

# The Practical Guide On How To Practice

What is the purpose of practice? Practice is used to reinforce, learn, and improve any activity through repetition and analysis. This applies to anything that you do in your life, be it shooting free throws or writing your signature. Practice should always be done with goals in mind; otherwise it is just repetition of what is already know.  $2+2=4$ ; doing this math problem again will teach us nothing. It is the same with music: playing what we already can is not practice.

Practice vs. rehearsal: Practice is done by the individual, on their own time. Rehearsal is putting the individual players together to create something bigger. Rehearsal should NOT be the time to correct wrong notes and rhythms; it should instead be used to add details and develop what the music should sound like as an ensemble.

Who needs to practice? EVERYONE! There is always something that you can practice to improve your playing. No one to date has fully mastered any subject or activity in this world, and so we should always strive to get better. Just ask yourself this: if Tiger Woods, the No. 1 ranked PGA golfer in the world can spend 4 hours each day just hitting golf balls on the driving range, is it too much to ask of myself to practice for 30 minutes, three times a week?

What do I practice? You should always practice whatever music you have to play as part of a larger group during each practice session. Additionally, you should practice any scales and exercises that you have received from your teacher. If you have any exercise or excerpt books, these should also have a place in your practice sessions. As far as what you should focus on in the music, prioritize it in this order: 1) Correct notes and rhythms, 2) Dynamic markings, 3) Articulations, and 4) Phrasing

How do I practice? Practice in a quiet place free of distractions. Devote all your attention to your task at hand and you will be very productive. It also helps to have two important and useful tools: a metronome and a pencil! These are a musician's best friends!

First, just as we do in class, warm-up! Your warm-up routine should last about 5 minutes, and should include long-tones, mouthpiece buzzing, and scale exercises.

Next, set a few for your practice session that are reasonable; "I will be able to be play all the notes and rhythms correct from measure X to measure Y at a steady tempo with correct dynamics" is a good example. **Don't generalize your goals!** If you say "I will be able to play this piece", what is your definition of "able to play"? At what tempo? Will you play EVERYTHING correctly?

Once you have warmed up and set your goals for the session, it's time to jump in! Use the priorities listed above as a guide. The question you should always ask yourself is this: "Could I play this section/scale/measure/note better?" If you are having trouble, slow it down; you have to learn to walk before you can run! *Don't get discouraged, get determined!* If you can play something **correctly 5 times in a row**, then you can consider it learned and move on.

## **Sample 30 Minute Practice Session**

**Student:** Johnny B. Goode

**Instrument:** Trumpet

**Music To Work On:** D-flat major scale; “Foundations for Superior Performance” book: exercise 19; “Variations on a Korean Folk Song” by John Barnes Chance; “His Honor March” by Henry Fillmore

**Date:** April 12, 2007

**Time of Practice Session:** 7:00 PM – 7:30 PM

**Goals for Practice Session:** Play D-flat major scale in the All-State pattern at a tempo marking of 100; play exercise 19 with correct notes and rhythms at the indicated tempo marking; play the trumpet solo in “Variations on a Korean Folk Song” with the indicated phrasing; perform the second strain of “His Honor March” at the indicated piano dynamic marking without cracking any notes

Timeline for Practice:

**7:00 PM** – Warm up on mouthpiece buzzing long tones; playing on instrument long tones descending chromatically; chromatic scale ascending and descending in eighth notes, 2 octaves from G-G

**7:05 PM** – Practices D-flat major scale, very slowly at first as quarter notes; began All-State slowly, and increased tempo up to 100 beats per minute (goal met!)

**7:09 PM** – Worked on exercise 19 in “Foundations” book; was able to play all notes and rhythms correctly but not at indicated tempo (goal not met; will be practiced again)

**7:15 PM** – Practiced solo section repeatedly; was able to play it correctly 5 times in a row with correct phrasing; added vibrato (goal met AND extra details worked on!)

**7:22 PM** – Played 2<sup>nd</sup> strain of “His Honor” for 8 minutes; notes and rhythms are correct but not sure if dynamics and articulations are correct; will ask director tomorrow for guidance (goal not met BUT is taking steps to improve)

**7:30 PM** – End of practice session...time to watch Jeopardy!!!