

The way to achieve successful practicing and to encourage future practicing is to feel a sense of accomplishment at the end of your routine.

Get Set: Preparing Your Technique

-“Wake up” the Elements

breathing exercises (inhale, exhale, air speed)
air support (long tones, slow 8ves, slow slurred scales)
embouchure (mirror, long tones, slurred arpeggios)
body position (mirror, self-awareness)

-“Toughen up” the Skills (technique, speed, rhythm, sight reading)

scales and patterns
articulation patterns and exercises
broken intervals
rhythmic patterns
sight reading
instrument-specific etudes and other study pieces

-“Finesse” the control (entrances, releases, dynamics, intervals)

long tones
broken chords and arpeggios
etudes
phrases from solo works or ensemble works

Hopefully this will help you to be even more productive in the practice room. You may find some of these tools completely ineffective and others a saving grace.

Remember: all minds do not work alike.

The practice anecdotes that changed my life:

#1- If you practice it wrong 9 times and stop when you get it right on #10, you have provided yourself with a 10% chance for success in future performances.

#2- Almost right is all wrong.

#3- All the right notes in all the wrong rhythms is just all wrong.

#4- Practice is the best of all instructors.

Practice!

Prepare to Practice...
A Lecture Presentation for Music Students
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Dr. Mary Alice Druhan

Ready: Preparing Your Mind

The effectiveness of your practice routine directly relates to the state of your mind while practicing. An organized routine creates consistency and discipline, both of which contribute to productivity. Consistency in the practice room is the key to consistency in performance.

-Setting the Time Frame

Look at your daily schedule and find at least two times, regardless of length, that you plan to use for practice time. In the event of a special circumstance interfering with one of your practice times, you want to be assured of some time in practice every day. The amount of time spent in a practice room does affect your learning, but more essential is the quality of the time you spend. This is one reason that organization is the key- every minute counts.

-Setting the Location

When you are setting up to practice, make the best use of your space for productivity. Have all the tools you need to practice already set up before you begin. The best use of your time is not spent searching for the next item in your bag. Take the time at the start of your practice to place metronomes, tuners, literature, pencils, recordings, etc. close enough to grab. Try to keep other distractions out of the way. Having a theory assignment propped up on the piano in front of you while practicing can be distracting and stressful.

-Setting the Goals

Have a list of the assignments you need to cover. Try to have a plan for each day that is as similar as possible. Probably the worst idea is to try to hit everything on your list every time you hit the practice room. Some of my best practice routines have consisted of only a few measures of hard drill or a really good long-tone exercise. When planning, make sure that you have hit every item during the week.

-Setting the Schedule

Once you have a list of goals for the practice period and a time frame allotted, plan a reasonable schedule to be productive. Most students get frustrated with practicing due to poor planning or over planning. If you have 10 minutes, make sure to spend it on exercises that can accomplish a goal in that amount of time.

At the other extreme, some students feel bored in the practice room. This is usually due to a lack of variety, and maybe a misunderstanding about what the goals are and the methods to achieve those goals. If this is the case, work with your private teacher to come up with a variety of specific exercises for your routine.