

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

How to Practice Effectively

" I don't care what you're doing or what you're trying to accomplish; you can't skip fundamentals if you want to be the best."
- Michael Jordan

- 1. Practice must be scheduled DAILY and the schedule must be met.**
-how much time you spend practicing in a week is much less important than how many days during that week you practice.
- 2. Make the most of your time. FOCUS!**
-concentrate exclusively on your practicing
-don't let your mind wander
-remove all distractions, i.e. TV, phone, radio etc.
- 3. Time must be budgeted.**
-basic areas covered should include:
tone exercises, technical exercises, orchestral repertoire, solo literature, ensemble repertoire.
-proportion of time allotted to each area should be determined by degree of difficulty.
- 4. Be hard on yourself.**
-every mistake you find and fix while you're practicing is a mistake you probably won't make in front of your teacher, your director, or an audience.

SCALES

- Start slowly. Even if the scale is a familiar one, it is easier for you to hear and correct intonation and technical flaws*.
- Listen carefully for intonation. If you have a piano, play the scale on the piano before you start to get the sounds of the intervals into your ear.
- Use a metronome. Be sure that notes that are supposed to be on the beat occur EXACTLY with the metronome, and be sure the notes are even. If the notes are uneven when you play the scale slowly, fix them immediately: the problem will only get worse as you speed up.
- Listen carefully to the joints between the notes: there should be no extra sounds or spaces between one note and the next. If there are, eliminate them: see that all your fingers are moving together, and that you're keeping adequate breath support through the slur.

*A recording device may be the most important study tool in analyzing imperfection.

ETUDES

The point of a well-written etude is to give you repeated practice at something that is difficult to play on your instrument.

Start working on an etude by finding the difficult passages. They will need a lot more work than the rest of the etude. You don't have to start at the beginning of the etude every time you practice it.

- Always start slowly. When you begin work on a difficult passage, start at a tempo at which you can CONSISTENTLY play it correctly. (of course you will be practicing with your metronome!) It is much easier to learn a passage correctly the first time, than to relearn it after it's been learned wrong. If you need to practice accurately at half or even a third or a quarter of the final tempo, so be it. Then speed it up gradually - usually one metronome setting at a time.
- As you work, don't start right at the beginning of the hard part: include 1 - 2 m. before/after it.

After the difficult passages are under control, work on the etude as a whole. Resist treating the etude only as a technical exercise; do what you can to make music with it.

- Exaggerate the dynamics. If none are written, add them yourself.
- Play the phrases so that a listener who doesn't have the music can tell where each phrase begins and ends.
- Always play with as beautiful a sound as you can possibly create.

SOME GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICING

Have a specific object of concentration for each repetition when practicing anything:

1. Notes and Rhythms
 - a. work out difficult technical passages with altered rhythms, tempos, and articulations
 - b. ALWAYS practice rapid staccato passages with a legato tongue when practicing slowly
2. Intonation
3. Phrasing and nuances
4. Tone quality

Dr. Gwendolynn (Wendy) Rose
Associate Professor of Music - Bassoon
Western Michigan University
voicemail: 269.387.4694
email: wendy.rose@wmich.edu

GOALS

Long Term

1 Year _____

2 Year _____

3 Year _____

4 Year _____

Short Term

Daily _____

Weekly _____

Monthly

Sept. _____

Oct.. _____

Nov. _____

Dec. _____

Jan. _____

Feb. _____

Mar. _____

April _____

Fall Semester _____

Spring Semester _____

Summer _____