

Practice Tips

MAKE PRACTICE A PART OF YOUR DAY, RATHER THAN AN INTERRUPTION

The best thing we can do for ourselves as music students, is to make a habit of practicing our instrument. This means treating practice as a non-negotiable aspect of our daily lives, something as regular as brushing our teeth or having our morning coffee. Even if it is just for 15 minutes, practicing at a scheduled time each day will make all the difference in your success and enjoyment. This tip is especially important for children, as practice time can seem like even more of an intrusion to them if they are not expecting it. Write up a weekly practice schedule, and stick to it like you would any other important part of your routine.

SHORT, FOCUSED SESSIONS EVERY DAY ARE BETTER THAN ONE LONG SESSION

Again, the aim is to make practice a habit, not a chore. Cramming in an hour or two before your lesson after a week of not touching your instrument is stressful and largely ineffective. You are much more likely to benefit from and build upon what you learned in your lesson if you keep the ideas fresh and studied throughout the week.

HAVE A PRACTICE AREA AND KEEP YOUR INSTRUMENT OUT/READY TO PLAY

For me, the single biggest obstacle between me and practice is the tedium of having to take my instrument out of the case, set up a chair and music stand, find my music, etc.! The solution: create a practice nook in your home, complete with a stand, your instrument, maybe a shelf for your music - all out and ready to go. Aside from random strikes of inspiration, a practice spot is the single best motivator I can think of. You would be surprised how tempting it is to just sit down and play, if all you have to do is sit down and play :) *NOTE: if you do decide to leave your instrument and bow out of their case, just be sure they are out of harm's way and in a temperature stable room.*

PRACTICE WITH A GOAL IN MIND, BREAK THINGS DOWN, HANDLE MUSIC WITH CARE

Do not just stumble through all your music and stop. Find the most challenging spots in your music and work on mastering those. Set specific goals, such as "I want to be able to play this tricky measure three times in a row without mistakes" or "I am going to practice this fast section slowly with a metronome until I know it by heart" or "I want to make this part of the music sound like bunnies hopping in the meadow by using bouncy bow strokes" etc. etc. Learn your music note by note, with no detail left behind!

WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK YOUR TEACHER

I love it when students email me for help during the week, because then I know they're practicing :) Sometimes a 30 minute lesson is not enough to cover all the bases on a particular assignment, so if something is really throwing you for a loop at home, go ahead and give me a call or shoot me a note with your questions. Chances are the solution is simpler than you expected!

VERY IMPORTANT: BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF...AND DON'T GIVE UP!

Even the best musicians in the world have moments when they feel like they're not accomplishing what they want, or they're getting worse rather than getting better. Many students get bored or frustrated, and start to wonder if they should continue lessons at all. These moments are a natural part of the process, and should be handled with nurture rather than despair. If things start to get overwhelming, please talk to me. I will do what I can to help you through the rough patch, either by switching up the material for a while or just strategizing other approaches to your practice. I'm here to help you get through the lows as well as the highs of your musical journey, so don't hesitate to communicate your frustrations if and when they arise.

HAVE FUN

Don't forget to play music for fun now and then! Go see concert! Organize a jam with your friends! I know of a whole lot of opportunities for students of all ages to get some experience playing with others. Ask me about classes and chamber music opportunities here at Twin Town as well.