

On Practicing

In order to play well, we must learn how to practice effectively. Everyone enjoys playing through old pieces they've learned and playing together in group class or with friends. Playing through pieces is important. But before we can have a successful playthrough, we need to learn to practice our pieces until they are polished.

Practice is the 'work' part of developing technique on the instrument. When we practice, we focus on specific challenges of a piece. Perhaps there is a new finger combination we must learn or a bowing problem we must resolve. When faced with such challenges, our teacher gives us strategies for overcoming these obstacles. We often will break problems into several parts (or practice boxes). By doing slow practice repeatedly on these difficult parts, we will learn them. Outlined below are suggestions for motivating your child to practice along with suggestions for making practice efficient and successful.

1. Have a space devoted to music practice
 - Uninterrupted by TV, phone, siblings
 - Duplicate the teacher/student placement used in private lessons
2. Approach the practice session with enthusiasm and be positive:
 - Try playing music to initiate practice
 - Compliment your child for initiating practice
 - Even though corrections must be made, try to find something to praise
 - Pace intervening comments – 2 positive for each corrective comment
 - Keep constructive comments positive
3. Be goal-oriented
 - *“Without goals, efforts tend to meander undirected and without achievement”*
 - Have a concept of what the end result should be
 - Create a plan for achieving the end result
 - Your plan should include a series of short term goals leading to longer term goals
 - Children need attainable limits set. *“By the inch it's a cinch, by the yard it's hard”*
4. Be organized – *“Even if the number of minutes is not written down, some kinds of structured routine should be decided upon so the student know the boundaries of the day's practice”*

A sample routine should include:

 - Warm-Up – Scales or other technical worked
 - Review – Old pieces should be reviewed – let the child pick review pieces from a hat, play review pieces with a CD
 - Current/Working Piece – polish up any rough spots
 - Preview – work out the hard spots of the next piece given to you by your teacher
5. Be consistent – It is better to practice every day for a short period than once or twice a week for longer periods
 - Make practice routine; Not “if” but “when”
 - Make practice a priority! “Your child learns to judge the importance of practicing by how lightly it can be set aside”
 - Try practicing first thing in the morning

- If your child is very young, try to practice when they want to
6. Listen to the recordings! Listening is essential to help students learn pieces faster and develops their sense of good tone and intonation. Listening is a crucial part of the Suzuki Method.
 - Passive listening – in the morning while getting ready for school or at dinner time
 - Learn the tunes and acquire concepts of rhythm, tone, and pitch
 - Active listening – during the lesson or at the other times
 - Note specific details about the music i.e.; “Does the second section of the Gavotte repeat of not?”
 7. Accuracy before speed – *“One of the biggest and most frequent mistakes made by music students is practicing a piece of music too fast too soon. When a piece is new, the brain must decipher a great deal of information simultaneously ... In young students’ zeal to arrive at the finished product, they will usually practice too fast, thereby actually practicing mistakes. Every time the incorrect version is performed physically, the wrong impression is made on the brain.”*
 8. Work from smaller to larger portion of music – *“Another mistake made by beginning students is that of always playing a piece through in its entirety. A student may do that once or twice as an overview to determine where the trouble spots are and to get a feel for the piece. But after that is should practiced in smaller segments.”*
 - Practice the notes approaching a difficult area
 - Practice the notes leaving a difficult area
 - Focus on segments first, then play through whole piece
 9. Repeat the correct version to impress it upon the mind – *“If you have played something wrong many times and have played it without mistakes once, which do you think your brain is going to remember best?”*
 - “Once is not enough” – repeat the correct version several times
 10. Keep focused
 - Take breaks or stop when focus wanes
 - It is better to end the lesson while the student is still enthusiastic. Don’t wait until your child is tired and cranky.
 - Break up lesson materials in two short sessions rather than one long session
 11. Be sympathetic
 - “That does look hard, I bet it is going to take a few tries to get it” rather than “I know you can do it”
 12. Be creative
 - Make up stories about fingers, bow, etc.
 - Use charts and stickers to monitor progress
 - Incorporate toys and other interest (stuffed animals, soccer etc.)
 - Make up words to the songs
 - Plan celebration activities together when goals are met
 13. Never Lose your self-control
 - Try not to nag or threaten
 - If your child is establishing independence, give them more room and different options
 - Set house rules “at our house we keep trying”
 - Use natural consequences (from house rules) “no _____ until we learn this part”
 - Your presence “I’m going to stick with you while we work out this problem”

