HOW TO PRACTICE!

FIRST STEPS (Setting the stage)

1. **Pick a quiet, undisturbed place in your house**. Practice in this same place every day. Make it your “practice station”. When you go into “practice mode”, do not let anything take you away from it (ex. Phone calls, TV, household chores, etc.)
2. **Gather any supplies you’ll need.** Your instrument, a pencil, your band folder (sheet music, method book, theory packets, flashcards, etc.), any cleaning supplies to make sure your instrument is in proper playing order, a metronome/tuner (these are not mandatory, but like math can be done without a calculator, music can be practiced without a metronome…but both are far easier with the helpful tools!), a clock or watch to keep an eye on your number of minutes practiced, etc.etc.

SECOND STEPS (Warming up)

1. **Stretch/breathe!** These exercises will help get your blood-flowing and will “wake up” the brain for a great practice session.
2. **After assembling your instrument carefully, sit or stand with good posture.** Always re-check this as it’s easy to begin slouching once you begin to get tired!
3. **Begin with playing on your mouthpiece or headjoint. (Woodwind and Brass only.)** Focus on holding your air steady for as long as you possibly can. Time yourself and check for improvement! This fundamental skill should be practiced well into a student’s high school years (or college/professional level). One never “finishes” reviewing the basics!
4. **Move on to “long tones”.** These are notes that you play on your instrument, one at a time, holding them out as long as you can until you run out of breath. Or as you get more advanced, you can play scales slowly, holding each note for at least four beats. Long tones are critical to allow the embouchure (shape of your mouth) to fully set. Your lip muscles will gradually set into a comfortable position after a few long tones. (Percussion students should work on single stroke rolls on their practice pad.)
5. **Play through your class’s “Daily Warm-Up”.** This will change throughout the year as we get more advanced.

NEXT STEPS (Tackling the assignments/concert music/solos)

1. **Pick a piece that is easy for you and play through it.** It’s important to get the “meat” of your practice session off to a great start by getting those successful “happy” juices flowing! Careful not to spend too much time here as there are “bigger fish to fry” coming up!
2. **Next, pick the most difficult line, or portion of a concert piece.** The difficult stuff takes the most mental energy. If you save a harder piece for the end of your practice session, your muscles and brain will be too tired to make any good progress on it.

PRACTICE ORDER:

* Pick one measure (or two) that you find difficult.
* Say the names of your notes from start to finish.
* Look up any fingerings of notes you don’t know. Check for sharps and flats in the key signature.
* Play each note of the excerpt in half or whole notes so you can hear the melody and your fingers get used to the patterns they need to play.
* Then take a playing break and write in your counting **underneath** the notes.
* Clap & Count **OUT LOUD** (important for neural connections in the brain!)
* “Too” it. (Practice articulations!—slurring vs. tonguing)
* Air jam while “tooing” in correct rhythm. (Move fingers on the correct keys without blowing air through the instrument.)
* PLAY! Slowly, at first. Then challenge yourself by speeding up!

1. **Continue this practice routine until you feel your muscles are beginning to tire.** Remember that success is making progress, not necessarily perfecting a piece! Even attempting it at all is helpful each day!

FINAL STEPS (Ending the practice session/cooling down)

1. **Once you feel like stopping, pick one more piece that you are good at and play it right before you stop.** It’s important to end your session with success!
2. **Cool down with long tones.** Keep them lower on your instrument to relax the embouchure.
3. **Swab out your instrument/wash mouthpieces before putting your instrument in its case.**
4. **Make sure you case is fully closed and latched to prevent dust and dirt from getting in your instrument.**
5. **Finish filling out your practice log.** Fill in total minutes and write specific notes for each piece. (This can be done as you go through your session, too!)

Following this format will ensure that you’re number of required minutes are “covered”, but more importantly, that musical success will happen! Remember two things: 1) The squeak of today is the tone of tomorrow! And 2) Nothing in this world worth having comes easy.

Happy Practicing!!