

practice



# A "HOW TO" GUIDE & WORKBOOK FOR MUSIC STUDENTS

© 2011 by Wendy Higdon

# practice

A "HOW  
TO" GUIDE &  
WORKBOOK  
FOR  
STUDENTS

## Why is Practice Important?

As a musician, your success depends on how well you practice your instrument. Although you will learn skills in band class, you will master them during your practice time at home.

Musicians who know how to practice effectively learn better and faster, waste less time and have more fun. Those who do not, find practice frustrating and a chore that they have to get through. We want you to be in the first category!

Musicians know that practice is what we do to get better. Read the definition of the word "practice" in the box at the bottom of this page right now. . .

Note the important words in the definition: *repeated* and *systematic*. When something is systematic, it means that there is a method or a plan involved in carrying out a task. When we repeat something, we do it many times. Therefore, effective practice requires having a plan, and doing that plan many times until we master the skill. Each time you repeat a skill, pathways in your brain are strengthened until that skill becomes almost automatic. But this works whether you practice something correctly or incorrectly. Play something wrong too many times, and it can become very difficult to do it right!



What a player does best, he should practice least. Practice is for problems.

## prac·tice

[prak-tis]

noun, verb, -ticed, -tic·ing.

Repeated performance or systematic exercise for the purpose of acquiring skill or proficiency

## why practice?

1. To improve skills and meet goals
2. To be prepared for lessons and class.
3. To make sure that you don't let down fellow ensemble members
4. To feel a sense of accomplishment
5. To make playing your instrument more enjoyable



### What is the major problem with practice?

When we use TIME as a measure of successful practice, we often forget about setting goals and working to achieve them. Instead we practice to satisfy the clock, mindlessly playing our instruments without accomplishing much until the required time is up.

Each time you play your instrument, make sure that you can do something better when you finish than when you started.



Why is measuring success by the amount of time we practice a problem?

### The difference between practicing and playing



# questions to think about

What do we mean when we say that playing your instrument is “mindless,” but practicing your instrument is “thoughtful?”

What is the big problem with only measuring our practice by the number of minutes that we play?

It is not necessarily the amount of time you spend in practice that counts, it's what you put into the practice. *Eric Lindros*

# You get better by setting goals!

What do I want to be able to do better as a result of this practice?

If you don't think about this question first, your practice session will probably not be very effective and you will end up wasting time.

So, the KEY to successful practice is to THINK about what you are doing and why!

## setting goals

As you write goals, it's important to be as specific as possible.

Write down THREE short term goals you want to accomplish in the next 1-2 days.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are TWO medium term goals you would like to achieve on your instrument in the next 1-2 weeks?

- 1.
- 2.

Write ONE long term goal that you have for your musical improvement over the next month.

- 1.

Think about the place where you normally practice your instrument.

Which of the following practice tools do you have available in this place?

- music stand
- pencil
- Smart Music
- tuner
- metronome
- mirror
- other \_\_\_\_\_

What are some other things about this place that are helpful to you while you practice?

What are some things about this place that could prevent you from doing your best practice?

How can you improve your practice space?

<b>before you practice</b>	<b>Prepare your practice location</b>	<b>Decide what you want to accomplish</b>	<b>Develop a plan for reaching your goals</b>
	<p>Make sure you have all the practice tools you will need.</p> <p>Make sure there are no distractions that will keep you from your goals</p>	<p>Short Term Goals = Goals you want to accomplish during the next 1-2 days</p> <p>Medium Term Goals = Goals that you want to accomplish in the next 1-2 weeks</p> <p>Long Term Goals = Goals that you want to accomplish in the next month or longer</p>	<p>Consider your current strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>What practice strategies will you use?</p> <p>How will you know when you are successful?</p>

# the *wrong* way to practice. . .

does this sound like  
anyone you know?

1. Play your music without thinking
2. Make a mistake and react
3. Play again
4. Make another mistake
5. React to that mistake
6. Continue the process without really fixing anything

In the space below, explain why you think the practice strategy above really doesn't fix the problems.



