

Rocky River Middle School Bands

PRACTICE GUIDE

You've heard people say "Practice makes perfect," but in order to be successful we should say "Practicing **perfectly** makes perfect." In other words, your diligence when you practice is what determines how quickly you improve. Practicing can be dull, tedious, and frustrating, *but it shouldn't be!* If you set yourself up for success, it will be rewarding, worthwhile, and hopefully enjoyable. Valuable practice time looks and sounds different for everybody, but the following tips are good starting points for anyone learning how to practice.

When to practice:

- *Practice as frequently as possible-* a half-hour every day is better than an hour every two days, which is better than two hours every once in a while. Developing muscles and skills for music is no different from developing athletic skills- running a couple miles every day will build endurance better than trying to go out once a month to run a marathon!
- *Practice in frequent, short sessions-* set small goals for each practice session, and take short breaks once they are achieved. Don't sit down and try to practice for two hours in a row- try to play in 15-20 minute chunks.
- *Make a practice schedule for yourself-* if you set aside time each day to practice, you'll be more likely to actually do it, instead of just randomly trying to find time to practice.

Where to practice:

- *Find a place that is distraction-free-* sitting down in the living room, with your computer, TV, and iPod on is not likely to yield much success. Give yourself the opportunity to spend some time focused on yourself, your instrument, and the music so that you can achieve something every time you sit down to play. Also, let your parents and siblings know (politely!) that you're going to practice and you would appreciate some time without any interruptions.
- *Be consistent-* if you designate a particular place where you practice well, try to practice there all the time. Re-creating positive conditions will lead to more consistent, successful practicing.

What to practice:

- *Focus on the basics-* spend the majority of your practice time on fundamentals including long-tones, scales/technique, articulation exercises, rudiments, and breathing. Practicing is all about building your musical vocabulary- practicing skills in isolation will help you recognize and achieve them in "real music." Spend about 1/3 of your practice time on long-tones and tone-building exercises; spend another 1/3 of your practicing on building technique; and the remaining time on repertoire (band/orchestra music, solos).

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How to practice:

- *Start successfully*- start each practice session with something simple that you can play well, with good fundamentals. This will put you in a positive frame of mind, and lead to a more enjoyable practice session.
- *Work slowly*- take time to process your playing- realize there are very few skills that will come to you immediately, but with consistent practicing you will develop them! Never push your way through problems, just relax and enjoy the process of making music.
- *Use a metronome and a tuner*- practicing is about getting to know yourself as a musician, and these tools are impartial judges that will make you aware of your pitch and rhythmic tendencies and smooth out any issues.
- *Extend as you go*- do not begin your practicing with material that is either loud and fast or really soft and slow. Start in the middle, and as you work, gradually expand out to the limits of your pitch and dynamic ranges.
- *It's all about how you make the sound*- for winds: think air support and embouchure; for percussion: think relaxed hands/arms and good grips.
- *Spend time listening*- there are thousands of recordings of great musicians and listening to them will build your "musical vocabulary," and develop your ear for good tone. More importantly, listening to music will hopefully inspire you, and it should be a fun experience.
- *Be musical*- whatever you may be practicing; work on expressing through the music.

We hope that these tips set you on the right track to successful practicing, which will open up the incredible possibilities of music even more to each of you. If you have any questions or want some suggestions of materials for practice or listening, please ask us. Practice daily, practice intelligently, and practice musically!

~~Mr. Komperda & Mrs. Quimby