

Practicing Tips for Middle School Students

The key to success in band is focused, consistent, and daily practice. The question is not whether a student is talented. All students can develop musical skill through deliberate practice. When students practice, they should be working on the places where they are having trouble. Skill growth comes from the struggle to correct errors and the repetition of the correct action.

Break it down into smaller chunks, practicing each one slowly until perfectly correct; pay careful attention to every detail; and repeat the correct action until it is automatic. The more time that students devote to this very careful practice, the better they will become. Simply running through a song will not make a student better and mistakes that are not fixed will become bad habits.

Be sure to spend time practicing scales and rhythm exercises, as well as your band/orchestra music. Set goals for yourself in your practice time, such as "I want to learn the Ab or E scale," or "I want to be able to play from measure 20-30 in this song."

Whatever you are working on when you practice, your goal is to play it correctly three or more times in a row. If you have trouble playing it correctly, slow down and try one of these ideas. Use a metronome and be very picky with yourself. If you practice carefully and regularly, you will become a great musician.

Tips for practicing scales:

1. Don't play faster than you can play with zero mistakes. Play the scale in whole notes if needed.
2. Say the name of each sharp or flat and finger those notes. Look up any unfamiliar fingerings in your fingering chart.
3. Say each note name up and down the scale.
4. Sing and finger the scale.
5. Play the scale three times in a row perfectly, then speed up the tempo.
6. Be sure you know how the scale is supposed to sound so that you can tell if you are making a mistake. You don't want to learn the scale with mistakes!

Tips for practicing rhythms:

1. Write in the rhythm if you aren't sure. Ask for help if you don't know what to write.
2. Clap and count the rhythm with a metronome. Be sure that every time you say a number, the metronome is beeping.
3. Start with a slow tempo. Only speed it up once you can do it perfectly three times in a row.
4. Listen to the exercises being performed by the computer on the rhythm drills page. Play along.
5. Once you can play the rhythm well, try playing it while changing the notes.
6. Be sure to hold notes full value and keep counting carefully through the rests.

How to learn a difficult piece of music:

1. Go through and find easy measures or sections. Play those parts.
2. Look for any parts that get repeated. Learn those parts.
3. Work on the difficult parts. Count the rhythms carefully and work out the notes.
4. Work piece by piece and put the whole piece together. Use a metronome to learn it at a slow tempo before trying to speed it up. Remember, Perfect Practice makes perfect.

Tips for practicing a difficult part in the music:

1. Count and clap the rhythm; say the notes in rhythm; finger them as you say them; play the passage (Count, Say, Finger, Play)
2. Play the rhythm on only one note, then play it as written (add the notes)
3. Sing the passage; finger the notes while singing; then play it
4. Sing the passage with proper articulation/dynamics/expression/phrasing and then play it.
5. Using a metronome, slow the entire passage down and play it at a slow tempo with accurate rhythm, then speed it up a few notches at a time.
6. Play each note slowly out of rhythm, then play very slowly in rhythm
7. Play one measure of the phrase at a time
8. In a fast passage of even notes, vary the rhythm, then play it correctly
 - a. LSLSLS (Long, short, long, short: like a dotted eighth-sixteenth)
 - b. SLSLSL (Short, Long...)
 - c. Even
 - d. Also try varying the articulation and then with the correct articulation
9. Record yourself playing and then listen to yourself
10. Play for your parents. This is good for when you are nervous.