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Musician's Guide to Practicing



School Name: _____

Student: _____

Musical Recipe for Success: A Beginner's Practice Plan

You need to practice 30 minutes every day.
Here is a great recipe to make you into a good musician.

Prepare beforehand:

- a quiet room for yourself
- a music stand
- a comfortable chair without arms

Add:

- 1 minute of long tones
- 2 minutes of lip slurs/octave slurs
- 5 minutes of scales with various articulations and dynamics
- 5 minutes of sight reading
- 12 minutes of band method music and assignments
- 5 minutes of active listening to recordings suggested by your teacher

Stir in:

- good posture
- good embouchure
- full, controlled breath support
- concentration! (A concentrated and focused practice for 15 minutes is better than a distracted practice for 30 minutes.)



Bake at 365 days a year.

Serves enjoyment and self-esteem for a lifetime!



*By your 3rd year of playing, you should
increase the practice time to 1 hour*

*The inside of your mouth must feel open all the time.
All sound resonates from here.*

The Tortoise and the Hare

If you believed that more was better, then you may be someone who also believes that faster is better. However, some of the worst clarity problems occur from players who like to practice everything in 5th gear! It is simple to spot someone who practices only in high gear. When asked to play a passage at half the tempo, they simply cannot do it. Fingers run together, articulations run amuck, and the resulting sound is muddy. Of course, this type of player will adamantly profess that they *can* play it, but just not that slow. This is a myth. If a passage cannot be performed with control and musicianship at a slow tempo, then it is impossible that it is performed with control and musicianship at a faster tempo.

A good practice habit is to perform more challenging technical passages at three different tempos using the *paper-clip method* on *each* of the three tempos. The first tempo should be approximately 10 – 20 metronome clicks under the actual marked tempo. The second tempo should be approximately 5 – 10 clicks under the marked tempo, and the third tempo is the actual marked tempo. (Sometimes, it is beneficial to add a fourth tempo that is just a few clicks faster than the marked tempo. You will then feel more comfortable and in control when returning to the marked tempo.) For example, if a piece was marked at quarter note = 120, then a practice routine may look as follows:

Tempo 1	quarter note = 100
Tempo 2	quarter note = 110
Tempo 3	quarter note = 120 * Target Tempo
Tempo 4	quarter note = 126

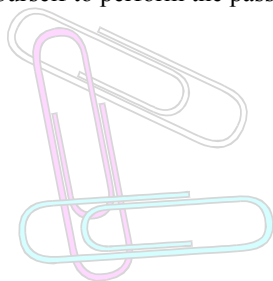
*When practicing a passage slowly, use the
increased time to open your auditory
sense and listen to the quality of your tone
and the nuance of the musical line.*

Paper-Clip Method

It has been said that Mozart's father had him use ten peas every time he practiced his piano. The peas served as a method to record keeping of *quality* practice. You can use five paper clips for your record keeping. The paper clips can be easily stored and can be clipped onto a music stand and slid easily from side to side similar to an old counting abacus.

Here is how the Paper-Clip Method works. Fasten the paper clips to the left hand side of the music stand. Instead of practicing your music from beginning to end, isolate particular problem areas in your music. Once a problem area has been defined, practice the section until you can perform the passage correctly five times in a row (or ten times if you choose to use ten paper clips). Each time the passage is performed correctly, you can slide one of the paper clips to the right hand side of the music stand. If on the fourth time through a passage an error is made, then all of the paper clips are positioned back on the left side of the stand in order to start over at number one again. Once you have correctly performed the passage five times in a row, you may then proceed to the next isolated area.

The method works because it trains you to perform a passage more times correctly than incorrectly. If you didn't start over at number one each time an error was made, then essentially you are kinesthetically training yourself to perform the passage just as many times incorrectly.



Practice Routine for Intermediate - Advanced Players

The Warm-Up15 → 30 minutes

Warm-Up = 50% physical + 50% mental

The purpose of the warm-up is to prepare yourself both physically and mentally. Warm-up exercises can be *routine* and dull if you do not have a defined objective intended. The warm-up must be treated as a performance - - with passion, motivation, and purpose.

The physical aspects of the warm-up should awaken and prepare the aural sensory muscles to assemble sounds into musical meaning. In addition, all muscles directly related to instrumental kinesthetic function must be stimulated in order to arouse the player's fine motor skills necessary for the remainder of the practice session.