## Fix the **REASON**, not the note. . .

When we "fix" a mistake without understanding why we made the mistake in the first place, we are bound to make the mistake again! It's important to figure out why the mistake happened.

Do you need to learn the fingering?

Did you miscount the rhythm?

Do you need to use more breath support?

Was there something wrong with your embouchure?

**Fix the cause of the mistake, and your fix will be permanent!**

# practice strategies

**strat·egy**

[strat-i-jee]

–noun, plural -gies.

a plan, method, or series of maneuvers for obtaining a specific goal or result

**Let's Brainstorm.** . . . Write down as many strategies that you can think of that would help you to learn a piece of music better. Remember, when you brainstorm there are no wrong or bad answers. Just write down everything that comes to mind.

"A goal without a plan is just a wish." Larry Elder



Using the items you thought of on the previous page, categorize your list by writing each strategy under the types of problems it could be used to solve. Some strategies could be used for more than one type of problem.

I can use these strategies to fix wrong notes:

I can use these strategies to fix wrong rhythms

I can use these strategies to work on tone quality

I can use these strategies to work on articulations and style

I can use these strategies to improve my technique

I can use these strategies to work on \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank)

# five parts to a practice session

1.

Remind yourself of your plan: It's a good idea to write things down in order to stay focused.

2.

Warm-up and Fundamentals: Spend a few moments settling into your practice routine, preparing yourself both mentally and physically while working to create your most vibrant, resonant sound.

3.

Focused Practice: This is the time that you work on those items you identified in your plan. Work specifically on these goals. When you have accomplished what you set out to do, then stop.

4.

Review: Spend a few minutes reviewing material for band class or lessons that was not included in your plan above.

5.

Play something just for fun: This is your reward for a job well done. Take a few minutes just playing your instrument for enjoyment.

Practice  
without improvement  
is meaningless.

Chuck Knox

Practice  
does not make  
perfect. Only perfect  
practice makes perfect.

Vince Lombardi

# let's map out a practice session

Just as you might plan a trip route so that you will reach your destination, you need to plan the route you will take in your practice to reach your goals.

Activity	Specifics (which pieces, which measures?)	Goal (what do I want to accomplish?)	Practice Strategies (how will I accomplish it?)	How will I know I'm done?
Warm-up				
Focused Practice				
Review				
Just for Fun				

# two practice MYTHS

## Faster is better. . .

Nope. Sorry. You will learn your music better and quicker if you practice slowly. Often when we practice something faster, we make mistakes and decrease accuracy.

Keep this idea in mind. . . as you become more accurate in your playing, speed will come naturally.

## Great practice sounds like great performance

Wrong. . . proper practice is definitely not musical. There should be lots of starts, stops and repetition. If you are playing a song all the way through, you are NOT practicing it.

Effective practice is full of misses, backtracking and lots of mistake-fixing.

If I don't practice the way I should, then I won't play the way that I know I can. Ivan Lendl

# two practice TRUTHS

## Real practice is hard work. . .

If you don't feel like you are working very hard at your practice, then you probably aren't accomplishing much.

## Practice makes permanent. . .

Whatever you practice, be it right or wrong, that is what your brain will learn to do. Better to learn something correctly, than to practice mistakes and have to "unlearn" them.

# you are a troubleshooter!

What is a  
troubleshooter?

It's a  
person who locates the cause of a  
problem & treats or removes it.

Write about a problem that you recently encountered in your practice and how you troubleshooted it. Make sure you explain what the cause of the problem was and how you solved it.

# smartmusic and practice

In 60 seconds write down all the ways you can think of that SmartMusic can help you when you practice your instrument. . .

Now, compare your answers with a partner. List two more ideas that your partner wrote down that you'd like to try.

1.

2.

Here is a place to write down other ideas you want to remember about practicing!

A series of approximately 21 horizontal black lines spaced evenly down the page, providing a space for writing.