

# School's In, and So is Practice!

## 6 Ways to Create Good Practice Habits for the New School Year

By Christina Thompson

As young musicians, we know that practice is very important. But when school starts, the transition to a busier schedule can make practicing a challenge. For those of us who enjoyed a lot of practice over the summer, it can be hard to find time to play in a busy school-year schedule. On the other hand, for those who didn't practice much during summer break, adjusting to the daily demands of band class can be quite difficult. Here, we'll share six ways to make practicing easier as the school year begins, so that you can keep your music flowing even when times are changing.



### 1. Schedule practice into your day.

Although we know we need to practice, the demands of school, homework, and extracurricular activities can make it tough to fit in. One easy solution is to schedule practice time into your day. Find a time that you can make on a regular basis; for example, after dinner each night, and practice at that time as often as possible. As you continue practicing at your scheduled time, your practice will become a habit that is easy to remember each day.

### 2. Find a quiet practice area.

Having a quiet place to practice can be just as important as having a regular time. To practice effectively, you need a calm, peaceful area where you can concentrate. Many students have a hard time getting into a practice habit because they try to practice in areas with many distractions. Think about where you're practicing now. Are there potential distractions nearby like the phone, TV, or computer? If so, finding a quieter place will make your practice easier and more effective.

### 3. Think of practice as homework.

After a long day at school, you may feel like putting your practice off until later. Unfortunately, it's easy to delay practicing until you've run out of time in the day! If you're tempted to put off your practice, try thinking of it as homework. You wouldn't be able to skip your math homework if you didn't feel like doing it, right? Thinking of practice as required work can help you start practicing even when you don't want to, and those valuable minutes of playing will add up to make you a better musician.

### 4. Ask your parents to help.

Many parents are happy to support their kids' musical practice, so if you're having trouble getting into a regular practice routine, parents can be a big help. Tell your parents about the practice time and place you've chosen, and ask them if they'd mind helping you stick to practicing until it becomes a habit. Some parents may even reward you for your hard work in practice; for example, they may give you extra time with friends if you practice a certain amount each week.

### 5. Set practice goals.

Setting goals can be an excellent way to beef up your practice as the school year begins. Before you practice, write down one or two things you'd like to accomplish, and challenge yourself to achieve

those goals. Your goals don't have to be long and involved; they can even be as simple as, "I want to learn the notes in measure 10 tonight." As you challenge yourself to achieve your goals, you'll start to sound better and develop a deeper understanding of your music.

## **6. Don't give up!**

Let's face it--things happen! Sometimes, life events will disrupt our practice time, or we won't make musical progress as quickly as we expected. If this happens, don't feel bad--just keep practicing and think as positively as you can. Even if you practice your instrument for just a few minutes each day, your playing skills will grow and grow.

Keeping up our practice as we move into the school year can be challenging, but with some planning and perseverance, we can make this transition much easier. Try some of the suggestions in this article today, and you'll be ready for another successful year of music making!



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