

# How to practice (and be happy)

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From this . . . .

*This article presents information to help parents and students understand why, when, where and how to practice. The first part explains basic learning challenges associated with learning how to play a music instrument. The second part presents specific practice strategies to help make learning music productive and enjoyable. The third part gives parents suggestions on how to accommodate their child's needs and efforts.. It also presents "to do" lists to help plan strategies for learning or for solving musical problems.*



To this . . .

Learning to play a musical instrument can be a rewarding and exciting adventure for students of all ages. Parents, happy to provide the opportunity for their child, are likewise excited about their child's prospects. While many students stick with it throughout their school years, others lose interest and quit. Those who continue usually become musically proficient and frequently stay with music performance into their adult lives. For these students, music has become an important and rewarding part of their life. Those who do not continue lost enthusiasm along the way. They became dissatisfied with their progress. Many claim they: ". . . didn't have talent." ". . . didn't like to practice" or, "It was too hard" or, "It became boring."

The number one reason why students lose interest involves issues with practice. Most students and many parents do not fully realize the level of commitment to practice that is necessary to make progress on a musical instrument. Most do not know there are ways to practice that are efficient and productive which, in turn, makes learning rewarding and fun.

## Learning

Making progress with a musical instrument is essentially a learning process. In addition to **UNDERSTANDING** and **LEARNING** concepts, they must also **PERFORM** skills. Learning can take place in both formal and informal circumstances, with or without teachers. Learning can include knowledge and skills that either help or detract from making progress. Learning to play a music instrument is no different than learning how to read, swim, drive a car or perform brain surgery. **AS WITH LEARNING ANYTHING**, They all are fully dependent upon **MOTIVATION**, **REPETITION**, and **CONSISTANCY**.

## Motivation

Motivation is the fuel that provides energy for all learning to take place. Chances of success are greatly improved with high levels of motivation. The motivation to make music may take many forms. For most, the rewards of making music come simply from one's own sense of achievement and the joy music making gives.

- Motivation is maintained when practice results in progress and improved skills
- Motivation can change from positive to negative at any time
- Motivation can be improved through modifications to practice methods
- Motivation is fully dependent upon the ratio of effort/time to the amount of reward received
- Students need to check and reflect upon their motivation levels and change tactics to maintain it.
- Parents and teachers become aware of a student's motivation level based upon what they say and do during lessons or at home.

## Two Types of Motivation.

- **Extrinsic motivation** motivation is based on aspects outside of the student. For example, a student may want to learn an instrument to win awards, to be praised or to seek fame and fortune. These motivators have little to do with music and are based upon a "reward" system outside of the music experience. This kind of motivation can evaporate if the extrinsic rewards are

*To do . . .*

To clarify **motivation**, ask the following questions:

1. I want to be able to play \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of song).
2. I want to perform like \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of a person).

taken away or are never received.

- **Intrinsic motivation** comes from within. For example, a student wants to learn an instrument because s/he enjoys the challenge, love the sound, is fun and relaxing, etc. Intrinsic motivation provides the internal “drive” and perseverance needed to make the effort of learning how to play an instrument

## Assessing Motivation

Students are consciously or subconsciously aware of their own motivation and these perceptions are key to whether practice becomes productive and meaningful. Sometimes, when the “motivation tank” is low, learning will be difficult and students may be reluctant to practice and tempted to give up. When the motivation tank is full, practicing will be rewarding and productive.

### 1) Interest – What are your goals?

Goals can be broken down into long-term, mid-term, short-term and immediate goals. A goal is the reason students take up an instrument in the first place and acts as the “carrot on the end of the stick.”

### 2) Satisfaction

Only with time and experience will you be able to know how long it takes and how much effort is required to learn certain aspects of music and therefore gain a realistic expectation of your development. By reflecting upon your feelings of achievement and discussing these with your teacher, you will be able to gain a clearer insight of what is actually happening and be satisfied with the results of your work.

### 3) Expectations

Sometimes mastering something as complicated as playing a musical instrument can take many years. Learning takes as long as it takes and you cannot rush it. It's different for every person and it's a reality that is not easy to accept.

If you are trying to master something which is taking a while, it is OK to leave it and come back to it later.

