

MBCI Band Program

Helpful Practice Hints

Mr. A. Klassen

Now that the school year is well underway, and each of you have gotten into the routines of school and home, I thought this would be a good time to highlight some information in the band course outline regarding individual practice on your band instrument.

Band students have an ongoing homework assignment: practicing their instrument and striving to take it to the next level. The success of any team is ultimately determined by the individual effort of each of its members. Band members are only in a position to contribute to the ensemble if they have done their homework. Studies show that the benefits of individual practice are enhanced significantly if students follow some simple guidelines. Here are a few:

1. Establish a specific time of day for practice and get in the habit of always doing it at that time.
2. Establish a suitable location - one with good acoustics and free from distractions.
3. Make sure practice location has all these needed items ready to go in position:
 - a proper chair which allows for and encourages good posture while sitting
 - adjustable music stand raised to eye level, with rack at proper angle, standing or sitting
 - music books and sheets neatly organized in folder within easy reach
 - pencil within easy reach
 - instrument case and cleaning accessories within easy reach

Additional items strongly recommended:

- electronic metronome - for checking and keeping steady tempo
 - electronic tuner - for checking and keeping correct pitch
 - CD/DVD/stereo player set up nearby - to play together with
 - audio recording device - invaluable for hearing yourself accurately and objectively
4. Do a warm up. Go from easy to complex, covering all the technical fundamentals.
 5. Set a specific goal for each practice session, then try to make some progress towards that goal.
 6. Play some music just for fun - something you can already play well. Play for others.

Much has been written about how to practice, but following the above guidelines is a pretty good place to start, even though they don't specify exactly what to do. The truth is, each student needs to work on different things, and students with different learning styles will also need to practice in different ways to achieve the same results. Many students find that going through the same routine in each practice session provides a way to measure progress from day to day and week to week. However, recent research on how our brains best learn suggests that 'changing the channel' and finding a variety of ways to practice increases the retention of good habits and can often break through the roadblocks that all of us encounter from time to time as we strive to get better.

Most individual practice is best done at home where the environment is controlled and in the younger grades, parents can monitor progress. There are situations however, where it may be more convenient for students to practice at school, either before or after classes, or during a spare or lunch time. Percussionists, for instance, will not have every percussion instrument at home, and will need, from time to time, to do some of their individual practice at school, depending on what is needed. (A reminder that percussionists are entitled to sign out equipment to bring home overnight, following some procedures outlined on the wall.) Band members are welcome to practice

in the main band room or practice rooms any time classes are not in progress, or in the upper band room at any time. With some restrictions, Jubilee Place is also available.

For MBCI band students in Grade 6-9, part of the expectation is that they record and submit to me or Mr. Bergman the amount of time they are practicing on a weekly basis. Although 'putting in the time' is not a guarantee of success, students who put in a minimum of 100 minutes per week or more of quality practice generally find that they do make progress on their band instrument, and that this achievement level generally rises with the amount of time practiced.

The thinking behind practice records only in the younger grades is that most students benefit from an extrinsic push to develop the habit of individual practice, but at the upper levels, this motivation needs to become self-directed. (Much like brushing ones teeth daily, or remembering to watch for traffic when crossing the street.) There are some ins and outs students need to know about handing practice records in, which you can read up on in the Course Outline for the grades involved.

If students or parent/guardians have questions about practicing, or would appreciate additional resources on the topic, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Mr. Klassen (also on behalf of Mr. Bergman)