

## How do you know if you or your child practice enough? What does a good practice session look like?

If these questions have been on your mind, let me take a few minutes of your time to share with you what I expect from my students. First of all, the amount of practicing is really a matter of what your goals are. If you want to play in Carnegie Hall, then you should aim for six to eight hours a day, five days a week. And no, I'm not exaggerating. That's why Carnegie Hall isn't meant for everyone, myself included. If you want to be a composer, then expect to work on written music theory exercises, while at the same time focusing on instrumental proficiency, several hours a day for many years. If you want to be a pop recording artist someday, you may not need that much study, but you will want to play as much as possible. Then there's the other end of the spectrum. If you actually *want* to be *unable* to play even a basic tune one year from now, then ten minutes a day, two days a week is the way to go. But please don't do that, or your lessons will go to waste.

So, as you can see, it all depends on the student's goals. That's why I would encourage you to decide on goals for yourself or your child. Talk to your child about his or her personal goals as well as what you want to see. Remember that "having fun" is a legitimate goal—it's ok if you don't plan to be a professional musician! Let me suggest a good, fun starting goal: the ability to beautifully play basic tunes by ear, by sight-reading, and by improvising. This is the "default goal" I have for all of my students, which might look like roughly 15 to 20 minutes of practice a day, at least four days per week (preferably five). Be sure to communicate *your personal* goals to me so I can adjust my expectations accordingly. In any case, I generally do not recommend *timing* the practice sessions. I recommend, instead, that my students learn to stop only after they have *improved* in some way or another. Indeed, *improvement* is far more important to me than the amount of time or number of repetitions that a student plays.

## Assignment Sheets and My Practice Rewards Program

On your "practice assignment sheet" you will notice five rows for five possible assignments. Next to each assignment, in the "Priority" column, I write a number to make it clear what is most important that week (1 being most important, 5 being least); students should not neglect any numbered assignments. The unnumbered assignments are optional for that week but encouraged. You will also notice seven columns representing each day of the week; this space is for you to mark your initials for each day that your child practices each specific assignment, that is, if you wish to keep track.

Chances are, your child won't practice as much as you or I would desire. I don't believe in bribery, but I do believe in rewards. I have a program to offer practice rewards to my younger students (10 and under). Music should be fun and so should practice. But, since we live in the real world, learning an instrument often feels like plain old-fashioned hard work. The real reward is being able to play your instrument skillfully with ease, but that doesn't come overnight. Therefore, I believe it is perfectly appropriate to reward yourself (or your child) in other ways.

Here's the way it works: When coming in for a lesson, have your child hand in the practice sheet. If your child has practiced everything on the assignment sheet (marked as a priority) at least four days that week, he or she will get a piece of chocolate.<sup>1</sup> PARENT INITIALS ARE REQUIRED (check marks, written by the child, will not do). I will keep a tally, because each week of good practice also counts as one point toward a future prize:

- 1 point = candy (weekly)
- 10 points = gift card to Cold Stone Creamery

After that, points start over again from zero. If your child misses a week, have him or her continue practicing what was previously assigned, and continue initialing the assignment sheet as before (it will count as a separate week). Encourage your child to also try something new in the meantime; exploration is vital to learning. I hope your music lessons will be a rewarding experience, in more ways than one!

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<sup>1</sup> This program is optional if sweets are unacceptable. I usually offer only chocolate because it's not as bad on teeth as other candies. If you would rather not participate, please write "No sweets" (or "N.S.") on the assignment sheets each week so I will not give any.