### 4) Relevance

All practice should lead one to reaching their goals. Many practice activities such as scales and exercises are meant to prepare students to play pieces. Most songs are assigned to help students understand and perform specific musical skills.

## Skills

To learn to play a musical instrument one must master many physical skills. Most musical skills are actually compound skills—a skill built upon the foundation of other previously memorized skills. A compound skill cannot be mastered until the foundation skill is entirely memorized. One skill is built upon the next, so the foundation skill must be learned before adding another. The following lists some of the general skills necessary to play a musical instrument:

- Read music
- Perform correct notes
- Perform correct notes in succession
- Perform correct rhythms
- Produce a pleasing tone
- Perform in tune
- Perform music with others

Each of these skills requires a set of sub-skills. For instance, to read music, one must master the following sub-skills:

1. Recognize each symbol
2. Interpret its meaning
3. Integrate knowledge with a physical action
4. Process steps 1-3 while reading ahead
5. Read groups of symbols in a continuous flow with the music without interruption

*To do . . .*

To clarify **goals**, ask the following questions:

1. Why am I taking music lessons?
2. What song do I want to be able to do next week/month?
3. What musical challenge/s am I faced with *right now*?
4. What do I need to do to accomplish my goals?

*To do . . .*

To clarify **satisfaction**, ask the following questions:

1. Does it bother you when you can't play a song the first time?
2. Are your activities too hard?
3. Are your activities too easy?
4. Am I becoming bored?
5. Have I already done this?

*To do . . .*

To clarify **expectations**, ask the following questions:

1. Re my goals realistic?
2. How much time am I willing to put in to achieve my goal/s?
3. How much work work am I willing to put in to achieve my goal/s?
4. Am I willing to spend time and energy to achieve my goal/s?

## How are skills learned?

Musicians, athletes, dancers, tightrope walkers, surgeons, craftsmen and anyone who performs vital skills with accuracy and confidence must integrate knowledge, and physical movement to the point where they become automatic reflexes; done “without thinking.” Under critical conditions, there is not enough time for them to think about what their bodies need to do. Each sub-skill must be combined and executed at once. Impossible to do if each skill requires conscientious and separate thought. Automatic reflexes such as these are only developed through repetition that leads to muscle memory and long-term memory

## From understanding to “muscle-memory”

The study and mastery of a musical instrument is largely about learning skills through *understanding* the challenge, *refining* approaches to master the challenge, *observing and assessing* progress and creating *long-term “muscle-memory.”*

### Step 1: Understanding

Understanding is essential to learning physical skills. The instrument and the music will present specific physical challenges.

Understanding the challenge is the first tool used to set *goals* and *evaluate* progress. Through guidance from a good teacher, students will receive strategies on how to overcome these challenges. Exercises, scales and etudes are designed to help students master essential skills. Once mastered, students can play music with confidence and enjoyment.

### Step 2: Refinement

Learning new skills essentially consists of selecting successful strategies to overcome each challenge. Students usually practice by first following the teacher’s suggestions and then by using tried and true methods or his/her own techniques discovered through trial and error. Between these three approaches, students can discover the most productive practice strategies. It takes lots of trial and error before the body can do what the mind clearly understands. Once a movement is correctly refined, sufficient repetition is required in order to master it.

### Step 3: Observation and Assessment

While following the teacher’s recommendations and exploring his/her own methods, the student will decide which practice strategy is the most productive. At first, younger students need feedback from the teacher to observe, assess and recommend practice strategies. Older students can start to assess their progress “on the fly” and shift their observation from point to point, without interrupting their skill execution.

### Step 4: Relinquishing executive process

Musicians are unable to quickly and reliably perform actions if they need to consciously think (executive process) about how to perform each skill. To do this, skills must be transferred out of conscious attention to automatic execution, sometimes called “muscle-memory.”

When musicians thoroughly learn a physical movement, they no longer rely on the slow deliberate sequence of thinking about each step. They bypass executive process completely and replace it with a series of automatic reflexes that can be performed effortlessly and reliably in succession. Automatic execution allows your conscious attention to perform other tasks—primarily observation and assessment while practicing and interpreting and listening while performing.

