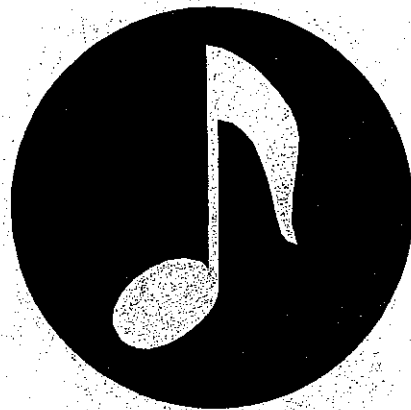


# **What to Do When You Practice**

A Guide to Efficient &  
Effective Practice Routines



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Mr. Scott Sheehan

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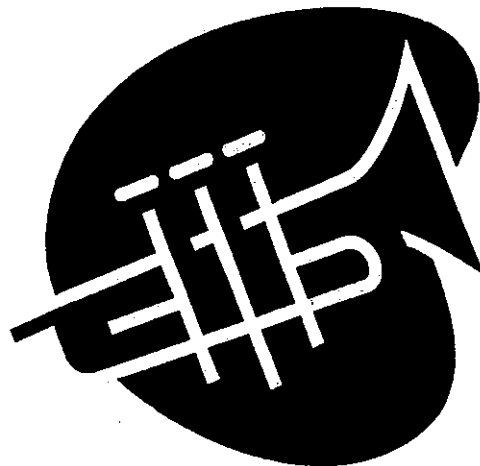
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# The P's of Practicing

- Purpose – always have a goal for everything that you play; ask yourself, *"What am I trying to accomplish/improve by playing this selection?"*
- Process - learning about music and musical skill development is a carefully refined process that develops over time
- Plan – be sure to have ideas of what you will accomplish for each practice session; don't forget the components of a quality practice session: warm-up, scales and technical exercises, melodic/lyrical development, assigned repertoire, something fun that you enjoy
- Preparation – have the room ready for your practice session; be sure that you have all of your materials – instrument, books, music, pencil, music stand, etc.
- Patience – not everything can be done in one practice session; it takes time to develop skills
- Place – be sure to have a quiet place to practice where you can concentrate; having a mirror available is also helpful
- Persistence – don't give up; you can accomplish something even on your worst sounding days
- Pace – work only as long as you are focused; when you feel tired (physically or mentally) it's time for a break; it is not recommended to practice for more than 1 hour at one sitting
- Performance – the more you play the more confidence you will build; confidence leads to better performance
- Pride – feel good about your accomplishments and be aware of your strengths and areas that still need improvement
- Perseverance – practice to improve; there is a great deal of self-discipline, commitment, and reward in having a regular practice routine
- Practice Doesn't Have to Painful

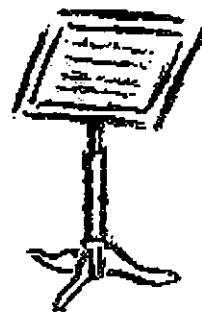
# Set-Up

It is very important that you are prepared with everything that you need to have a quality practice session. Here is a checklist to help:

- ✓ Instrument
- ✓ Music
- ✓ Pencil
- ✓ Scale Sheets & Exercise Materials
- ✓ Music Stand
- ✓ Chair that allows proper posture
- ✓ Metronome
- ✓ Tuner
- ✓ Mirror
- ✓ Tape Recorder & Tapes

Becoming a better performer and developing skills involves many of your senses – sight, hearing, and touch. Practicing in a quiet place where you can concentrate is a must. Here are a few suggestions to avoid distractions and interruptions:

- Turn off the TV and/or radio
- Don't talk on the telephone during your practice session
- Turn your computer monitor off if it's in the same room
- Ask your family not to disturb you until you are finished
- Practice in a room that isn't cluttered – clutter can be a distraction

