

12 Awesome Steps to Practicing Your Instrument Effectively

1. **Warm Up:** To begin practicing correctly, a proper warm up is required. Consider the keys of the pieces you are studying and it will lead you to the correct scales to practice during your warm up period. How long do you warm up? As long as you need. For beginners five or ten minutes suffice. Long, sustained notes help you focus on the correct amount of air needed to make the notes sound beautiful. Whole notes first! Practice scales long and connected, giving purpose to each note.

ALWAYS PRACTICE WITH A METRONOME!!!

Download a free app on your phone or purchase a metronome/tuner at a local music store.

2. **Write On Your Music:** Always have a pencil handy. Writing on your music is not a bad thing. It is actually a very professional action. If you miss something one time, make a mental note. If you miss it a couple more times and it becomes a habit, you must mark the mistake to help you become aware of the problem. Do not write letter names above any notes. For beginners, **writing letter names above notes will slow the music education process** because they are only prolonging learning note names. Writing too much on your music will result in a messy score that is harder to read instead of easier to read.

3. **Practice Slowly:** New pieces should never be practiced at performance speed. You should practice the entire part of the music you are studying at the fastest tempo you can play the most difficult passage – then a bit slower. Tempo, or speed, should be increased gradually and only after you have practiced the entire piece. This will ensure that the tempo does not fluctuate wildly after you feel the piece has been learned. Level 1 first – count and clap the rhythm. Level 2 – count and say the letter names of the notes. Level 4 – play the part on Concert F. Level 5 – play as written – mastery.

4. **Set Aside Time:** Any practicing is worthwhile, but time that is reserved for practice is best because interruptions are fewer. Try to practice when events are not happening immediately after or before practice; this way your mind is completely focused on your practice.

5. **Quiet:** Practicing in a quiet space may be difficult, but finding that sanctuary for practice time will improve productivity within that time. Once more, this will help you **focus** on your practicing.

6. **Calm:** Practicing should be done when you are in a calm state. Rushing home from school to practice is not the best procedure. If you are exhausted or busy when you begin practicing you will not get the most out of your practice time.

7. **Identify Problems:** Many students will play a passage over and over without **stopping to analyze the music** for problems. Being able to identify problems and implement solutions in an organized fashion is important to your music education and independence of learning.

8. **Isolate Rhythmic Problems:** Rhythmic problems should be corrected outside of the line of music. This way the notes are not involved, and the rhythmic issues can be dealt with for what they are: rhythm. After the rhythmic problems are solved the notes will be easier to apply.

9. **Work Into and Out Of Problems:** It is wise to work out problems in small areas. Once a problem is solved you should practice into the problem from a few measures before, then from the problem area forward a few measures, then from before to after the problem area. This method of working outwards from problem areas will ensure continuity in your playing when you piece everything together.

10. **Practice In Sections:** Always practice your music **line by line or phrase by phrase**. The brain enjoys small bites of knowledge. It is easier to process and produce when there is less knowledge being processed at a slower rate of speed. This way you will not forget what went wrong and where it happened. Small chunks at a time!!

11. Everything: Students should not only practice notes and rhythms but all parts of the music as they begin. Dynamics, articulation, phrasing: all this should be included from step one when you practice.

12. **Practice Daily:** Building good habits require **daily attention**. The mind likes routine and will take advantage of a daily practice time. The more time you leave between practice sessions the more information learned will be lost. Keep your study fresh and continually moving forward.