Components of the Warm-Up:

Long Tones

By playing sustained tones in various progressions, the player is able to physically prepare their embouchure. Long tones further stimulate the cardiovascular system for the physical endurance of performing on a wind instrument. Mental preparation during long tone activities include heightening your aural awareness to hear the center of a full tone, and accurately perform correct pitch with and without a tuner.

Flexibility through Facility Exercises

In order to *ready* the fingers, embouchure, and air stream to the constructs of operating the musical instrument, the employment of technical exercises is crucial to the warm-up process. Facility exercises may include scales in various patterns, arpeggios, published etudes, and the like.

Make every attempt to practice at the same time every day. Protect this time as your time and do not allow yourself to be disturbed. Take a 2-minute break about every 20 - 30 minutes.

Correlation Factor

Whenever possible, consider the connection or correlation if relating the warm-up to rehearsal material. For example, if your rehearsal goal were to clarify the dotted-eighth – sixteenth rhythm, then it would be prudent to incorporate this rhythm into such exercises as scales. It is not essential that every aspect of the warm-up routine be related to the rehearsal goals, but it is wise to structure a portion of exercises to rehearsal objectives.

Remember to keep your body and muscles relaxed so that you are always able to take a full, deep breath to fuel your sound.

Etudes10 → 25 minutes

It is crucial that various style-studies/etudes become a regular part of the practice routine so that you can learn musical styles and their relationships. By means of performing style studies and etudes, you will be better equipped to emotionally respond with musical relevancy. There are several published etude materials available for your instrument. (Ask your music director for assistance in selecting such materials.)

Solo & Band Repertoire30 → 60 minutes

In addition to learning your wind band repertoire, time must be invested in learning solo repertoire. You could select a piece from the OMEA list or ask your music instructor for assistance. Try to find performance opportunities for your solo such as at school, church, and community events, and family gatherings.

Sight Reading5 minutes

Use sight-reading as part of your “warm-down”. Every practice session should conclude with reading a short piece or a few measures from a lengthier work. If you practice the same time as a friend, get together to sight-read duets. Before you begin to play the selection, take a minute to look over the piece for meter, tempo, key, rhythms, terminology, etc. Then play the piece from beginning to end without stopping to correct any errors. Play the selection again and improve upon any errors. You will find your reading skills improve greatly!

More is better, right?

Wrong! More is not better. The compounding effect of a *quality* practice session is much more beneficial than simply amassing hours. A focused practice for 30 minutes is greater than mindless repetition for one hour.

Practicing your instrument is not a simple, habitual pattern that one follows in order to accumulate knowledge. Learning is not the collection of information to be stored on a shelf, but rather, learning is the collection of knowledge and experience that can be employed to improve playing skills. A good practice session should free the mind and body of old, cumbersome habits and open new doors that encompass music as a whole. The ultimate goal of quality practicing is to reach a level where proficient skills are pooled into the whole of musical expression.

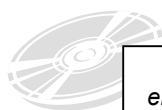
A player must learn to unleash poor practice habits and understand that every session is an opportunity to further develop the skills to gain ease of performance. Sometimes it may mean letting go of techniques that you believe are working for you, but may rather be hindering your playing. Maintain an open mind and do not be afraid to try new ways of approaching concepts and techniques in your practice routine.

An interesting, related story is of an individual who went to have tea with a Zen master. As the master poured tea into the visitor's cup, he continued to pour even after the cup was spilling over. The visitor exclaimed, “The cup is full; it can hold no more.” The Zen master replied, “Yes, but you came to me with your cup already full. How can I teach you anything unless you first empty your cup?”

Practicing Musicianship

Yes, you guessed it; there is also a magic tool for practicing musicianship. Your parents may call it an LP, your grandparents may call it an 8-Track, but today we call it a CD, mp3 etc.

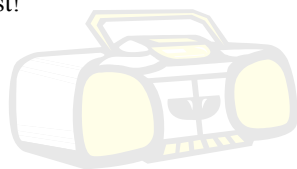
Purchase quality audio recordings of instrumental artists and ensembles, and then listen – listen – listen, and then listen some more. Many quality recordings are available at a very affordable cost, and you can listen for free via your local public radio station that programs classical music. If you own a computer, you can locate many quality channels online that stream real audio right to your home.



Be present in whatever you do. Be fully engaged in activities with heart, mind, and body.

Listen to good music every available moment you have. Not only should you own a quality recording of your own instrument, but you should also listen to other instruments, vocalists, chamber ensembles, and large ensembles. If you are unsure where to start, ask your music director to provide guidance towards purchasing quality recordings. Without guidance, you could be listening to poor recordings that provide very little musical value.

