

STUDENT GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICING

PRACTICE HINTS:

- Warm up carefully
- Select a time of day that is free from interruptions and use this time each day
- Choose a place to practice that is free from distractions
- Set a goal for the session: a scale; an exercise; specific measures of a piece, or even just one measure that is giving you trouble. It could be a rhythm, the notes, or the tempo. Work it slowly, and then build up your speed gradually. Before leaving it, put it together with the rest of the line. Don't try to do too much at one sitting.
- Repetition of a problem area reinforces muscle memory.
- Use a metronome. (See below)
- Rest when you get tired.

SUGGESTED PRACTICE SCHEDULE:

Materials Practiced	Minutes	Goal
Long tones; easy drills; breathing exercises	5	Warm up of embouchure (lip & mouth position) and instrument; good tone production
New Material; individual improvement; assignments; look ahead	10	Develop new exercises; increase range; new songs; new lesson in book
Familiar exercises and etudes; Personal music choices	5-10	Improvement of finger dexterity; tonguing; and overall fluency. Play things you enjoy.

A metronome is a device that can be set to make a clicking sound at different rates of speed used to set the tempo for playing a musical peice. For example, if you set the metronome at 60, you will hear 60 clicks (beats) in every minute. If you set the metronome to 120, you will hear 120 clicks (beats) in every minute. so a setting of 120 is twice as fast as a setting of 60. The higher the number, the faster the tempo.

Essentially, a metronome helps the musician keep a steady beat. It's like having your band director in a box clapping the tempo for you! After more and more practice sessions with the metronome, you will know when you are right on the beat of the metronome because you will get the sensation of not hearing the metronome while you play! Your notes are replacing the

metronome beats at this point. This will happen but requires much patience/practice to achieve.

Go to www.metronomeonline.com for a FREE online metronome to use with every practice session. Or you can use the metronome function on Essential Elements Interactive when doing your practice from the book!

PRACTICE THOUGHTS:

- Practice makes permanent, not perfect! If you start out by practicing wrong, you will permanently play that spot wrong!
- Good practice is hard work and practice is not always fun. (sometimes it is - especially when you can feel the improvement!) Even professional musicians don't always want to practice (too busy, too tired, want to do something else) but we have to tell ourselves that the only way to get better is to practice, so just go do it and then you can do whatever else it is you are wanting to do.
- Practice is working on small sections until you can play them, then adding the small sections together to make slightly larger sections, etc.
- Practice and run through are different procedures (both useful, but running through a piece or assignment is not practicing it!)
- Putting your horn to your face and blowing (or grabbing sticks and banging) is not practice. Think before you play. Think before you play. THINK before you PLAY.
- Don't quit as soon as you get it. Do it three more times! If you really want to make it permanent, make yourself do it correctly three times in a row. If you mess up, start counting over again.
- Tomorrow you probably will have lost it, but the good news is that it will take less time to get it back than it did to learn it.
- It may take many days or weeks to get it right and be able to play it correctly every time!
- Practice is more than just rhythm and notes. Make a beautiful tone, make sure notes speak clearly, get the dynamics correct. It is in the DETAILS!
- If you start making more mistakes or getting frustrated, take a break. Come back to the spot later in your practice or the next day.
- DO NOT PRACTICE UNTIL IT HURTS! If a body part hurts, stop. This is why it is important to practice less time for more days than one long practice session.
- Make sure you can count the rhythm before you try to play it. Write in the counting if you need to, or write where the beat falls. Feel the rhythm and speak it in time.
- Always work in "chunks", but be sure to practice the "links". If you practice measure 4, then measure 5, and never practice linking 4 & 5 together, you will stumble every time you cross the measure. Practice measure 4 into the first note of measure 5.

PARENTAL GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICING

Time Schedule - 15-20 minutes per day is the amount of practice time recommended for the average student. Practicing at the same time every day is good, but some flexibility should be built into this schedule. Don't bring the world to a halt at 6:30 every evening because it's practice time. Kids need time for fun and relaxation just as adults do. If the situation merits, reschedule the practice session to an earlier or later time or spend 5 extra minutes practicing the day before or after.

Climate - Practicing should be done in an area that is free of distractions away from the TV, radio, stereo, phone and family traffic. Good lighting, a straight backed chair, a mirror and a music stand are all good assets to have in the practice room. Reed players should have at least 2 good reeds available at all times.

Is your child progressing? - The field of instrumental music is new for your child. They are learning to use their facial muscles in a different way, and their breathing apparatus for a different purpose. There is a new language of symbols (notes) that require the use of mind and body to translate into musical sounds. All this takes time! Even parents who have had band experience have probably forgotten the struggle of producing the first few notes. Parents can evaluate practice sessions by asking:

- Am I hearing attempts at new material (such as higher notes, new rhythms, new exercises) or am I hearing the same old tune daily? (If you only hear selections your child can already play, then the practice time is not being used efficiently. A student will not improve if they play the same thing over and over.)
- Is the tone quality becoming more characteristic of the instrument or is the tone harsh, unmusical, or unpleasant?
- Does the familiar tune or exercise move along steadily with some sort of fluent rhythm, or is it halting and jerky with no rhythm?

If you reach the point when your evaluation is consistently coming up negative, please call me. The student may be doing fine for their grade level; they may have hit a temporary plateau; or they may be having difficulty in grasping a basic concept that could bring their progress to a halt. This last problem may take a joint parent-teacher effort to be corrected.

Encouraging your child - Spend some time listening to your child practice. Offer constructive criticisms, but choose your words carefully so they don't get discouraged. It is important that your child feels supported and encouraged in their new skills!