



THE NEW SCHOOL FOR MUSIC STUDY

PRACTICE

We at the New School for Music Study recognize the challenging schedules of today's school children. Because of the many demands on each child's time, a significant portion of private and group lesson time is dedicated to addressing how to make practice both efficient and productive. The entire family can play an active role in making lesson and practice time effective.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRODUCTIVE PRACTICE

1. Immediately after the lesson, ask your child to tell you what s/he learned that day, to show you the new assignment, and especially to tell you what the teacher had to say about the lesson.
2. At the first practice session following the lesson, spend a few minutes with your child helping her/him practice one or two of the pieces. Even if you do not play the piano, encourage your child through the instructions on the assignment sheet. For example, we ask our students to use established practice steps to learn new music.
3. If there are questions about assignments, please do not hesitate to contact your child's private teacher to discuss.

PRACTICE STEPS

PLAN: First the student studies the music carefully to discover the overall character, the musical signs and symbols it contains, its physical problems, and its rhythm.

PLAY: Next the student plays each section slowly and carefully. Special attention should be given to any sections with brackets. The focus should be on accuracy.

ANALYZE: After playing each section, s/he analyzes the performance, asking if the playing sounded the way s/he wanted it to sound; if not, why?

This type of practice may take some time to become a habit at home. Young students (like most adults) resist planning and analyzing, preferring the immediate "play-through" step. This often results in errors that, if repeated day after day, become nearly impossible to correct. Work habits are arguably one of the most important skills of growth taught by piano study, and your encouragement and assistance will be of immeasurable value in establishing these skills.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT PRACTICE

Q: When should my child practice?

A: Every day! Because each child has a different schedule, the best practice time is that which suits her/him. With this in mind, you and your child should set aside a mutually agreed upon time to practice. This time should be used only for practice, uninterrupted by telephone, errands, or TV. Children practice best in private, and most successfully right before

school or immediately after dinner. Don't allow anything short of illness or emergency to interfere with this practice schedule. The child who practices at the same time each day makes significantly greater progress than the child who does not!

Q: How much time should my child spend practicing?

A: Long enough to cover the assignment sheet, short enough to stay within the student's attention and interest span. For this reason, it may be beneficial to schedule two shorter periods to practice, rather than one long period.

Remember: practicing is not a matter of time spent, but a matter of mind spent.

PRACTICE EXPECTATIONS

The success of all educational pursuits is in large part determined by consistency. This is especially true for music students. For them, the consistency required for adequate progress must be the result of a collaborative effort between parents and teachers. It is the teacher's job to fill the lesson with activities that set students up for success. It is the parents' job to develop an environment that allows a daily reinforcement of what occurs during the lesson.

When we say "daily practice," we know that there are days when it is not possible to work in a practice session. However, there are two guidelines we want you to keep in mind when scheduling your child's practice week:

1. No week goes by without a minimum of five days of practice.
2. Even under extreme circumstance, never allow two days in a row of missed practice. Missing two days of practice is like taking one step forward and two steps backward.

The best results come from cumulative, daily practice; what we do in the lesson can never make up for lack of practice.

SUPPORTING PRACTICE AT HOME

Behind every child musician is a group of cheerleaders at home, making sure that practicing is done, assignments are completed, and the student arrives on time for the weekly lessons with all of the music books. Here are some suggestions for supporting your child at home:

1. **Set a daily time to practice the piano.** Make the piano practice part of your daily routine. Children thrive on routine and if piano practice is scheduled, they will be more likely to remember to practice. With younger children, try to supervise their practice at least once at the beginning and end of the week to ensure they are completing all elements of the assignment. Are they following practice steps? Have they practiced their warmups? Keep in mind that some students will always need a reminder to practice. Several of our NSMS faculty members recall needing reminders from their parents to practice through high school!
2. **Invest in a good quality instrument and keep it regularly maintained.** There are a variety of instruments available these days, and one must consider the wide range of qualities of these instruments. Acoustic pianos provide an edge in terms of facilitating a good hand position and developing a wide range of sounds and colors. If a keyboard is absolutely necessary, it must be full-sized and touch-sensitive. If you feel your piano is not the best quality, consider an upgrade. It is also important to have the piano tuned regularly. Twice a year—fall and spring—is best. During the regular tunings, be sure to ask the technician if any further repairs are recommended.

3. **Check your space.** Is the piano in a well-traveled, well-lit space in your home? One of our faculty members tells the story of a diligent student who suddenly stopped practicing regularly. When questioned by the teacher as to whether anything had changed at home, the answer was, “Well, we did move the piano to the basement.” Once the piano was moved back to the main level, the child’s regular practicing resumed. When your child is practicing, be cognizant of distractions. For instance, it is not a good idea to have other family members watching TV in the same room as the child who is practicing. He or she will be unable to focus.
4. **Posture and Hand Position.** Is your child sitting correctly at the piano and using a good hand position? This is a great thing for parents to assist with because it really does need daily reinforcement. If you aren’t sure if your child is sitting correctly at home, take a picture and send it to your teacher, asking for feedback. Keep in mind that the children need to sit differently as they grow so you should reevaluate their seating arrangement yearly (or even more frequently if they are growing quickly). Ask your teacher how you can help to reinforce a good hand position. All of our students are always working on technique, hand position and posture. We strive to have students play with a natural and relaxed hand, that is rounded with sturdy fingers.
5. **Enjoy live music.** Children benefit from hearing live music. It is inspiring for children to hear others play, and they are able to learn a variety of music through active listening. Consider a wide variety of genres: orchestral, opera, chamber music, and choral concerts, in addition to solo piano recitals. Plan to join us for our Faculty Recitals.
6. **Play music and sing at home.** Keep music a part of your daily routine at home! Find times when your child is playing or doing homework that they can also be listening to music in the background. Sing along! Encourage and broaden their tastes. Help them as they explore new pieces of music to add to their own music collections.
7. **Encourage frequent performances.** One of my student’s has a regular “Friday Night Family Performance” group. The children hold an informal concert of the pieces they are studying for their parents. Another student would often give a recital with her brother as a gift to her parents. This performance was complete with programs, bowing, and concert attire! These events can be formal or informal. The most important element is that your child feels celebrated at the piano. There are times when playing the piano feels like a lot of work; difficult and solitary. Encouragement from family and friends go a long way in helping the student feel successful and inspired to continue.

Music is a transformative experience. It is an outlet for creativity and expression. And, as NSMS faculty member, Marvin Blickenstaff, eloquently says, “Music nourishes the soul.” As we work to develop the next generation of those who love and support music for life, we are reminded daily that this is a lifelong goal.