Recordings provide one of the best methods for absorbing musicianship as we listen to great artists bring music to life as they shape musical lines, shade nuances, caress phrases, and awaken dynamics. If you desire to be the best musician you can be, then you must surround your ears with the best!

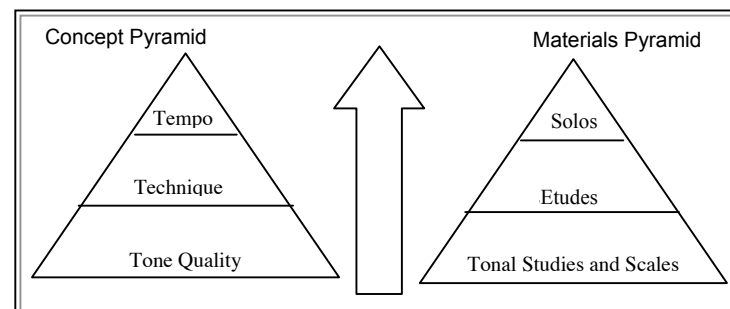


You become what you believe you can be. Trust and respect your ability and self-worth.

More Practice Tips

Priority Pyramid

Tonal production and quality of sound should be the first priority in every practice session. A passage performed technically perfect means nothing if the tonal quality is substandard. Use the following diagram as a guide to prioritizing concepts within your practice routine.

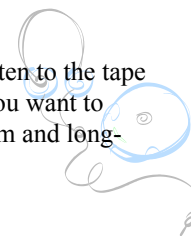


Practice Journal

A practice diary can also be useful for any age of musician. Sometimes it is easier to have an instructor tell you what you are doing well and what needs to be improved. However, some of the best learning happens in the practice room when we develop the musical maturity to tell *ourselves* what needs to be done. Learn to be your own best critic.

Recording thoughts and progress in a practice journal can be constructive to the performance assessment process. Throughout every step of a practice routine, a player should always be asking such questions as: Do I like how I sound? Was that passage clean? Am I playing accurate pitches? How can I make this phrase more musical? Etc.

Tape record practices whenever you can. Listen to the tape with a critical ear and make notes of things you want to improve upon. Divide your list into short-term and long-term goals.



Makes Sense?

We all know that we have five main senses: taste, touch, smell, hearing, and sight. Yet, did you know that when your eyes are in use, the other senses are functioning at a mere 20%? Therefore, the more you focus on notation and the mechanics of your instrument, the less you are listening to the quality of your sound.

The less you need to rely on the black and white dots on the page, the more musical you are able to function with your auditory sense. Try this. Play a few measures of your music. Now close your eyes and hum or sing the passage. Open your eyes. Now silently play the passage on your instrument, but continue to sing or hum aloud. Do this exercise a few minutes every day and you will find your other senses increase in function to assist in your development as a musician. (Even if you are performing a repetitive exercise, or playing scales, always listen intently to the sound you are producing.)

Being a musician is very similar to that of an athlete. Lung capacity and air control is so important to playing a wind instrument. Schedule at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise three times a week. Eat a healthy, balanced diet!

Scales Are Like Vitamins

As much as we may not enjoy eating Brussels sprouts or liver, or taking our vitamins, we do know that such things are good for our health and well-being. And likewise scales are our musical vitamins. Without a thorough knowledge and practical performance facility of scales, we are surrendering ourselves to a poor diet.

If you choose to learn only the Concert Bb Scale in your diet, then you are a malnourished musician. Learn as many scales as possible, and *never* give in to the misconception that scales are difficult --- after all, there are only eight notes to learn in each scale!

The Scale Matrix may assist you in recording and tracking your scale progress. Instead of attempting to learn all scales in a short period of time, the matrix is designed to add scales in a timely learning sequence.

Practicing Accuracy

Here are two secret tools that may change your life forever. Are you ready for this? Okay, here it is, presenting to you (insert drum roll here) ----- the metronome and the tuner. Yes, there you have it folks, not such a big secret after all, yet they still remain two tools that are either defectively used or never used at all.

It does just as much damage to your development by never using these tools, or ignoring the tools if they are being used. Too many times I have strolled by a practice room and hear a student with a metronome turned on, but it may as well be in the next room for as much as it is being the leader of time. And alas there is the poor, neglected tuner. Many tuners are dying to be turned on so that they may assist you when you are working on long tones to learn the intonation tendencies of your instrument.

Players **MUST** own and use both a metronome and a tuner. Learn to become your own best critic in the practice room.

