



“But HOW do I practice?”



Tips for students and their parents

Schedule your practice time

Shorter, consistent practice sessions are more effective than one longer session. Schedule even 15 minutes every other day to practice and you will see improvement! Ask Rachel for more individual guidance on how much time you should ideally spend practicing.

Set a Clear Goal

Set a clear goal for each practice session. While ‘I will practice for 15 minutes’ is a goal, it is less effective than specific goals. Example: “I will play this measure four times correctly in a row.”

Remove distractions

Put your phone in another room and put away any distracting games or screens. You didn’t really practice for half an hour if half the time you were on Snapchat! Focus on the task at hand.

Structure practice like a workout

Just like an athlete, musicians work to strengthen muscles and improve skills. Start with a warmup, move on to skills and fundamentals like scales, then start working on repertoire. Cool downs are recommended for longer practice sessions and can be similar to your warmups.

Break Your Music into Small Sections

You might want to play your new piece all the way through, but that’s not always the best way to start. Break your music down in to smaller sections when you practice. Don’t start from the beginning every time! Find those tricky sections and practice them on their own, then start a few measures earlier and practice moving into (and then out of) the tricky section.

Practice Rhythmically

You can practice even without a piano by focusing on the rhythms. Try clapping them or tapping on your lap. Generally, when practicing, we need to SLOW DOWN. Use a metronome (Google ‘Metronome’ is all you need!) and practice slowly. Once you can clap the phrase slowly, you can then try it at a faster tempo. Use this same ‘slower to faster’ technique when playing.

Listen to other people perform your songs

Whether it’s on YouTube, Apple Music, Spotify, or anything else, listen to other people sing what you’re working on. How do they phrase the piece? What dynamics do they use? What do you like about their artistic choices? What will you do differently in your version?

Use your theory knowledge to analyze the piece

Our music theory studies help us learn our music! Look for cadences, A and B sections, repeated motifs, key changes, scalar passages, etc.

Start and End with Fun

Playing music should be fun! If you want to play your favourite song from an old book as a warmup, go ahead! If you want to work on a pop song that you found on YouTube, play around with that after your regular practice. Practice sessions can be both fun and productive.

Practice vs Playing

There is a difference! Both are valuable, but they are different ways of spending time at the piano. **Practice is messy.** It includes stops and starts, playing bits over and over, talking to yourself, singing, clapping, and all sorts of things we do to engage the brain and create new neural pathways that we need to play the piano. **Playing is about enjoyment.** When we're playing for ourselves or for others we can get lost in the flow. We don't stop to fix mistakes or judge the results.

"Good practice shouldn't sound good."

Productive practice is often frustrating to listen to, not pleasant! This is because practicing is mainly decoding and rehearsing – it involves stopping, fixing, and lots of repetition. There eventually comes a time when you will be preparing for a performance and must play pieces through - this is a much smaller percentage of overall time spent at the piano.

Examples of practice sessions:

5 minutes (very young children): 1 minute of shaking hands and stretching arms. 2 minutes of finding all the As on the piano, then the Cs. 2 minutes on assigned piece, focusing on the third measure.

15 minutes: 5 minutes of five note scales, first hands separate, then together. 5 minutes of new C major scale hands separate. 5 minutes on assigned song, focusing on the last line.

Half Hour: 5 minutes on C-major scale and primary chords as a warmup. 5-minute play through of previously learned piece for a warmup. 5 minutes on the newly learned A minor scale, hands separate, then together. 15 minutes on assigned repertoire, focusing on the B section of the second piece.

45 minutes: 10 minutes on Royal Conservatory technical requirements, starting with the easiest scales in C major and A minor and then focusing on the newly learned tonic triads. 5-minute play through of previously learned piece for a fun warm up. 5 minutes of sight reading using the RCM Four Star book. 10 minutes on the assigned RCM etude, focusing on the left-hand rotation in the Alberti Bass pattern. 10 minutes on the assigned repertoire selection, focusing on the right-hand articulation. 5-minute play through of previously learned piece for a fun cool down.