

MacArthur Middle School

Practice Guide 2018-2019

Practice Techniques

- **Metronome**- It is crucial to use a metronome in your practicing. You will be able to tell very obviously where you are rushing or having difficulty. If you do not own a metronome, there are several apps and websites that have free digital metronomes. **Remember:** Our goal is to sound like we are one instrument. The only way to do this is if we are all playing at the same speed (consistently too!).
- **Enter the Matrix**- This technique is a favorite of mine and can be beneficial with challenging passages consisting of fast notes or runs. Using a metronome, play the passage under the desired tempo until the notes are learned. Next, gradually increase the speed little by little. If you need to, slow it down until all notes can be played accurately. Keep increasing the speed until the tempo is faster than what the desired tempo is. Keep increasing speed until it is impossible to play. Now, go back to the desired tempo. This should now feel extremely slow and make playing it a bit easier.
- **Permutations**- This technique is great for learning notes in a difficult passage, especially those with groupings of eighth notes. Put the eighth-note runs into groupings of 4. Next, pretend the 4 notes have a slur over them and play them at a slower speed until learned as follows: First note long, then the rest (in that four note grouping) short for the entire passage. (Remember to change your bow between each four note grouping) Then play the passage again with the first note short and the second note long with the rest of the notes short. Continue until each of the four notes has been made long. Then play as written. **Simplified:** LSSS, SLSS, SSLS, SSSL, SSSS.
- **Back and Forth**- Back and forth is great for getting to know the music and solidify the notes. For this technique, simply play each note twice, slurring the second beat of each note to the first beat of the next. **Note:** All notes will be the same value and should be played as a moderate to slower quarter note. This exercise focuses on learning the notes and intonation, not rhythm.
- **Scales, Scales, Scales**- The single best way to improve intonation is to practice, you guessed it, scales! Playing scales well enhance your knowledge of key signatures as well as your intonation. **Practice Tip:** Try to focus on listening and feeling the intervals between each pitch to improve accuracy. To take this even further, play each scale with a drone (or sustained pitch) of the first note of each scale. You will be able to hear each note sounds compared to the tonic (or 1st note of the scale).
- **Slow it Down**- One of the best ways to practice is to simply practice at a slower tempo. We all want to prove we are the best by playing at a fast tempo all the time, but in order to actually learn the notes and play with good tone and accuracy, playing slow is the way to go. As always, a metronome is preferred.

Sample Practice Routine

Warm-Up- Scales and arpeggios are great for warming up the muscles and the ear. Work on intonation and vary the articulations and bow strokes for an advanced warm-up.

Technique Builder- Use a method book or the handouts from class to work on developing and advancing your technique. Pick one thing at a time to focus on. Perhaps the bow today and the left hand tomorrow and so on.

Etude- Etudes are a great way to reinforce what you did in the warm-up and technique builder and it puts your skills to the test.

Solo Work- Make sure you have a solo that is not too far out of your reach. It is good to work towards a harder piece, but if you make little progress in a week or two it might be time to find an easier one. Focus on troublesome spots using the practice techniques above. It is important to *practice* the music, not just play through it over and over. Repetition is good, but only when you have learned the notes!

Repertoire- Be sure to include school concert pieces, outside of school pieces, and audition material into your practice session.

Practice Tips:

- Record and listen to practice sessions or parts of sessions (voice memo app)
- Solos take weeks to learn and months to perfect
- Etudes should only take about a week or two to learn if practiced correctly
- Quality of practice is ***always*** better than quantity

Tools:

- Metronome <http://www.8notes.com/metronome/>
- Tuner (I like having a real one to use, but there are online ones too!) A440
- Rag (not microfiber) to wipe down strings and cloth for instrument (microfiber)
- Rosin
- Music Stand

Book Recommendation: If you are not taking private lessons (which you should definitely try to do, even if it is with a high school student or for the summers), then I would recommend getting the book, “**String Techniques for Superior Musical Performance**” by **Robert S. Frost**. This book is less than \$10 features sections on improving tone, technique, and tuning as well as scales, chorales, etudes, and excerpts divided up by key signature. If you are having trouble finding it, see me and I can help you out!

Happy Practicing!

-Mr. Boyer

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Practice Tips

Having trouble practicing? Try one of these ideas!

1. **BACK IT UP:** Try starting from the ending instead of the beginning! Work your way backwards by measure or group of notes.
2. **CHANGE IT UP:** Play around with tempo and dynamics to make your piece sound different. If a piece is fast and happy, try making it sound slow and sad!
3. **RHYTHM FUN:** Try playing only the rhythm of your piece! You could clap or even play it on a homemade drum.
4. **SINGING:** Try singing the melody of your piece! You will be surprised at how much this will help your playing!
5. **REVERSE IT:** For a scale passage, try playing it backwards perfectly at a slow tempo. Then play as written.
6. **FOCUS ON DYNAMICS:** Every time there is a dynamic marking in your piece, play 2 measure before it and 2 measures after it. Listen to see if you could hear the dynamic change. If not, try it again listening and changing dynamics even more carefully!
7. **RED LIGHT/GREEN LIGHT:** If you miss a note, STOP! Go back one measure, and play the section slowly. Once you can play it slowly, play it perfectly at tempo three times. Then, move forward with the piece!
8. **HOW FAST CAN YOU GO:** Start a small section slowly, then little by little speed the section up. See how fast you can go, then go back to playing at the normal tempo!
9. **RELAXING TIME:** Play at a normal tempo up until a difficult spot. Right before this spot, take a second to relax, then begin at that spot!
10. **ADD-A-NOTE:** In a difficult section, add one note at a time. Begin with one note, then play two notes, then continue until you can play the whole section perfectly!

