



The Seven DOs & DON'Ts of Practicing

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Center for Musical Arts

We know the story.

You take up an instrument, perhaps inspired by a famous artist or a song you've heard or maybe you're a fifth grader and you've been to Instrument Night and you just HAVE to play the French Horn because it is absolutely the most amazing thing you've ever seen. You have a sense that getting good at your instrument is going to take some investment of time, energy, and effort. The way there, to "getting good," is to practice, according to your new teacher.

What's the magic thing that keeps students wanting to learn, practice, and play really well?

Read on for a few suggested dos and don'ts that are easily adapted to older students—or even yourself.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent 'K' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

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What's the magic thing that keeps students wanting to learn, practice, and play really well?

- 1. Don't enforce a specific amount of time for practicing.** Your teacher may suggest 30 minutes a day, which is a place to start. But life can get in the way. Often, 15 or 20 minutes of focus is better than skipping one or two days. And trying to cram a week's worth of practicing into 3 or 4 hours on a weekend afternoon just doesn't work.
- 2. Don't punish a student for "not practicing."** Punishing takes many forms, including threats to stop lessons or withholding internet/online time or that brownie. This kind of approach equates making music with an unpleasant chore.
- 3. Don't (ever, ever) shame or humiliate a student into playing their instrument** Have you seen the movie, "Whiplash?" I don't recommend it.
- 4. If you don't know how to play the instrument yourself, don't coach your child.** And if you do know how to play, be really cautious about coaching your child.
- 5. Do show interest and do celebrate your child's playing.** Applause goes a long way. Ask them to play new tunes for you, or be Very Impressed when they nail the Eb Major scale.
- 6. Do experiment with making practicing fun.** You may want to try "game-ifying" practicing. There are some good strategies for this [HERE](#).
- 7. Do change up times or circumstances for practicing.** Instead of "every single day at 5 pm," try 15 minutes after school and another 15 minutes after dinner. Practice in the garage in the summer and serenade your neighbors, or practice in the bathroom (good acoustics).

Here's to happy music students!