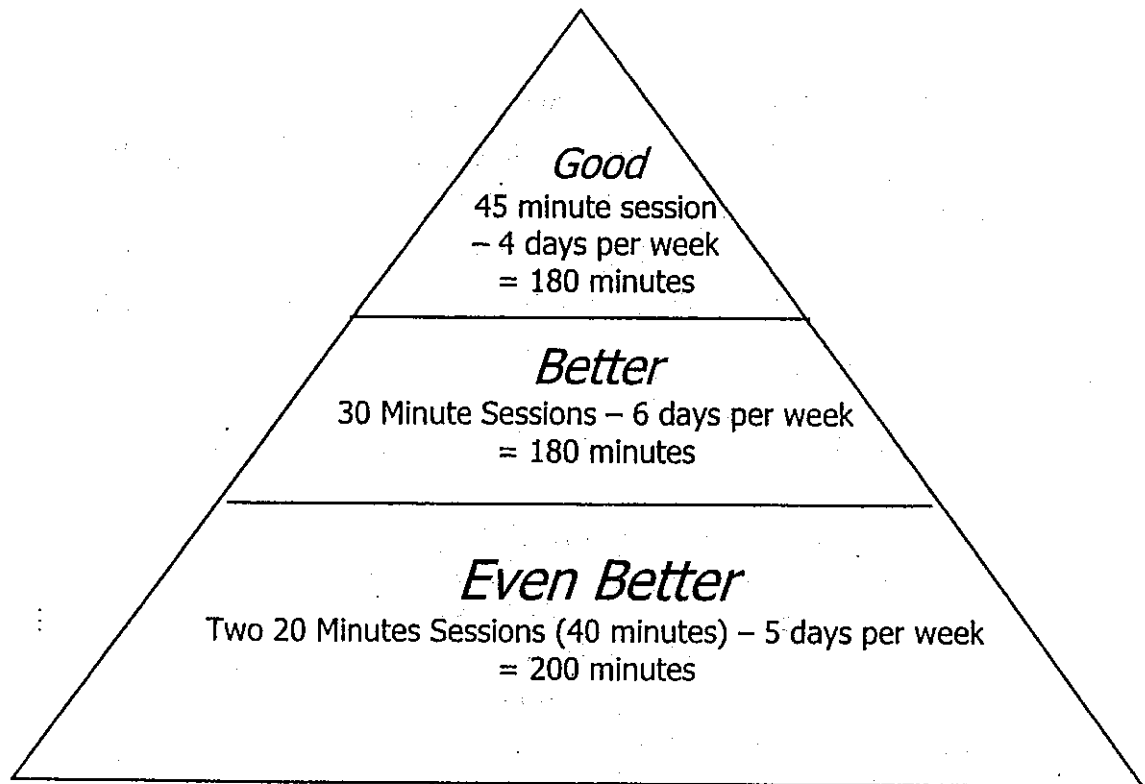


# Making Time to Practice

Have a regular practice routine. Make it part of your everyday life just like brushing your teeth or doing your homework!

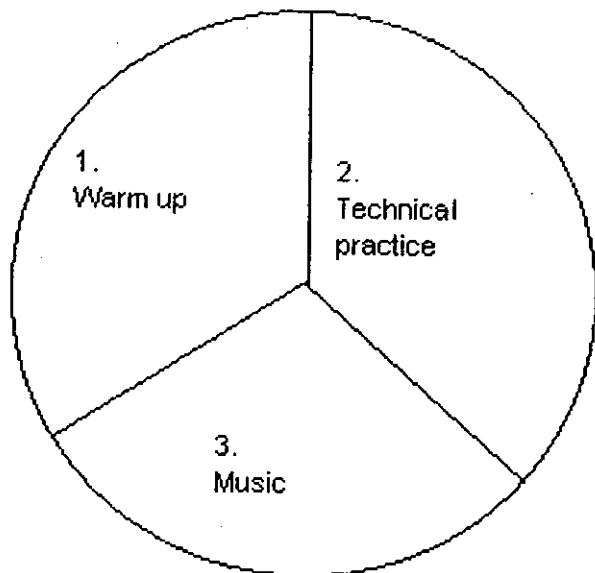
To make your practice worthwhile (improving your skills) you need to spend a minimum of 30 minutes for each session or practice for more than one session per day.

IT IS BETTER TO PRACTICE IN SHORTER SESSIONS THAT ARE MORE FREQUENT THAN TO PRACTICE IN FEWER, LONGER SESSIONS.



At school you can use practice rooms during study halls or other free time that you have. That way you don't have to take your instrument home every day.

