to your standards) you win, and every time you play a piece of music incorrectly (below your standards) you lose. One example might be this:

1 - 4

After playing a part of your music, you get it correct on the 5th time. This means your sports record is 1 win and 4 losses. This would be a very poor team. Essentially, you have played it correctly once and incorrectly four times.

5 - 4

After you get it correct, you then get it correct a total of 5 times in a row. Now your record is 5 wins and 4 losses. This is a winning record, but about average. Any top notch sports team would not be happy with this record.

15 - 5

After you get it correct 5 times in a row, you proceed to get it correct another ten times. You may actually make a mistake from time to time, but you are essentially playing it correct three times for every time you get it incorrect. This gives you a .750 winning percentage, much like a great sports team such as the Pistons (late 80's/early 90's) Lakers, Bulls (with Jordan), Red Wings (Stanley Cup years), Cowboys (early 90's) or Yankees.

These types of repetition, once done properly, will not be too time consuming, but they do take self-discipline and diligence. Having enough control over yourself to not move forward until you are certain you understand a concept is very important.

Bad Habits

When repeating items in this manner, it is vital that you are performing the item correctly. If you are not, you could end up establishing bad habits. In sports terms, you might actually be digging yourself into a hole such as a 4 wins 15 losses record. (Yikes!!) So, it is important that with every repetition, you continue to correct and focus on the diagnosis and prescription portion of your practice routine.

Session Organization

It is important that your practice sessions cover the right aspects of your playing. Try to think of your practice in terms of 4 different sections. The following aspects should be covered each practice session. There are many different exercises that could fit in to each section. Throughout the week, you can spread out the exercises so you do not do the same exact routine every time.

Tone Development - It is good to start the practice with exercises that help to develop your tone quality. This might involve breathing exercises, fundamental sounds, mouthpiece work, long tones or other tone building exercises. Some exercises for this portion might be:

Technical Studies - The next aspect will be your ability to “get around” on your instrument. In other words, how well can you move from one note to the next with great hand position and great tone quality? Notice that this is a build up process. Tone development is still a priority in this portion of the practice session. Some exercises for this section might be:

New Material – It is always a good idea to try to introduce or review new material in every lesson. You may have just gone over something new in band class or lessons that you need to review the same day you first tried it. You might also just want to read a new piece of music to help your sight-reading skills. Rhythm counting and note-naming are two great ways to improve and refine your music reading skills.

Musical Studies – This portion of the practice time is where most people spend all of their time. This is your chance to refine the finer points of material that you have been working on for class or lessons. Playing tests and band music are prime examples of music that should be worked on during this time. Detail work is your goal. Consistency with those details is important – again, use your sports analogy. What type of team do you want to be on your given material?

***Planning, self-discipline, diligence and consistency will pay off!!
Playing a musical instrument is more mental than physical.
Make sure you have “think time” in your practice sessions.***