

Practice Journal

Table of Contents

Thank you!	2
Read this, OR ELSE...	3
Why Should You Practice?	3
On Your Mark... (Practice Tools)	4
Get Set... (Daily Preparation)	5
GO! (Daily Practice Routine)	6
What Should I Play First? (Effective Warm-ups)	6
How in the World Am I Supposed to Play <u>This</u> ? (Meeting and Beating Technical Challenges)	8
And Don't Forget To...(General Reminders and Tips)	9
That Thing Can Break, You Know...(Instrument Care Tips)	10
Are We There Yet? No, But We're Getting Closer (Personal Weekly Practice Journal)	12

To the student:

This guide was put together with you in mind. Experience as a band teacher tells me that most band students find home practice to be challenging, and for a wide variety of reasons. I hope that this guide will help you to play better, understand music better, and have more fun.

The guide is designed to be easy to use. It is not “more stuff to practice,” but rather a resource to help you tackle the music that you already have. Simply identify the section or sections in the Table of Contents that apply to you and your situation. Carefully consider the tips and strategies in each. If in doubt, ask your director for help.

To the parent(s):

Your child has made a potentially wonderful and life-changing decision by choosing to play a band instrument. He/She needs your consistent and enthusiastic support in order to succeed. Please read through this guide with your child and discuss its contents. Consider often how you might assist. Offer to help by simply listening. Let your child know how proud you are of him or her. Gently participate in the process as much as you are able. He/She will appreciate your effort to help make practice time enjoyable. Encourage your child as he/she works to form good habits. As habits develop and you continue to support this great activity, you may find yourself surprised at what your child can do!

Read this, **OR ELSE...**

You might not get the most out of this guide!

If you want to use this guide to your advantage, you will need to remember that good practicing has a lot to do with forming **GOOD HABITS**. Once you **DECIDE** that you are willing to learn some new, good habits, you will have a great chance to improve your playing quickly. (Example: feeding yourself regularly is a good habit to learn if you want to stay healthy!)

Habits of **GREAT** musicians include **having the proper tools, setting aside time to play, and knowing what you want to get out of your time** (goal setting).

You may want to highlight or underline information in this guide that you find especially useful.

Why should you PRACTICE?

You were probably told from the very beginning that you need to practice, but why? Here are just a few reasons why you should learn to practice effectively:

- You will almost certainly become a better player of your instrument.
- You will probably have more fun playing your instrument, because you will be better at it. Consider something else that you enjoy doing...you're probably pretty good at it.
- You will become a more valued part of any group with which you play – like the school band.
- You owe your fellow musicians and the composer your very best effort.
- As you improve, you will be ready for more challenging and interesting music.
- You may very well become friends with people who also decide to practice more.
- No one ever learned to play an instrument better by leaving it in its case!

What other reasons can you think of to practice?

On Your Mark... (Practice Tools)

Before you do anything else having to do with practicing at home, make sure that you have the following:

- 1) **A regular time to play.** This may be THE MOST IMPORTANT PART of improving your playing. Practicing every day at the same time is the ideal. Consider how you normally eat meals and wake up every day at about the same time. You can develop a similar daily practicing habit. Once it is established, it will become one of your life's daily events. If you need to vary the time on certain days, try to keep it close to your set time.
- 2) **A quiet, well-lighted place to play.** This needs to be a place that you can depend on to be available at your regular time. You will need to be sure that distractions are minimized. Distractions might include: TV, CDs, MP3s, radio, video games, computer, telephone, toys, or even siblings. Arrange for a time with your parents so that you will not disturb them or others who need quiet (sleep, work, etc.).
- 3) **A good chair or enough room to stand.** Find a chair that is similar to one you would use at school – flat seat, fairly straight back, no (or minimal) padding, no arms. If possible, keep this chair in your practice place. Percussionists, make sure there is adequate room to stand and hold your sticks or mallets with room to spare.
- 4) **A music stand.** This will help you to use proper posture and will allow you to read your music at a good angle. If possible, keep it in your practice place.
- 5) **A pencil.** You may want to mark your music or write things down to remember.

Complete the following:

My regular practice time will be _____

My quiet, well-lighted place will be _____

Distractions that I will need to avoid include _____

I have a good chair to sit on while practicing. ___ YES

I have a proper music stand. ___ YES

I have a pencil. ___ YES

Once you have these Practice Tools in place, you are ready to do your Daily Preparation.