- Incentives “I’ll take you shopping after we’ve had a good practice”
 - Use games
14. Rid your child of the habit of griping and complaining
- Rewards for good behavior
 - Set out M&M’s – for each grip, an M&M disappears (in your mouth!) and your child eats what is left.
 - Pom-pom in container with smiley face – each gripe moves pom-pom to container with frowny face. Redeem pom-poms for rewards.
15. Tension Dissolvers
- Humor
 - Praise
 - Cutting down the lesson – *“Don’t worry about getting through the whole lesson every time. Sometimes it is better to focus on one specific spot which is causing trouble.”*
 - Self evaluation – *“Empowering the child by letting them determine that they did well and what they think they should work on”*
16. Don’t carry any grudges – *“After the lesson is over, change the subject and find something positive to say about the clothes they are wearing or some other school project”*
17. Be fair – Be careful not to place unexpected demands on a child.
18. Be sensitive to your child’s needs at the moment – *“You cannot expect much to be accomplished in practice if your child has just come from an emotional upsetting experience. Sometimes, you may need to pull back a little”*
19. Don’t be afraid of tears – *“The best way to respond to tears is to wait quietly for them to subside to a point where work can continue... Offer sympathy that the work is hard, wait for the tears to die down and then continue the work. Never give in to teachers, and don’t let them bother you. The child will eventually outgrow them”*
20. Expect good days and bad days
21. Enjoy your child’s music – *“Enjoying your child’s music is closely related to praise, but it isn’t necessarily the same. You can enjoy the music-making without feeling the need to compliment or praise its quality. If children know you are enjoying the sounds they are making that can be rewards enough, without the formal compliment.”*
22. Help your child recognize progress - *“Children tend to have short vision and short memories. Help them to see that they are progressing”*

Source: Wagstaff, Diane. Games and Motivation for the Suzuki Violin Student. 1992.

Practice Incentives

In a perfect world, your child would be eager to practice each day. But realistically even the most enthusiastic child will have slumps. These slumps are normal! Even professional musician have days when they would rather not practice! Incentives can be a good way to keep your child's interest in music. However, it is important that incentive be appropriate. Promising your child a trip to Disneyland for completing May Song would be a bit extravagant. However a picnic in the park would be nice reward for learning and/or polishing a piece. Incentive do not have to be material. A hug, smile, or wink can go a long way in bolstering your child's esteem! The following are suggestion for keeping your child (an you) motivated to practice.

- ❖ Let your child decide where and when they will practice for a week.
- ❖ Plan a recital for friends, stuffed animals. Etc. Make a program on a sheet of paper and decorate it. Practice for a week in preparation and let your child decided which pieces will be played, what favorite cookies or food will be served etc.
- ❖ Put a small "gift" in a secured paper bag. After your child has thanked your fifty time during the practice, they get the surprise.
- ❖ Practice outside on a warm day.
- ❖ Make up words to any pieces your child is learning. Sing it together and share it with your teacher or group class.
- ❖ Purchase a "practice plant" and set it in the practice room. Watch it grow because of all the beautiful music it hears. (Be sure to by a very hardy plant!)
- ❖ Let the child plan a week's practice. You can set the parameters such as "We'll do six things each day but you decide which six things you will do"
- ❖ Make hot cocoa or cold juice to enjoy together during practice
- ❖ Light a birthday candle and have that be the length of a practice session. For older students, have a the candle determine the length of tonalization, scales, review etc.
- ❖ Let the student be the parent for a day of practice.
- ❖ Take your child "on tour" playing something different in each room of the house, in a different place in the yard, or at different neighbors' homes.
- ❖ Make a practice puzzle: Cut a sheet of paper, or a picture from a magazine in several large pieces. Write a "practice task" on the back of each piece. Let your child begin putting pieces together by accomplishing the various tasks, until the puzzle is complete.
- ❖ String macaroni, Cheerios, or Fruit Loops on yarn for each good practice sessions then wear the necklace/bracelet. Or string one marker for each good review pieces, scale, etc. and make the jewelry in one day.
- ❖ Make practice chains: each slip of paper represents one day of practice where you write what you accomplished that day on that slip of paper. Make a loop out of one slip and staple it together. The