# Components of a Quality Practice Session



1. Get the air moving and start with good sound
2. Maintenance phase -- develop and improve skills
3. Work on repertoire and play music that you enjoy

Before you play anything, ask yourself **why** you are playing this. Is it to warm-up, improve a specific skill, learn a piece of music, maintain an already learned skill, keep a particular piece of music ready for performance, or simply to enjoy making music?? The point is – have a reason for what you do every time you pick up your instrument.

## **Some important notes:**

- Warming up is the most important thing you can do.
- Challenge yourself to be the best player you can be.
- Make only the best sounds that you are capable of making!
- Be relaxed - let the air flow. Even if you don't have great technique, you can play beautiful phrases.
- Be aggressive with improving your skills. Don't be too easy or too hard on yourself.
- Practice difficult sections slowly at first – if you can only play them fast, then you don't really know them – be able to play anything at any tempo. Use a metronome to keep yourself accurate!

## ***Part 1 - Warming Up***

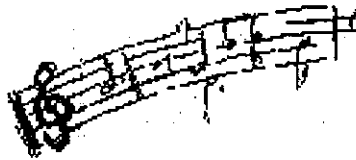
It is very important that you warm up each day as you begin your practice session or when you play for rehearsal or performance. Here is a list of suggestions for warm-ups (remember to have a purpose of what you want to accomplish):

- Breathing Exercises
  - Be sure that you are taking deep breaths and fill your lungs from bottom to top
  - Don't raise your shoulders as you breath
  - Don't create any tension in your throat, neck, chest, arms, mouth, lips, etc.
- Long Tones
  - Find a comfortable starting pitch and hold it for 10 – 15 seconds
  - Listen to be sure the tone is clear and full
  - Don't allow the pitch to go sharp or flat – using a tuner is very helpful
  - Move higher and lower throughout a scale or chromatically to continue
- Scales
  - Practice scales to improve finger patterns since all music is based on some sort of scale or pattern
  - Practice scales in a variety of rhythms – whole notes, half notes, 2 eighth notes, single eighths, etc.
  - Vary the articulation patterns that you use when practicing scales – tongue every note, slur all of the notes, slur two notes then tongue two notes, etc.
  - Play scales in as many octaves as you can as long as there is good tone quality
  - When learning a new scale practice slowly (whole notes)
  - Strive to be able to play all scales using the following pattern:



- Chromatics
  - Once you know the chromatic scale finger patterns practice it in groups of triplets and in groups of sixteenth notes. See how fast you can go and still have all of the notes sound clear and even.

- Create Melodies
  - Create your own melodies (improvise) using a particular scale.
  - Concentrate on the tone quality that you are playing.
  - Choose various styles of music to create these melodies
  - Remember to have a purpose of what you want to accomplish by doing this
- Memorize Simple Melodies
  - Learn simple melodies such as children's songs, holiday tunes, or patriotic tunes (Row, Row, Row Your Boat, Jingle Bells, Happy Birthday, America the Beautiful, Mary Had a Little Lamb, Three Blind Mice, etc.)
  - Learn how to play these only by ear – listen to be sure that you have the correct notes and rhythms – trial and error will be your guide
  - Once you can play them in one key, learn to transpose them into other keys (Learning the solfege syllables to the tunes is sometimes helpful.)



## ***Part 2 - Technical Practice***

The second phase of your practice session should be spent developing your technique.

### **Scale Exercises**

Once again, working on particular scales and variations on scales will improve your skills. Some scale studies may include:

- Playing Intervals – Do, Re, Do, Mi, etc.
- Scales in 3<sup>rds</sup>, 4<sup>ths</sup>, 5<sup>ths</sup>, etc.
- Arpeggios
- Varying articulation patterns within scales



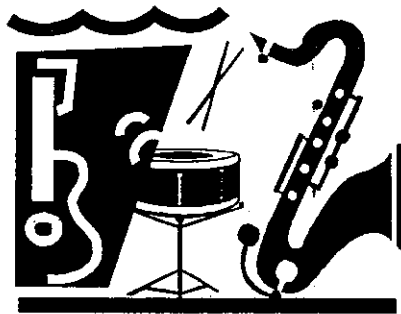
## **Lyrical Exercises**

In addition to scale patterns that lead to better technique, it is also important to practice exercises that develop your melodic or lyrical playing. By working on creating musical phrases that have a shape and expressive qualities you will greatly improve your musicianship!

