

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

There's no such thing as 'practice makes perfect'. If you think you're perfect, you're fooling yourself. Practice makes better.

We all know that if you want to learn to play an instrument, you have to practise. But it's important to know **how to practise effectively**.

Your practising should include these three things:

1. A review of your last lesson, applying what you learned
2. Preparation for your next lesson
3. Anything else you feel is important for you – something you really want to play, a technique or idea you want to work on, etc.

Here are some basic principles that apply to all players, whatever their level:

- **You are your own best teacher.** Only you can make yourself into a better and better player. You absolutely must understand this!
- Enjoy practising. It's fun to be good at something and to be constantly improving your skills.
- Practise with your brain turned on and you will learn twice as fast.
- Part of good practising is developing your ability to concentrate. If you always try to focus to the best of your ability, you will actually get better at focusing.
- Stay relaxed, both mentally and physically. You'll think better and play better.
- Listen to your sound and make it the best you can.
- Don't neglect the technical work. Playing an instrument involves physical, as well as musical skills, and technical work builds your strength and stamina, along with your musical knowledge.
- When you identify a problem spot in a piece, turn it into an exercise. Play it as slowly as necessary to eliminate the mistake then gradually increase the tempo.
- Practise being correct. When you are working on a piece or section that's difficult for you, don't aim for a fast tempo until you're ready. If you try to play it too fast, you'll make the same mistakes over and over again and you will get better at making those mistakes! It's much harder to unlearn mistakes than it is to practise getting things right.
- Learn to handle frustration. If you can't get something right, stop and take a deep breath. Try to work out calmly where you're going wrong, then try again. If it's still not working and you're not sure why, make a note of the problem and discuss it with your teacher. Then move on to something else.
- Make some time to play through something you know well and really enjoy or make up something of your own.
- Try to practise every day, or nearly every day. Find a time of day that works for you, and stick to it.
- Aim for 20 - 30 minutes per day, at least 5 days a week. If you want to become a really great player, you'll need a lot more.
- Find a place to practise where you can concentrate, with nothing to bother or distract you.

Be patient with yourself. Learning to play an instrument is a long-term project.