next day attach the next slip in a loop over that previous one. See how long you can make your chain!

- ❖ Clip a clothespin to the child's shirt or pants each time he/she does something well (or whatever the specific practice objective is). See how many clothespins are "hanging on" at the end of the practice session. Try to increase clothespins each session or set an achievable goal for the end of the week.
- ❖ Use a gameboard during practice sessions. Move the game piece for each successfully complete repetition of a practice box. Etc.

Source (in part): *Between Parent & Teacher* by Susan Kempter

Please resist YouTube!!!

I want to encourage all students/parents to learn step-by-step with me. There is a level of trust that is beautifully built in this mentoring process and if the parent is anxious to "get ahead" of the teacher this trust can be severed. I discourage the learning of pieces from any youtube videos as some of these videos may contain different bowings and/or fingerings than what I will teach you. In addition, I am trained to show you certain steps that will build habits and skills gradually and if some steps are skipped or "bad" habits are built then it will take twice as long to re-learn the piece/skill. I am happy to make videos for you in your lesson time of anything that you need so you can use those videos at home to help you

Here are some different categories that we might talk about in the lesson:

Polished Piece:

A piece you will probably perform at a recital or concert. This needs to be at the highest level of your personal best.

All bowings, fingerings, dynamics, phrasing, expression and stage presence must be present CONSISTENTLY.

Working Pieces:

Pieces you are still learning – bowings, dynamics, fingerings, and phrasing.

Review Pieces:

Pieces you can already play with correct bowing, dynamics, fingerings and phrasing. Review pieces are used for skill-building in the Suzuki Method and we often play them in new, and sometimes unusual ways in order to present new skills or refine already learned skills.



Etudes:

Pronounced A-tood.
Translation: Repetitive Exercises for Skill-Building

Scales:

Basic patterns of music making!






Recommended Practice Times (can be split into 2 times per day):

<i>30 minute private lessons (ages 3-5)</i>	<i>—————></i>	<i>10-20 minutes home practice</i>
<i>30 minute private lessons (ages 6-9)</i>	<i>—————></i>	<i>30 minutes home practice</i>
<i>45 minute private lessons (ages 7-9)</i>	<i>—————></i>	<i>45 minutes home practice</i>
<i>45 minute private lessons (ages 10-12)</i>	<i>—————></i>	<i>45-60 minutes home practice</i>
<i>60 minute private lessons (ages 10-15)</i>	<i>—————></i>	<i>60 – 90 minutes home practice</i>
<i>60 minute private lessons (ages 15+)</i>	<i>—————></i>	<i>60-120 minutes home practice</i>

Remember ... you only need to practice on the days that you eat!

Practice Plan

Theme of the Week:

Date:	1st day of practice	2nd day of practice	3rd day of practice	4th day of practice	5th day of practice	6th day of practice
 Have you listened to your CD today?						
1.  Warm-up Exercise:						
2.  Review Piece with Special Task:						
Other Review Pieces:						
3.  Concert Piece:						
4.  Exercises for the New Piece:						
New Piece:						

Place an X in the relevant box if you have practiced the task. How many X's will your practice plan have this week?