Further tips for practicing accuracy include the procedure of isolating the more difficult passages and then practicing the passage in varying rhythms, articulations, tempos, etc., before performing the passage again as printed. Consider alternate fingerings that may assist in ease of facility, and look for patterns that may be mentally regrouped to add clarity to the rhythmic subdivisions. One should also take the time in a practice session to sing the music. Singing the music will contribute to greater accuracy of tone and pitch in the wind performance of the music. Applying a vocal quality to instrumental music influences the musical manifestation of the composition.

With difficult rhythms, practice saying them aloud before playing them.

If you can say it – you can play it.



A Two-Sided Coin: Accuracy and Musicianship

We may be in awe at the technical facility of a performer – the fluid motion of their hands, the ease of runs, and not a single note missed, BUT we are further inspired by the performer who displays astute knowledge of musical form and phrase and stirs our emotions. A musical performance that tends to display more of a machine or technician does nothing for the emotional psyche. On the other hand, a performance that may have *minor* flaws but is steaming with excitement and beckons to the soul will be a performance of lasting value.

A player must choose to develop and excel at both accuracy and musicianship. An instrumentalist can simply not be musical without first achieving accuracy of tone, pitch, rhythm, articulation and style. On the flip side, an instrumentalist can simply not perform with convincing accuracy unless the technical constructs are presented with mature musicianship.

Both sides of the coin must receive equal practice value. Neither may be sacrificed for the other. Achieve competency of both accuracy and musicianship and you will soon be *dancing* with your instrument.

*Make every attempt to practice at the same time every day. Protect this time as **your** time and do not allow yourself to be disturbed. Take a 2-minute break about every 20 - 30 minutes.*

Remember to keep your body and muscles relaxed so that you are always able to take a full, deep breath to fuel your sound.

Scale Matrix

	Largo	Larghetto - Adagio	Andante	Moderato	Allegro	Presto - Prestissimo
Week	MM = 40 - 60	MM = 60 - 76	MM = 76 - 104	MM = 104 - 120	MM = 120 - 168	MM = 168 - 208
1	Bb	Bb				
2	Eb	Eb	Bb	Bb		
3	F	F	Eb	Eb	Bb	Bb
4	Ab	Ab	F	F	Eb	Eb
5	C	C	Ab	Ab	F	F
6	Db	Db	C	C	Ab	Ab
7	G	G	Db	Db	C	C
8	Gb	Gb	G	G	Db	Db
9	D	D	Gb	Gb	G	G
10	E	E	D	D	Gb	Gb
11	A	A	E	E	D	D
12	B	B	A	A	E	E
13	Chromatic	Chromatic	B	B	A	A
14	Bb 3rds	Bb 3rds	Chromatic	Chromatic	B	B
15	Eb 3rds	Eb 3rds	Bb 3rds	Bb 3rds	Chromatic	Chromatic
16	F 3rds	F 3rds	Eb 3rds	Eb 3rds	Bb 3rds	Bb 3rds

Note: Vary articulations and dynamics with each scale, and practice scales two octaves whenever possible. As you advance, you should play every scale extended within the key. Once you feel comfortable with performing your major scales, construct other scale matrices to include natural, harmonic, and melodic minor scales.



Use your "mind's ear" to hear every note before you play it.

Figure 7.4. Saxophone Intonation Chart Template

SAXOPHONE INTONATION CHECK-SHEET

Instructions: 1. Properly warm up your instrument and then tune to A = 440. 2. Sustain a written note on your instrument 2 or 3 times in a row while a friend watches the tuner: a. If the average of the notes is in tune, or it displays as only a few cents sharp or flat, don't mark anything. b. If the average of the notes is flat (more than 5 cents), write the number of cents flat; ie. -12 c. If the average of the notes is sharp (more than 5 cents), write the number of cents sharp; ie. +12 3. Repeat step #2 for every note within the range of your instrument. 4. When you have completed the Check Sheet, go back to the notes that were MOST out of tune and learn solutions to play them in tune by improving tone, firming or relaxing your embouchure, using alternate fingerings, etc. If you have difficulty getting any particular notes in tune, please read the chapter <i>Factors Affecting Pitch</i> . When you revisit your Intonation Check-Sheet, ALWAYS USE YOUR EARS FIRST BEFORE YOUR EYES!													Name: _____	
													Mouthpiece: _____	
													Reed: _____	
													Notes: _____	
Number of cents flat (-) or sharp (+):														
Solutions:														
Number of cents flat (-) or sharp (+):														
Solutions:														
Number of cents flat (-) or sharp (+):														
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