

What Band Directors and Private Lessons Teachers Mean When They Tell You To Practice

What is practice?

- Time spent outside of ensemble rehearsal playing your instrument.
- Desire to improve as an instrumentalist and musician.
- In addition to working on ensemble music in your practice, you should work on fundamentals (breathing, lip slurs, long tones), technical studies, scales, and any other assigned music or music that interests you.

How to practice

- Put distractions away (cell phones, tablets, computers, etc.)
 - Be present in your practice, otherwise it will not stick and your distracted-ness can create bad habits and tendencies.
- Have a plan
 - What do you need to work on?
 - What do you want to work on?
 - Designate a certain amount of time for each task, so you get to everything you want to work on.
- Warm up at the beginning of your practice, and warm down at the end.
 - Don't just dive into the "meat" of your practice. Your chops need time to warm up before taking on tough music.
 - Prepare your chops for practice with some fundamentals, and play some long tones and low notes at the end of your practice to relax the chops.
- Have a "Bag of Tricks" of Practice Techniques
 - Slow Down and Practice Smart
 - If you cannot play it slow, you won't be able to play it at tempo.
 - If a passage is causing you trouble, take the horn away and work on clapping or saying the rhythm. Then maybe "shadow-slide" while saying the notes or rhythm aloud.
 - If your chops are tired or you aren't near your instrument, get your music out and think through the rhythms, pitches, phrases, etc.
 - Work on music in chunks, then put the chunks together.
 - Start at the end of the piece, and work backwards, adding measures or chunks as you go.
 - Sing, Buzz, Play
 - Sing on pitch then buzz on pitch. If you can do these two things, you have a much better chance of being able to play it on the instrument.
 - Use Practice Tools
 - Use a tuner
 - Don't just stare at the needle on the tuner, use and train your ears, then check it on the tuner.
 - Use a metronome
 - Record yourself
 - Record yourself playing something so you can listen back to it and analyze what's going well and what you can still improve.
 - Try to avoid analyzing while you play, it's best to listen back after the fact.

- Use YouTube, iTunes, etc.
 - Find a recording of a piece you are working on, and follow along in your music.
 - Find a recording of someone playing your instrument. Make notes of the tone color, phrasing, articulation, etc. and try to emulate it.
 - Listen to music and try to dissect it.
 - Listen for the form, harmonies, bass line, melodies, etc.


How much should you practice?

- This depends on several factors.
 - How long you've been playing?
 - How much work needs to be done on your ensemble/assigned music?
 - How good do you want to be? You do not become great on accident!

Why should you practice?

- A commitment to regular practice is the easiest and best way to improve as an instrumentalist and musician.
- Ensemble rehearsals and performances are much more enjoyable (and much less stressful) when you can play your music well and just be in the moment.

When are you done practicing?

- Is the music you worked on better than when you started?
- Just because you practiced once or twice doesn't mean that you'll be able to play challenging music right away.
 - It could take days, weeks, or even months to master difficult passages.
- Some days practice will come easy and some days it will be a challenge. Be focused and work to improve every day.
- Progress is not just an incline. In my experience, practice looks more like this...
- Typically, you will improve, then things may actually seem to get more difficult and tough, and you may plateau and even regress. When this happens, stick with it! Soon this plateau will end, and another big improvement is just a few practice sessions away!

Additional Things to Practice/Notes

- Work on basic piano skills, basic theory - chord qualities, intervals, I IV and V chords, etc.
- The instrument is the tool, but the person is the musician. Learn as much about music as you can (piano, singing, listening, etc.) so that you can be at your best when playing your instrument.
- Know that everyone progresses at different rates. There may even be some people who seem like they don't need to practice because of their natural talent. Know that at some point, those people will reach their ceiling and have to do a lot of work to improve. Your daily practice and improvement will surpass them, and you will be better off in the long run.
- "The more you practice, the better you sound. The better you sound, the more fun it is to practice."
- "Amateurs practice until they can get it right. Professionals practice until they can't get it wrong."
- "Your daily practice is your strongest practice." - Sarah Beth, Yoga Instructor
- "The world's foremost cellist, Pablo Casals, is 83. He was asked one day why he continued to practice four and five hours a day. Casals answered, "Because I think I am making progress.""
- Leonard Lyons, *Reader's Digest* 1959