

What About Practicing? *



Learning to play a musical instrument is a complicated task. It involves mental, physical and emotional abilities. Practice is a specific SKILL that must be learned. Students and teachers work alongside parents to ensure practicing is a productive and positive experience. Practicing can be compared to a school assignment which must be completed in an evening or weekend, although practicing will take a week to be completed, and it can be **heard**.

What is the parents' role as their student practices?

- to be an at-home motivator, cheerleader and task guide so the student can achieve consistent progress (they may ask for an in-home mini-recital from time to time)
- to provide a practice environment that is free from distractions
- to ensure a regular practice time that is not interrupted by too many other activities
- to occasionally check to be sure the teacher's directions are being followed
- to give encouragement if a student struggles with a new piece or when practicing lags
- to ensure that the lesson time does not conflict with other activities/appointments
- to ask their student if he or she understands the difference between **practicing** a piece and **playing** a piece (see the difference in the Student section below)
- to understand that a student experiences the ups and downs of a learning curve, much like school

What is the student's role as he or she practices?

- to practice at the same time each day for the length of time agreed upon with the teacher
- to practice a new assignment **slowly** so mistakes are kept to a minimum and the piece will be learned more quickly (at home he or she becomes the teacher)
- to listen to his or her own practice to determine whether or not the composer's own details are being followed, knowing that the details are what brings the piece to life and gives the piece excitement
- to increase the tempo of a piece gradually so it matches what the composer intended
- to learn the difference between **practicing** and **playing** a piece
 - **Practicing** takes many repetitions of small passages,
 - **Playing** a piece from beginning to end helps maintain a piece after the learning steps have already taken place
- to look forward to performance opportunities where the music can be shared

What is the teacher's role as he or she prepares a student's assignment for the coming week?

- to assign music that is the appropriate level for the student
- to explain the practice steps for each piece (hands alone, small sections first, metronome use, rhythms or dynamic contrasts, etc.)
- to make sure the student is clear about what is expected during practice in the coming week
- to provide performance opportunities which motivate the student to practice
- to encourage the student to **play** pieces, separate from regular practice, so pieces which have been learned will be maintained "under the student's fingertips"

*This article has been revised from the booklet, "A Parent's Guide to Music Study", which was written by a committee of teachers from the Foothills Music Teachers Association in 2006. FMTA is affiliated with Colorado State Music Teachers Association and Music Teachers National Association.