Get Set...
(Daily Preparation)

Every time you practice, you should:

- 1) **Check to make sure your instrument is in good playing condition.** This includes keeping lubricant, reeds, a rag, and any other needed supplies handy. Keep it clean and lubricated properly; discard worn out reeds. (Reed players: If you are not currently rotating reeds, ask your director how to do so.) Cleaning and maintaining your instrument regularly will enable you to play better and may prevent costly repairs. For further direction, refer to “Instrument Care Tips.”
- 2) **Have certain goals in mind before you play.** Write down assignments in a designated place as your teacher gives them. Set realistic daily goals based on these assignments. Also, set your own daily, weekly and monthly practice session goals and write them down in a designated place, like a notebook. Have these goals handy while you are practicing so that you can refer to them.
- 3) **Make sure you have the written music that you need to meet your goals.** Plan ahead so that your music is not left somewhere else (like school) when you need it at home. Keep sheet music in a protective folder. Take special care of school-issued music – it’s very expensive, and not very easy to replace! If there is room, you may want to store soft-cover music books (like method books) in the folder.

Complete the following:

Every time before I play my instrument, I need to make sure that I have these supplies:

At the end of every practice session, I need to do the following to my instrument:

My instrument needs the following periodic care every _____ :

_____. It should be professionally serviced every _____.

If my instrument breaks or needs an adjustment, I will need to bring it to

_____ or ask _____

for help.

GO! (Daily Practice Routine)

This should last for a set amount of time (at least 15 minutes) and should include:

- 1) **Appropriate warm-up exercises.** These can vary considerably, depending on the instrument and their purposes. Playing a band instrument can be a very intense physical and mental exercise. Like an athlete, you need adequate preparation in order to play music well. See “Effective Warm-ups” for specifics.
- 2) **Review.** Spend a short amount of time to play through passages that you have recently mastered.
- 3) **Honest work on challenging technical material.** This should be the “guts” of your practice time! Pitch accuracy, difficult rhythms, fast-moving notes, range-testing areas, articulations, dynamics, and the like should be focused on carefully and intensely at this time. See “Meeting and Beating Technical Challenges” for specifics. Don’t “let yourself off the hook” in this area!
- 4) **Make music with the notes.** Apply the appropriate emotions and feelings that transform notes on the page into something that is truly enjoyable to hear.
- 5) **Document your progress.** Write down whatever you have succeeded at improving today. Look back to this tomorrow to see what “fruit” your labor has produced.
- 6) **Rewards.** That’s right! After you have worked to make progress on assigned material, feel free to take a few minutes and play something that you really enjoy or try to play something new – whatever you want.
- 7) **Think ahead to tomorrow.** What will you work on tomorrow that you know needs further improvement? What did you not get to work on this time? Write these things down. Look forward to the next session knowing that you have done something productive today.

What Should I Play First? (Effective Warm-ups)

Warm-ups set the tone for your entire practice session. Play them carefully and patiently. Do not neglect counting wherever there is a time signature. Warm-ups can include many exercises and drills that you may want to rotate or modify to keep from getting disinterested in them. You may find useful warm-up exercises in your lesson book or in other materials that you have. Feel free to make up your own warm-ups based on technical exercises, musical passages, or a favorite piece. Ask your director for specific warm-up exercises that you can use daily. Here are some basic exercises to consider:

Woodwinds and Brass

- **Mouthpiece/Head joint playing or buzzing** can benefit your playing greatly. Play long tones, scales, simple songs, etc., and then play them on the entire instrument.
- **Long tones** are critical for tone development. A long tone should be played with a full breath of air and at a comfortable volume. Vary the length and dynamics of long tones.

Start with pitches that are easy to produce, then play some that are lower and higher. Always strive for the very best possible sound.

- **Scales and scale patterns** have many benefits, including learning and reinforcing key signatures, extending your range, and increasing your technical ability. They can be used to practice different articulations and dynamic changes. You will find partial or complete scales frequently in band music, so, in effect, you may be practicing some of your lesson material and sheet music when practicing scales.
- **Arpeggios** are great for range extension and flexibility.
- **Slurs** are critical for embouchure strengthening, especially brasses. Brasses should include slurring up and down one partial at a time for each fingering/slide position. These are known as “lip slurs.”
- **Fingering/position drills** are useful for training your mind and body before you even blow into your instrument. Work slowly at first and gradually increase your speed, being careful to keep your movements even and smooth.

Percussion – Snare Drum

- **Single, double, and alternating strokes** will help to develop your stroke. Work slowly at first, gradually increasing speed.
- **Sticking patterns** will help you develop coordination and flexibility.
- **Rudiments** are critical to learn and improve, as they appear in many pieces of music. These include flams, rolls, paradiddles, and others.

