



RECIPE FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE (ASTA Cookbook)

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Practice is a journey. It needs a destination. Frustration occurs when there is no sense of accomplishment. Most students approach practice by repeating a piece over and over with little success. Often they are assigned a set number of repetitions that they dutifully execute. Then they avoid practicing when it appears pointless because they do not see results. Here is a recipe for effective practice.

Ingredients:

Music students who want to improve their playing skills, parents and teachers who want to see their children progress, and students who are ready to assume more independence in their music study

Serves:

Music students, teachers, parents

1. Make a plan

Decide what you are going to accomplish. Set goals in very small steps so that you can insure success. Learning even one measure of a piece is a positive accomplishment, much more productive than trying to learn an entire concerto and ending up frustrated! Isolate just a single problem spot and within that spot, identify the different elements that need addressing. Focus on just one point. Think about the left hand, think about the bow, think about the rhythm, think about the tone, think about the intonation, and think about the musical expression. One small spot leads to at least 6 sub-spots. Address each separately.

2. Set a schedule

It is really important to practice consistently. Just a few minutes daily is better than cramming just before your lesson. Set a regular time for practice each day. Everyone's schedule is different. Some students find it most productive to practice in the morning before school. Some like to practice when they get home, before doing homework. Some like to practice just before or after dinner. Once you find a time that suits you, try to keep to your schedule. Remember to practice only on the days that you eat.

3. Structure your practice time

Begin your practice session with a warm-up which focuses on tone and technique, and review a favorite piece or two so that you get "in the mood." Next work on your current piece(s). Work in small sections, with specific goals and with a one-point focus. Be realistic - enjoy each step of your progress. Sometimes you won't see immediate results. The time you spend is like putting money in the bank. It will compound and mature at a future time. Remember, Rome was not built in a day!