## **Sight Reading**

A great test of your overall technique comes from how well you play music the first time that you see it. Challenge yourself to sight-read new music regularly. Are you able to play all of the correct notes and rhythms? Did you play the music at the correct tempo? Were you expressive and did you observe dynamic markings? How was your phrasing? Did the music have a sense of direction and flow? And most importantly how did you sound? Remember that no one wants to hear bad sounds!

**See your band director to help you find exercise materials that will suit your abilities and help to improve your skills.**



## ***Part 3 – Repertoire***

The third phase of your practice session should be spent working on repertoire. This can mean several things:

- Practicing your band music so that all of the notes, rhythms, dynamics, phrasing, articulations, style, etc. is 100% accurate
- Practicing solo music or duets for lessons or performance
- Playing music that you can already play well or have performed in the past
- Playing music that you enjoy and find fun

# What to Listen For & Work On When You Practice

Always have a purpose for why you play something!  
What is your goal when you practice?

## 100% Accuracy for:

- ✓ Tone Quality
- ✓ Notes/Pitches
- ✓ Rhythms
- ✓ Dynamics
- ✓ Articulations
- ✓ Intonation
- ✓ Tempo
- ✓ Style
- ✓ Phrasing
- ✓ Breathing
- ✓ Entrances and Releases
- ✓ Embouchure
- ✓ Posture, Hand Position, etc.

## And don't forget

- ✓ Expressive
- ✓ Meaningful
- ✓ Emotional
- ✓ Creative

## How do you know if you're improving?

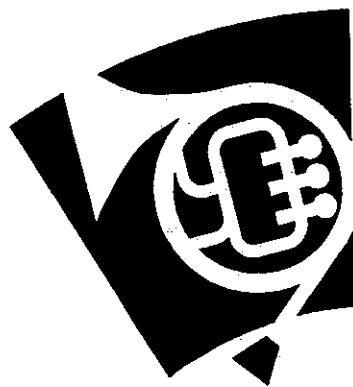
1. You can play through scales, exercises, and repertoire without hesitations and with accuracy.
2. It is easier to play music the first time that you see it.
3. You miss fewer notes and rhythms and are more musical.
4. You always play with a good tone!
5. You are more consistent.
6. You feel confident that you can perform for an audience.

It is very important that you constantly assess your own progress. Using a tape recorder is a very good way to evaluate your improvement. Setting high expectations for yourself will result in high returns! Hard work and dedication is the key and it is very rewarding in the end. There is no substitution for **PRACTICE!**

## ***Philip Farkas Comments on Practice:***

Probably the most important aspect of practice is knowing *how* to practice. Before you can really know how, you must first analyze your present abilities. Ask yourself what you do well on your instrument, what you do badly. How is your endurance, tone, range, staccato, legato, pp and ff? You must evaluate your own ability fairly and impersonally to have a clear concept of what you are trying to accomplish.

On a piece of paper, draw a chart showing the days of the week and the number of hours available for practice each day. Divide these hours into fractions showing all the phases of the practice day: warm-up, special problems (trills, attacks, scales, transposition, etc.), etudes, solos, orchestra passages. When this is done, allot the time in varying proportions to these different sections on your chart, as your analysis has shown your need. After having chosen suitable etudes from the several books, diligently follow your well thought-out plan for the week, marking off the number of minutes worked as each section is completed. Then, if for some reason your practice time is cut short on any day, it is a simple matter to consult the chart, find the sections which were not marked off and give the neglected portions their proper attention.



## **The Wynton Marsalis 12 Rules of Effective Practicing:**

1. Seek out the best private instruction you can afford
2. Write/work out a regular practice schedule
3. Set realistic goals
4. Concentrate when practicing
5. Relax and practice slowly
6. Practice what you can't play - (The hard parts)
7. Always play with maximum expression
8. Don't be too hard on yourself
9. Don't show off
10. Think for yourself - (Don't rely on methods)
11. Be optimistic - "Music washes away the dust of everyday life."
12. Look for connections between your music and other things.

