

What Instrumental Parents Should Know

A Norwin Band Parent's Home Practice Guide

Now that you have given your son or daughter the opportunity of private lessons with a qualified professional player on their instrument, what do you need to know about at home practice time? This guide will help you as the parents of an instrumentalist get the most that they can out of the instrumental music experience.

One of the most important aspects of any successful individual is the time they put into developing and honing their skills. While time and regularity of practice is very important, the quality of the practice is the true determining factor in a musician's rate of improvement. In fact, 20 minutes of focused and correct practice is more effective than an hour of poor practice.

Practice Environment

In order for our students to get the most out of their practice session, we have a couple of suggestions. The first suggestion will involve the practice environment. Their environment should be:

- **Quiet & Calm** – Much like studying, practicing an instrument is mostly mental. Their practice area should resemble a library or study as much as possible. A place that is peaceful, out of the way, and quiet. After all it is an aural activity and they need to be able to focus on what they sound like.
- **Good Temperature** – Sometimes students are asked to practice in the attic, garage or basement as not to disturb people. If this is the case keep the temperature between 65 – 75 degrees. Extreme temperatures can cause their instrument to not work and in turn cause them to avoid practicing.
- **Chair and Stand** – It is important that their practice area allows them to sit in the exact same position they do in a performance situation. A sturdy chair is important to help them use correct posture. Their music should be in a place that they do not have to bend over to see it. Wire music stands are available for purchase at any local music store.
- **Use a mirror** – It is important that students constantly check their embouchures to make sure they are being formed correctly. Small Mirrors on their music stands are ideal. Bathroom mirrors work just as well.
- **Metronome & Tuner** – You can purchase a metronome & tuner from any local music store or online. Students need these devices to provide a reference for beat and pitch. These two items are must have items for any musician.

What should practice sound like?

- **A METRONOME BEEPING** – Students should be using a metronome 95% of the time when he/she practices. This helps them keep a steady tempo. As they mature, they will use the metronome less and less. However, they will never outgrow the need for a metronome as even a professional will use metronomes in their practice sessions.
- **Clapping and Counting** – The combination of rhythmic counting and clapping to the beat is key to overall success. Counting out rhythms with self-generated tempo will help with the coordination of motor skills and conceptual learning.
- **Note-naming** – Students should be reading lines from the music and saying the note names out loud. This should also be done with a metronome, and eventually, while fingering or positioning the notes being said.
- **Fundamental Sounds** – Students should be working on their sounds on just the mouthpiece, mouthpiece and barrel or head joint. This sound might be a little obtrusive, but it is essential in their development of proper embouchure and tone quality. They should work for a steady sound that doesn't waver at all.
- **Long Tones** – The first sounds that you should hear when a student has fully assembled their instrument are long and smooth sounds. Their tone quality is one of the most important aspects of learning instrumental music.

What shouldn't I hear?

- **Clowning Around** – Sometimes students get curious about their instrument and try new things. Although we want them to look ahead and read new music, they should never make obviously poor sounds on the instrument. Brass players should not be trying to play really high sounds, or really, really fast music when they are learning. Percussionists should not be trying to hit the drum as hard as they can.
- **All Music** – Students should enjoy practicing and should want to play songs as much as possible. However, at this point in their musical lives, they should also understand the importance of fundamentals. So you should not hear just songs when they practice. They should be doing many exercises along with note-naming and rhythm counting.
- **Silence** – Students should not just do rhythm counting or note-naming for their practice time. Part of becoming a musician includes the actual physical act of playing an instrument and honing those skills to express musical intent. Sometimes students try to say they have been practicing without making any sounds at all. This should not be the case. They should play their instrument for at least 2/3 of their practice time.

What can I do to help?

We have a few parents who have played musical instruments, but most parents don't feel comfortable helping band students with practicing. This is normal. If you are a person who has been in a band program, please feel free to help your child practice. Try to make sure you are helping the students practice the correct way that we teach them at Norwin. All parents can help their students by doing any or all of the following:

- **Find the right environment for practice** – An area as described before; Keep siblings busy with something else during that time; be sure they have a music stand, metronome, and tuner. Whatever you do, please do not send them outside or away to practice. Do what you can to make practice positive.
- **Consistency** – Try to help your child have a regular practice time (preferably when you are home to hear them practice now that you know what it should sound like). If they get in the habit of practicing for the same amount of time at the same time everyday you will be surprised at your child's progress.
- **Encourage Performance** – Set up a time every week for your child to perform for family or friends. Encourage them to show off the things they are playing in school or working on with their private teacher. This will give them performance goals and opportunity to control performance anxiety before big auditions.
- **Ask Questions** – Have your child explain what his or her plan is for their practice session. Ask them about upcoming playing tests or class requirements.
- **Sit in on a Practice Session** – Listen to your child practice occasionally. Ask them to go through the process as normal and explain to you why they follow the process they do when practicing. You can time them on timed note-naming games or mix up their rhythm cards to try to trick them up on rhythm counting.

Do all that you can to make practicing a positive experience!!!

The amount and quality of daily practice directly impacts their playing level on their instrument and the quality of the experience they can get out of music.