Saint John's college school

Some Tips for Successful Music Practice

Practice *can* make perfect, but only if you practise in the right ways. Quality is more important than quantity.

General advice for parents

- Musical expertise is not necessary in order for you to be able to support your child effectively with her/his practice

- However, making music practice as fixed a part of the domestic <u>routine</u> as possible – making it 'normal' – is the single most effective contribution any parent can make.

Why practise and why is it important to practise in certain ways?

- to process what you did in the last lesson and to help you prepare to get the most out of your next lesson. It is a really good idea to practise after your lesson, on the same day, so that everything your teacher said to you is fresh in your mind.

- to train your brain to get things correct and to develop the muscles you need.

- most of all to help you to progress and, as a result, to enjoy your music more.

For starters (before you begin to play):

- Are you ready to practise? Have a quick stretch and take a couple of long, deep breaths. Check your posture is good.

- Read through your practice note book to check what you did in your last lesson and what you should be working on.

- Ask yourself: what do YOU want to achieve from this practice session? Take a minute to create your practice goals.

'By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.' (Benjamin Franklin)

Getting going (whilst following your practice goals):

- Warm-ups – use ones your teacher has given you, and also make up your own, using the scales & arpeggios/rhythms/articulations/dynamics, etc. from your pieces.

- Lots of your practice should be SLOW – it is really important that your brain and your fingers get used to playing the correct notes (with the correct fingerings); teach your brain to get it right.

- Focus on getting small sections correct, SLOWLY, and then joining the sections together, SLOWLY at first.

- Try playing your scales and sections of pieces with different dynamics (including < and >) and with different rhythms and articulations.
- Try playing your scales and sections of pieces in different moods. If one of your pieces should be fast/lively/joyful/slow/sad/lyrical, play your scales and, in particular, the scale and arpeggio of the key of the piece in that way.
- Try playing scales, sections of pieces and maybe even whole pieces from memory.
- Perhaps try to make up a story to fit with your piece.
- Avoid always starting from the beginning of the piece when you practise.
- Use a metronome (often set to a slower tempo than marked) on occasions, to check that you are playing rhythmically.
- At any point of difficulty: if your teacher were with you, what would he/she say to help?
- Don't hesitate to write neat markings **in pencil** on your music, if it helps you: in particular, you could write P----------P above bars or sections which you particularly need to practise, so you remember to return to them when you next practise.

   'Practise slowly, learn quickly.' *(unknown origin - many wise people have said this…)*

Finally:

- Always listen to what you are doing – engage with your practice.
- Set yourself high standards - expect the very best from yourself. However, if it doesn't go as well as you would like first time, don't worry: try (SLOWLY), try (even more SLOWLY, if necessary) and try again (even more SLOWLY, if necessary).
- Make your practise creative and use your imagination (to make up exercises, etc.) – it doesn't always have to be what your teacher has written in your notebook.
- If you are confident that you have achieved your goals, then spend some time at the end of your practice improvising, composing, sight-reading some new music or trying to play by ear a piece you know and like.
- Listen to lots of different styles of music for your own pleasure (CDs, iPod, on the internet, going to live concerts) – this is a particularly good idea on the occasional days when it is more difficult for you to practise (because you have a sore finger, lots of prep or you have been out all day, for example).

Have fun!