

# **How To Practice**

*A practical guide to student-directed rehearsal*

## **Where should I practice?**

### School

School practice rooms aren't just for holding extra music stands – you can actually use them for, you know, practicing! Come in during your lunch, study hall, or before/after school and practice to your heart's content! Practice rooms are a great space for holding sectionals, rehearsing groups for solo and ensemble, or running difficult passages with a friend. Don't be afraid to practice with people!

### Home

Set up a dedicated practice spot in the corner of your room or another suitable place in your house. It should have a stand (your wire stand is great), a chair, ample light, and a pencil – nothing fancy needed! Try to find a space where you can practice without being distracted, and don't be afraid to ask your family for help!

### Elsewhere

Did you know that you don't even need your instrument to squeeze in a quick practice session? It's true – all you need is your music and yourself! If you're stuck in the car, waiting at the doctor's office, or generally sitting around away from your horn, you can work out difficult rhythms, check fingerings, and generally practice your parts *in your head*. Try fingering along on a pencil (woodwinds) or on your thumb (brass), singing through your part, counting & clapping tricky rhythms, or make up some other way to practice – after all, creative rehearsal is still rehearsal!

## **When should I practice?**

Effective practice can only be achieved by the efficient mind. If you're falling asleep over your music stand, or too distracted by your massive history paper to remember how to put your instrument together, you might not be in a good state to practice. Instead, try to practice when you're alert and able to focus and think – not only will your practice session be more effective and efficient, it will be much more fun! However, don't always put off opening your case because you're not in the mood – finally nailing that hard lick or figuring out a new technique can be a great way to release stress and tension!

Try to find around 30 minutes of practice time per day – either in one solid chunk, two 15-minute sessions, or 3 quick and easy 10-minute spurts. Finding time to practice doesn't have to be a chore – run your scales at school, play some long tones before or after dinner, smooth out a rough patch in the band rep right before bed, and you've met your goal!

## **What should I practice?**

There are two components to a good practice routine – fundamentals and repertoire. A typical 30-minute session might look something like this:

10 minutes: warm up, long tones, scales

10 minutes: scale patterns, etudes, articulation, technique

10 minutes: band repertoire, solo works, solo & ensemble pieces

And that's it! You can find long tones, scales, and scale patterns in your Scale Book, and you always have band repertoire in your band folder, which means you should have something that to fulfill each of the above categories with you at all times! If you want help finding etudes, solos, or other things to practice, please feel free to ask me for suggestions – the band library has material for each instrument, and I'd be happy to help you choose fun and appropriate pieces.

## **How should I practice?**

Try applying the following techniques below to your practice material

### **For technical passages**

- Practice slowly – set your metronome to a tempo at which you literally cannot fail, play the passage correctly, and then bump the metronome up a click. Repeat until you've reached the target tempo.
- Chunk it up – if you stumble over one particular part in a passage, isolate that chunk rather than running large swaths of music you can already play. Working on only the hard part for 5 minutes is much more efficient than stumbling over it for 20 minutes of full runs.
- Work backwards – try starting with the last measure of a difficult passage, mastering it, then adding the second to last, then the last three, and so on until you can play the whole passage. This technique has the advantage of helping you practice the transitions between measures as well as the measures themselves.

### **For tough rhythms**

- Count & clap – put the horn down and count & clap those tricky rhythms. Write in the counting if you need to, but make sure you can say the rhythm before you play it.
- Break ties – if ties have got you all tied up, just forget about them for a while – same goes for dotted rhythms (which are basically ties). Just count the rhythms as if there were no tie, subdivide everything, and figure out how the pieces fit together before you put it all back.
- Play it on one note – sometimes a tricky rhythm will be even tougher when you're trying to add fingerings and partials into the mix. Just play the rhythm on a single pitch before adding the next layer of notes.

### For awkward fingerings/note combinations

- Go between notes – if you have a particularly difficult leap or just some awkward finger switches, reduce the scope of the problem and just practice moving between the two notes. Eventually your lips and fingers will figure themselves out.
- Sing – if you're having difficulty hearing how a passage should sound, sing it before you play it! Singing a line will help you internalize it aurally, and will make hearing it while playing that much easier.
- Air-play – try taking tone out of the equation when working on tricky fingering passages – it's one less thing to worry about. Just blow through the horn while fingering through the part, focusing only on correct finger combinations, then try adding the tone back in.

### For general practicing

- Loop it – try playing a short passage as many times as you can in one breath, or try playing a longer passage 5 times in a row. The repetition will promote muscle memory!
- Succeed more than you fail – if you play a passage incorrectly 10 times and correctly 1 time, you've learned it wrong. Keep playing a passage right until you've played it right more than you have wrong!
- Make up your own – there is no set way to practice. Your time with your instrument should be a chance for you to get messy, make mistakes, and make up your own practice techniques! If you try something and it works for you, write it down so you can use it in the future! If you try one of these techniques and it makes you want to pull your hair out, don't use it any more. Practice should be fun and rewarding!

***Happy Practicing!***

**Karen Mari**  
Trombonist | Educator  
karen.e.mari@gmail.com  
karenmari.org