



Does Practice Make Perfect?

*Tips on Developing Better **Practicing** Habits*

Every good musician knows that regular practice is a must, but did you know that careless or inattentive practice can actually make you worse?

It is not necessary true that “practice makes perfect” – more likely that “perfect practice develops perfect playing.” Quality not quantity, you say? Your school music teachers will urge you to increase both the quality (focus, attention, goals/planning, etc.) as well as the number of minutes per week. Here are a few hints on improving practicing techniques. Read on... there are many additional resources for parents to guide their musicians to musical mastery!

1. Designate a quiet place for practice at home
2. Limit all distractions (TV, video games, computers, phones)
3. Plan habits of consistent daily practice time(s) and weekly frequency
4. Make practice goals (what do you hope to accomplish this week?)
5. Take a few minutes to warm-up (scales, finger patterns, long tones, or lip slurs)
6. Sandwich method (start at the bottom and work your way up)
 - a. Review a song you already know (bottom slice of bread)
 - b. Focus on a few “hard parts” (the meat in the middle of the sandwich)
 - c. Sight-read something new (condiments, pickles or cheese)
 - d. Review another well-prepared song (top slice of bread)
7. Pizza slices
 - a. Identify and prioritize the problems or hard sections
 - b. Partition the entire song
 - c. Focus on a “slice” of the music – a measure, phrase or line of music – at a time
 - d. Drill (daily) on one or a few slices
 - e. Next practice session, repeat then progress to next section
8. Re-order the sections of a piece (scrambling)
9. Target a difficult passage, play slow at first, then increase tempo gradually each time you play it
10. Try patterns of instant slow/fast and then fast/slow
11. Fire up different sections of the brain on a problem spot
 - a. Say the letter names out loud (or sing them) – speech center
 - b. Bow or tap the rhythms “in the air” – left-side psychomotor
 - c. Finger the notes without the bow or mouthpiece – right-side psychomotor
 - d. Combine a, b, and/or c on specific passages – all parts of the brain
12. Create new rhythmic or articulation/bowing variations to challenge your playing of the passage
13. To improve your musical batting average, implement the Ten-Times Rule (accurately in a-row)
14. Always add expressive markings including dynamics, tempo and articulation changes, etc.

Yes, practicing should be heard at home. It is NOT enough simply to play at school. The long-tested “success equation” is TIME + MAKING PROGRESS = FUN (encouraging more time, progress and fun). Practicing on a regular basis improves technique, musicianship, self-confidence, endurance, reading skills, and besides... playing better is a lot more FUN!

PARENTS: Here are several excellent websites on recommendations for developing better practice skills, but ask your school music director for more advice!

- <http://cnx.org/content/m11883/latest/>
- <http://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2013/09/03/216906386/10-easy-ways-to-optimize-your-music-practice>
- <https://www.familyeducation.com/fun/children-music/learning-play-tips-parents-young-musicians>
- <http://www.amparents.org/article-mom-how-do-i-play-a-g-a-parents-guide-for-the-young-musicians-practice-experience/>



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