

10 Practice Tips for Musicians

Bill Niemi, Euphonic Studio

Mount Vernon, Iowa

(319) 895 8002

www.euphonic.us or write bill@euphonic.us

1. Get your priorities straight

Make a list of all your daily activities and then try to prioritize them. Don't forget sleeping. See where learning music fits on your list. Are there things on your list that eat up your time that could be lowered in priority? For example, how about taking 30 minutes from video gaming and moving it to learning music?

2. Get Organized

When you sit down to practice, you should have all your notes from your last lesson, all of your books and materials, and a clear idea of what you are trying to accomplish in that session. Make sure you clearly understand everything in your lesson. If you don't, then jot down your questions and bring them to your next lesson.

3. Schedule a regular practice time

You should schedule a time each day for practice. You may have to be creative about this because it might not be the same time every day. But you should know every day when you're going to practice and then make sure it happens. Please avoid "cramming" for a lesson because it doesn't work.

4. Focus on what you're doing

It's just a plain fact that if you are sharply focused on your practice you will get more out of it... a LOT more. Think about the immediate purpose of your practice while you are practicing. Resist daydreaming, look at the music and actually see it. Push other thoughts out of your head and concentrate through the whole session.

5. "Genius is 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration"

No matter how much natural talent you have, it's up to you to develop it. Tip o' the hat to prolific inventor and American icon Thomas Edison. There is no better way to develop your talent than regular, focused, practice sessions. You should dedicate a minimum of 30 minutes per day to practice, and this should go up as you get more advanced.

6. Look for opportunities for extra practice

Often you may find yourself with a few minutes of downtime between other activities. Pick up your instrument and play it, even if it's just for 5 minutes. This tip comes from Winton Marsalis, world-renowned jazz trumpeter. It will work for any instrument.

7. Practice the hard parts more than the easy parts

Each assignment I give for a lesson should have something in it that's a little harder than the last lesson that teaches you something new. That's how you make progress. When you get to a part that's hard to play, don't panic! Just slow down and play each note until it becomes more familiar and you understand it. Then you can speed it up gradually until you can play it at tempo. This is called "spot practice".

8. Practice with a metronome

If you practice with a metronome it will help you develop a better sense of rhythm, make sure that you are in command of the entire piece (not just the easy parts), and provide a measuring stick for your technical progress. You should practice scales with a metronome for a few minutes at least every day. Yes, every day!

9. Record yourself

Buy an inexpensive tape recorder and record yourself as you practice. You will find that you can learn a lot by listening to yourself practice. You'll discover what parts of the pieces and exercises are giving you trouble. You'll see if your practice sessions are efficient and focused. Are you playing in time? Are you glossing over mistakes or fixing them? Listen and learn.

10. Patience is a virtue

It takes time to develop technique on an instrument and learn music. Be patient with yourself if it seems like it's taking a long time. Don't give up; instead, make sure you are using the 9 tips above to your best advantage. If you are still having problems, please don't be shy about talking to me about it. I've been there, too, along with every other music student. If this was easy, everybody would be doing it. It's not easy, but it's worth the time and effort. You are developing skills that will stay with you for the rest of your life.

In summary...

Please use these practice methods in any way that they help you. If you have any questions about them, I will be happy to discuss your questions at your lesson.

Protected by GPL. Please use freely with proper attribution.