

# NORTHGATE HIGH SCHOOL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

## Practice Tips

### June 22, 2011

Dear Parents and Students:

Some of you have asked me how do I go about practicing. (or... How do I know that my son or daughter is practicing efficiently?) I have made a list of good practice habits that if put into regular use will make a big difference in any musician's playing.

#### Important General Tips:

1. A regular practice routine is essential to musical progress. Identifying specific days of the week and or specific times of day is the best practice.
2. A few minutes every day (10-30 minutes) will develop your skills much more efficiently than cramming in hours every several days.
3. Perfect practice makes perfect – always use your best playing habits and knowledge as you practice.
4. Starting is the hard part – most of us will play for a good amount of time once we get started.
5. After practicing make a list of things that you can use help with and ask about them in class or between classes.

#### Start by Warming Up:

1. Spend some time of every practice session playing long tones with a **tuner**.
  - a. Learn which notes are hardest to tune on your instrument and know whether they tend to be sharp (too high) or flat (too low).
  - b. Practice adjusting the trouble notes on your instrument so that you can improve your overall intonation.
2. Practice some scales every time you practice. Your 1-8 patterns are perfect for this.

Always use a **metronome** when practicing scales!

- a. Play major scales
  - b. Play chromatic scales
  - c. If you are an advanced player play: minor, diminished, whole tone, Lydian dominant scales, modes etc.
  - d. Practice digital patterns around the circle of keys.
    - i. 1212
    - ii. 12345432 (pattern 2 from 1-8)
    - iii. 1234567898765432 (pattern 3 from 1-8)
    - iv. 1231
    - v. 1321
    - vi. 1235
    - vii. 5321
    - viii. etc.
3. Brass players: Practice lip slurs every time you practice as a warm up.

## When You Practice Your Music:

1. Concentrate on the things that challenge you.
  - a. “Don’t be a practice room player” A practice room player is one who always sounds great in the practice room because he/she only practices what they can already play well.
  - b. Practice time is your best opportunity to sound bad while working on the things that are hardest for you to play.
2. Always use a **metronome** and play challenging parts slowly.
  - a. Subdivide, subdivide, subdivide
  - b. Set your metronome for the subdivision rather than the beat.
3. Break challenging parts into small pieces.
  - a. If you have a stretch of hard notes, practice just a few notes, slowly and over and over again. Then practice another set of notes and then another. Then put the small pieces together one piece at a time until you have added all of the small pieces that comprise the whole passage.
  - b. Slow repetition is the key. Consider this Quote, “Repetition is the beast of excellence.”
4. Practice counting your rests.
  - a. Practice the rest that lasts more than a couple of measures at least a few times outside of rehearsal.
  - b. Practice every rest that leads to an entrance several times.
  - c. Practice rests that precede syncopated rhythmic entrances many, many times.
5. Practice dynamics and expression
  - a. Work to make your softest softs and your loudest louds.
  - b. Work to make crescendos and diminuendos even
  - c. Get softer to begin crescendos
  - d. Get louder to begin diminuendos
  - e. Add shape to your melodic phrases
    - i. Crescendo as the line goes up in pitch
    - ii. Diminuendo as the line goes down in pitch
  - f. Look up expression words that you don’t know
6. Play the entire piece from beginning to end without stopping. Do this only after you have worked on the tough spots. Do not stop for mistakes just keep on going, no matter what.
7. Sight-read something every time you practice. Just a few measures every day will pay big dividends. There are websites that have musical examples that you can play and forget.