Percussion – Mallet Keyboard (bells/xylophone)

- **Single, double, and alternating strokes** will help to develop your stroke. Work slowly at first, gradually increasing speed.
- **Scales, scale patterns, and arpeggios** will help you develop coordination and flexibility and will teach you about key signatures.

These warm-up exercises are by no means the only ones you could or should use. Ask your director to help you determine a good daily sequence.

My typical daily warm-up sequence:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Feel free to change this sequence from time to time!

How in the World Am I Supposed to Play This? (Meeting and Beating Technical Challenges)

All musicians have been intimidated at one time or another by technical challenges. Most every difficult musical exercise or passage can be learned with time, effort, and determination. The following “wood shedding” procedures have been used by successful musicians for many years to learn difficult passages:

- **Take small “bites.”** Isolate small portions of music and learn them separately before putting them together.
- **Eliminate articulation and style markings (and rudiments for percussion).** Add them after you are able to play rhythms and pitches accurately.
- **Slow things down.** Your brain is designed to learn unfamiliar concepts slowly at first, gradually adding speed.
- **Practice rhythms only** with claps, taps, counting, etc. Write in counting syllables (1&2&3&4& style). Practice rhythms by playing them using a single pitch.
- **Identify all pitches and fingerings/positions.** If you aren’t sure, look them up! Experiment with alternate fingerings/positions. Say the pitches out loud in sequence. Say them out loud in sequence using the written rhythm. Do this also while fingering/changing positions according to the changing pitches. Play through the sequence, first ignoring the rhythm and then observing it.
- **Write the music out.** It may seem strange, but writing out the music you are attempting to play can help you to understand it before you even make a sound. Ask your director where you can find music staff paper.
- **Gradually, put all the pieces of the puzzle together.** Practice the passage slowly and carefully, observing all markings. Gradually work up to the desired tempo.
- **If a recording of the music is available, listen to it.** Try to play along with it. If there is no recording of the part available, ask your director to make one for you.
- **Record yourself playing the passage, then play it back and listen.** Is everything correct? Check it against the written music and/or a professional recording.

Remember, this work can be slow and somewhat frustrating, so be patient yet honest with yourself. Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts to learning difficult passages. Use these procedures in whatever ways help you the most. Which ones do you not currently use?

Try to incorporate these additional methods whenever they might help.

Are there any ideas not listed on the previous page that you can think of to help yourself with technical challenges?

And Don't Forget To... (General Practice Reminders and Tips)

While you practice:

1. If you are keeping a practice record of minutes spent, only count the time you actually work, not breaks.
2. Use proper posture, sitting/standing up straight at all times.
3. Use good, appropriate warm-ups.
4. Once you are warmed up, concentrate on practicing what is difficult first and for the most time.
5. Remind yourself of the things that you know are necessary for good playing. Keeping a small reminder list on or near your music stand can help.
6. Write things down that you need to remember for the next session. (You do have a pencil on your music stand, right?)
7. Remember that difficult passages are not usually perfected in one session. Work on them carefully over several days. You may want to make a note of when you have “conquered” a particular passage or exercise.
8. Take a short break after a while if you need it.
9. Enjoy playing! You should regard practicing your instrument as something you GET to do, not something you've GOT to do.

Additional ideas for practicing:

1. Practice with the help of software such as SmartMusic or with a play-along CD designed to be used with your music.
2. Practice with a friend or friends! It's usually a lot more fun. Ask your friends who play similar instruments what's working for them.
3. Compete with your friends in band to see who can learn a particular passage the fastest.
4. Make up games that you can play that are based on your assigned material.
5. Tape record (or digitally record) yourself practicing, then go back and listen to yourself. Do this for short, medium, and long periods of your practice time. You may be surprised at what you hear! This instant feedback will allow you to hear

- where you need improvement. Save some of these recordings and listen to them a few weeks or months later to hear your progress.
6. Purchase a metronome and use it to help you keep your pulse while playing. This has short and long term benefits.
 7. Purchase a tuner and use it to help you play your music in tune. This also has short and long term benefits.
 8. Listen to good recordings of people playing your instrument. Borrow CDs from the library, visit CD stores (hint: used CD stores can save you lots of money), download recordings from the internet (make sure they're legal first), etc.
 9. If you have internet access, look up things that pertain to improving your playing.
 10. Ask your director (and private instructor, if you have one) for additional directions or suggestions.

Highlight or circle any of the above tips that you especially want to remember or ask your director about.

