

# Guidelines for effective practicing

To learn a musical instrument you must learn to master many physical skills. The mastery of physical skills requires a real "physical education." As a music student, your job is to improve, master, and remember what you've accomplished. And, as much as possible, try to relax and enjoy the process.

Most students fail in one of two basic ways:

1. They practice in a way that fails to produce improvement.
2. Although they practice carefully and produce improvements, but they fail to practice in a way that ensures a lasting memory what they've learned.

The following are some tips and music study skills that will help you improve:

- Warm up carefully. (This is the most important part of practicing, yet it is the part that is skipped the most by students.)
- Select a time of day that is free from interruptions and use this time each day.
- Choose a place to practice that is free from distractions.
- Set a goal for the session: a scale; an exercise; specific sections of a piece; or even a measure that's giving you trouble. It may be a rhythm, the notes, or the tempo. Work on it slowly, and then build up your speed gradually. Before leaving it, put it together with the rest of the line. Don't try to do too much at one sitting.
- Repetition of a problem area reinforces muscle memory.
- VERY IMPORTANT: Use a metronome. (see below)
- Rest when you get tired.

## Suggested practice schedule

Material Practiced	Minutes	Goal
Long tones; easy drills; breathing exercises	5	Warm-up of embouchure (lip & mouth position) and instrument; good tone production
New material; individual improvement; assignments; look ahead	10	Develop new exercises; increase range; new songs; new lessons in book
Familiar exercises and etudes	10	Improvement of finger dexterity; tonguing; and overall fluency
Personal music choices	5	Play things you enjoy

A metronome is a device that can be set to make a clicking sound at different rates of speed used to set the tempo for playing a musical piece. For example, if you set the metronome to 60, you will hear 60 clicks (beats) in every minute. If you set the metronome to 120, you will hear 120 clicks (beats) in every minute. So a setting of 120 is twice as fast as a setting of 60. The higher the number; the faster the tempo.

Essentially, a metronome helps the musician keep a steady beat. It's like having your Band Director in a box clapping the tempo for you! After more and more practice sessions with the metronome, you will know when you are right on the beat of the metronome because you will get the sensation of not hearing the metronome while you play! Essentially, your notes are replacing the metronome beats. This will happen but requires much patience/practice to achieve.

Go to [www.metronomeonline.com](http://www.metronomeonline.com) for a FREE online metronome to use with every practice session! Remember, you should always practice in a place that is free from distractions, so no "instant messaging" while using your online metronome!