

Sep 17, 2019

Dear string parents,

Orchestra classes are off to a wonderful start! The students are making rapid progress on their basic skills, they've learned most of our classroom routines, and - best of all - they're attentive and focused in class. Now it's time to take it to the next level by learning how to practice. This is the best time for you to get involved and help your child to develop good habits!

The First Challenge

The hardest part of a practice session is right at the beginning – *the choice to start*. There were so many times growing up when my instrument was sitting right there, but it just seemed like so much work to take it out of the case and set it up. Yet whenever I did start a practice session, it was fun! I'd get so caught up that time would pass in the blink of an eye. Thus, the first habit kids must develop is **the willpower to initiate practice**.

This week's project

In our first class this week, kids received (or will receive) a Practice Log. I'm not using this tool like other teachers – I don't care yet about the total minutes spent practicing. (Okay, I lied, I'd prefer beginners spend at least 5 minutes a day to build finger strength.) This Practice Log is only measuring **how many days you initiate a practice session**. That practice session can last an hour, it can last 1 minute, but so long as you *started* a practice session, mark it down on the Log! Next week, we'll see how everyone did and graph the results on our bulletin board. My goal is 5 days of practice for every student. Students who practice 6 days will get a "Great" and students who practice all 7 days will get an "Outstanding!"

What counts as practice?

Anything that is working towards your Goal. Most first-year students are working on White Belt (the White Finger Pattern), and most second-year student are working on Red Belt (Ode to Joy, p.23). Some students have other goals: learning the bow hold, seeing how far you can get through the book, mastering more advanced belts, etc. Some kids have multiple goals, and in any given practice session they'll work towards any or all of them.

Most often, practice involves playing your instrument. There are a few other things that count as practice, too, for example: watching a String Samurai video or drilling with flashcards. Black belt students who are working on advanced literature will often sit down with their music to study it or sing through it, working out phrasing and how they want it to sound without the instrument.

How can I, the parent, help?

You can have a tremendous influence on your child's musical development right now, by helping them create a practice routine. For now, I recommend a minimum of 5 minutes a day of practice. Many students choose to do more, and that's fantastic.

Make sure to discuss these things:

- 1) Time: When are you going to practice each day? Are there some days when you cannot practice?
- 2) Location: Where will you practice? Ideally, it's somewhere quiet where you can focus without distraction, and somewhere where you won't bother the rest of your family, too. If you don't have a place like that, that's fine – have a conversation with the family, and

set the expectation that during this time, your budding musician will have a quiet environment where everyone will support them by letting them focus 😊

- 3) Follow through: each day for the next two weeks, check in with your child and ask if they've practiced. At this point in the year, every child wants to do well and they all want to practice, but I suspect that by the time they get home, many will be distracted and forget. All they need is a reminder :-).

Help! My child doesn't remember what they're supposed to practice!

First-year players:

- 1) Make sure you've watched all of the video lessons currently available (for your instrument) at <https://d11strings.wixsite.com/home/video-lessons>.
- 2) Practice the White Finger Pattern for 5 minutes each day.
- 3) If you've already earned White Belt, practice with the bow for 5 minutes each day. Pages 4-5 and 16-17 in the book are great for practicing the bow hold.
- 4) If you're bored with that, start on page 6 in the book and move ahead. See how much you can learn and how far you can get.

Second-year players:

- 1) Most returning students are working on Red Belt – Ode to Joy on page 23.
- 2) If you already earned your Red Belt, work on your next belt. A list of all belts can be found at <https://d11strings.wixsite.com/home/string-samurai>.
- 3) If you're ready to test for a belt, start learning the next one. You'll need to test in order, but you can start learning them at any time.

Looking forward

Over the course of the year, I will guide kids through more advanced practice methods. As we learn more, practice expectations will morph, and I'll keep you (parents/guardians) looped in as they do. But for now, students should put in at least 5 minutes of practice on most days.

My **goal** by the end of the year is that **kids will have all the skills, knowledge, and habits needed to take charge of their own learning**. Once students are so empowered, there is no limit on what they can learn or what music they can perform. It's at that point that music becomes magical.

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[Mr. Lambert's class website](#)