That Thing Can Break, You Know... (Instrument Care Tips)

Your instrument is a very breakable piece of equipment that needs special care to keep it working properly and looking good. Consider and use the following tips:

Woodwinds

- Keep your corks and tenons greased as needed, but do not overdo it.
- Swab your instrument out after every use. This preserves the pads and prevents bacterial growth. Clarinet and saxophone mouthpieces should NOT be swabbed, but any moisture should simply be wiped off.
- Clarinets and saxophones ONLY: Rinse your mouthpiece out once per week with warm water. Flute head joints should NEVER be exposed to water.
- Wipe off the body and keys with a soft, lint-free cloth after every use. This will keep dirt and oil buildup to a minimum. Avoid using ANY water or cleaners on the instrument – they can destroy the pads. (And pads are very expensive to replace!)
- Flutes may be polished with a special polishing cloth available at music stores.
- Regularly used woodwind instruments should be professionally serviced about once every six months. Professionals will take care of necessary adjustments and other maintenance.
- If you are unsure about anything regarding your instrument's condition, be sure to ask your director.

Brass

- Oil valves once every few days. Be sure to wipe them off before oiling. Also, remove the lower valve caps occasionally and wipe them out.
- Trombone slides should be wiped off and given new slide cream at least 1-2 times per week. Use only a small amount – too much will slow down the action.

- Grease tuning slides whenever needed. One application of proper tuning slide grease may last for a long time, but it is also easy to forget about it – by then the slide may be stuck. Don't let this happen to your instrument!
- Rinse your mouthpiece out with warm water regularly. You can purchase a mouthpiece brush and use a little dish soap to clean it periodically.
- Regularly used brass instruments should be professionally serviced once per year. Professionals will take care of necessary adjustments, cleaning, and maintenance.
- If you are unsure about anything regarding your instrument's condition, be sure to ask your director.

Percussion

- If you notice any loose parts, ask your director about them. Otherwise, any service should be performed by a professional repair technician.

“Dos and Don'ts” of instrument care:

- DO keep your instrument in its case when it's not being used.
- DON'T leave it in its case in a place where a younger person can get inside the case and possibly damage it.
- DO keep your instrument properly lubricated.
- DON'T over-lubricate corks, tuning slides, or a trombone hand slide.
- DO make sure your mouth is free of food and drink before blowing into your instrument. Drinking a cupful of water just before playing is a good idea.
- DON'T eat or drink anything other than water just before playing. Food particles and sugary saliva are a few of the many things that will make the inside of your wind instrument very, very unpleasant to look at. They may also cause damage!
- DO hold your instrument carefully at all times and keep an eye on it when you put it down temporarily.
- DON'T allow other people to play your instrument, as they probably don't know how to treat it properly.
- DO keep your instrument from receiving unnecessary abuse.
- DON'T be careless with your instrument by dropping it or bumping it against things. Repairs for “injuries” is very expensive and time-consuming.

List four things that you can do to take better care of your instrument starting today.

Are We There Yet?...No, But We're Getting Closer
(Personal Weekly Practice Journal)

On the following pages you will find a practice journal. Photocopy it as often as you need. It can be very helpful to keep a journal of time practiced, material practiced, results, and goals. You may want to just fill out one or two things at first until it becomes a daily habit. Once a daily habit is formed, fill out as much as you can about your practice session so that you become more aware of your progress. Your director may ask your parent to initial it in order to verify your work.

Weekly Practice Journal

Name _____

Band: CB, SB, WS, WE

Starting date _____

This Week's Assignment _____

Total minutes practiced this week: _____ Parent initials _____

Sunday

Material practiced: _____

From _____ To _____ Total: _____ minutes

At the end of this session, I was able to _____

Tomorrow, I plan to practice _____

Monday

Material practiced: _____

From _____ To _____ Total: _____ minutes

At the end of this session, I was able to _____

Tomorrow, I plan to practice _____

Tuesday

Material practiced: _____

From _____ To _____ Total: _____ minutes

At the end of this session, I was able to _____

Tomorrow, I plan to practice _____

Wednesday

Material practiced: _____

From _____ To _____ Total: _____ minutes

At the end of this session, I was able to _____

Tomorrow, I plan to practice _____

Thursday

Material practiced: _____

From _____ To _____ Total: _____ minutes

At the end of this session, I was able to _____

Tomorrow, I plan to practice _____

Friday

Material practiced: _____

From _____ To _____ Total: _____ minutes

At the end of this session, I was able to _____

Tomorrow, I plan to practice _____

Saturday

Material practiced: _____

From _____ To _____ Total: _____ minutes

At the end of this session, I was able to _____

Tomorrow, I plan to practice _____