

Strategies for Successful Individual Practice

Practicing your musical instrument is obviously VERY important. However, if you are like many students, practicing your instrument may not be first on your list of favorite things to do. Unfortunately, if you do not practice regularly, you have no real chance of being the best you can be. The key, then, is to find a way to make individual practice sessions more effective and rewarding, and also more enjoyable.

When to Practice:

First, you need to find the time to practice. This means setting a regular schedule for your practice sessions. It is better to practice regularly for less time than to save all of your practicing for one day. It is also a good idea to set aside the same times for each day that you practice (6:00-6:30, for example). A good starting point is 3 days a week for 30-minutes. If you are already there, consider increasing your current schedule slightly.

Where to Practice:

A good practice room is quiet and free from distractions. This could be your bedroom, but it does not need to be. Wherever you practice, be sure to have a music stand and a good chair (if necessary).

How to Practice:

Many students play through music at home, but they are not necessarily practicing effectively. In order to be a good practicer, it is VERY important to have a structured routine. Here's what we recommend (for a typical 30-minute practice). As you get older/more advanced, you can add more time!

- 1. Warm-Up** (5 minutes: Long tones, lip slurs, etc.)
- 2. Skill Development** (5-10 minutes: Scales, rudiments, finger/tongue/bow exercises, rhythm studies, and other "technique builders")
- 3. Work on New or Difficult Piece** (10-15 minutes: This can be a piece from band/orchestra, a solo or etude from private lessons, etc.)
- 4. Review a Fun, Familiar Piece** (5 minutes: Work on something you enjoy playing. See if you can make it sound better than before!)

Why Practice?

We practice to get better at making music. The saying goes, "Practice makes Perfect." This sounds great, but it is not completely true. In truth, PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT. This is because practice requires that we repeat certain behaviors over and over again. If we play incorrect notes or perform with a poor tone, we will reinforce these behaviors until they become habit. On the other hand, if we always play with a beautiful sound and if we take the time to correct our errors, our playing will reflect these positive behaviors.

One Final Tip

If you are going to spend the time to practice, do all you can to make it pay off. ALWAYS play with your very best tone, technique, and posture. Building good habits is a daily process!

Good luck with your practice! Remember – your directors want you to succeed. If you have questions about achieving better results in your practice, please let us help you!