

Robert J. Elkington Middle School Band



Anissa Grotjohn, 6th grade & 4th hour 8th grade band director
agrotjohn@isd318.org www.grbands.org/6th-grade

How To Practice Smarter

It is important to practice your instrument for 20-45 minutes every day, or at least every day you possibly can. Every day you practice, you will get better; every day you don't practice, you will get worse. There are also things you can do to get the most out of your practice time, and strategies to help you learn difficult music.

1. **Slow down.** This is the most important tip I have to give you. When learning a new piece of music, especially one that is difficult, slow down the tempo until you can play it without making any mistakes. Then play through it 10 times (really, 10 times) at that slow tempo. Only after you do this should you start to increase the tempo. But if you increase the tempo and you start making mistakes, you may need to go back down to the slower tempo for a while longer, or stop and try again after you sleep.
2. **Play along with a Metronome.** You need to be able to play while keeping a steady beat. Playing along with a metronome teaches you how to do that. Listen to it while you play. Tap your foot along with the beat while you play. Remember to slow down the tempo for difficult stuff. Either download a metronome app (Tempo by Frozen Ape is my favorite), or google "metronome" on your laptop.
3. **Count and tizzle your rhythms.** You do not have to learn the notes and the rhythms at the same time, it is okay to count your rhythms (1+2+3+4+) and tizzle the rhythms first like we do in class. Tap your foot and use the Metronome while you do it. Say the note values (quarter half whole) with the beat.
4. **Stop and fix mistakes.** If you make a mistake, don't keep going. Stop and figure out what you did wrong, and fix it before going on. Work it out at a slower tempo. If you miss a note, practice going between that note and the note that comes right before it. Don't practice mistakes! You will only get better at playing mistakes!
5. **Say the letter names of the notes out loud.** When learning your notes for the first time, it helps to say the letter name of each note out loud. It helps because it forces you to slow down and think about each note. After a few years, you will be so good at reading music that you will probably not need to do this anymore, but it really helps first and second year students.
6. **Listen to a recording of the music.** Free recordings are available for your concert music online, just google the title and composer. Listen to how the song goes. You can also tizzle or sing along with the recording -- this really helps you learn your notes.
7. **Check your notes with the Bandmate Chromatic Tuner app (free).** If you are not sure whether or not you are playing the right notes, slow down and check each note one at a time with Bandmate.
8. **Play it correctly over and over.** Your body learns through repetition. A common mistake for beginners is they practice only until they get it right, then they think they know it. That's not how it works. You need to do it correctly over and over for your "muscle memory" to really learn it. Think about it like learning to hit a baseball or shoot a basketball: you get better every time you do it correctly. Pro musicians say you don't really "know" it until you can play it 4 times in a row without any mistakes.