- It takes a lot of repetition and review before any skill becomes a reliable reflex action.
- Reflex action is often called “kinesthetic memory,” “motor memory,” or “**muscle memory.**”

## Practicing

Musicians are ‘small muscle’ athletes and like athletes, they “**practice by doing.**” Learning a new instrument or a new song involves physical skill training, practice and reinforcement just like learning a sport. A music student’s goal is to improve, master, and remember what he/she accomplished and, as much as possible, enjoy the process while making good use of time.

### To do . . .

To clarify **understanding**, ask the following questions:

1. Do I understand what is expected of me in this assignment?
2. Do I understand why the assignment was given?
3. How is the exercise related to a specific technique or musical challenge in a piece of music?

### To do . . .

To clarify **refinement**, ask the following questions:

1. Have I followed the instructions my teacher gave me on how to practice?
2. Have I tried other ways to practice? (slower, isolation, 1-3 notes at a time, etc.)

### To do . . .

To assess **progress**, ask the following questions:

1. What progress did I make on the difficult places during this session?
2. What is still giving me trouble, and what can I do to address that specific trouble?
1. Do I change my practice strategies or do I approach each problem the same way? Which practice method works best for me?
2. Which practice method works for this kind of musical problem?
3. What should I work on in my next practice time?
4. When I am singing or playing something that is difficult, was I too involved to listen and evaluate objectively?
5. Is it difficult for me to evaluate how well I am playing a piece?

To ensure quality practice, four steps are essential:

1. Establish and set clearly defined goal/s
2. Practice frequently
3. Practice sufficiently
4. Focus, Assess and Adjust
5. Set baseline for future practice

### Establish and set clearly defined goals:

Rather than basing practice around time, students should pursue outcome-based practice. Each practice session needs to have one or more goals. Weekly goals are usually established by the assignment that was given by the teacher.

As observed earlier in this article, goals can be broken down into long-term, mid-term, short-term and immediate goals. The longest-term goal is to be able to play your instrument as well as you can. A mid-term goal may be able to play a specific song. There are many possible mid-term goals. The smallest goal is the most immediate; the thing staring you in the face that you want or need to learn *right now*. Short-term goals can change by the minute and once accomplished, you can move on to another. Each immediate goal is a stair-step towards the next longer-term goal. Accomplishing goals may take more time or less time, depending on the challenges they present and since they are tangible, they help make practice time more interesting, focused and productive.

Students can best monitor and evaluate their progress by setting up a **baseline**. Usually, the baseline is where you left off at your last practice. By striving to improve from your starting point — from your baseline, practice will have a purpose. You will be able to easily measure and feel your progress toward the goals you have set. As an added bonus, motivation and enjoyment will not only improve, they will be maintained.

### To do . . .

To clarify **outcomes**, ask the following questions:

1. Where did I leave off last time?
2. What is my baseline or starting point?
3. What are my immediate goals for this practice session?
4. Do I just play from beginning to end all the time?
5. Have I isolated the hard parts?
6. Have I alternated my practice methods to learn overcome the challenge/s? (play slowly)
7. Did I improve from my baseline?
8. What will my goals be for my next practice session?

### Practice Frequently

Frequent practice is a cornerstone of steady progress. You'll get much more out of your practice if you practice every day. An occasional skipped day won't hurt, but be careful about skipping several days in a row.

- Progress is reversed the longer you do not practice.
- Skipping a few days can lead to pledges of catching up with one or more marathon sessions on the weekend.
- Long marathon sessions usually cause mental and physical fatigue which can initiate a downward spiral, leaving you tired, frustrated and probably with little to show for your efforts. Often there's little fun and little accomplishment.
- A regular reliance on marathon sessions may easily take the fun out of music, and lead to a bad attitude toward practice, which might well be enjoyed when spread out appropriately.

There will come days when you really don't have time for a full practice session because something else came up that you might choose to do instead. And some days you're honestly too tired to practice — or you just don't feel like doing it. On days like these, it's best not to skip your practice entirely. Simply shorten it!

- Put in five or ten minutes, give yourself a pat on the back, and then call it a day. This may leave you feeling disappointed that you didn't put in a significant effort. Surprisingly, it really makes a significant contribution toward your progress.
- A few minutes of practice goes a long way toward keeping you on track. It maintains and strengthens your "daily commitment," and that counts for a lot.
- To maintain momentum, it's much better to shorten your practice than to skip days.

## Practice Sufficiently

Successful practicing is not about how *long* one practices but how *well* one practices and how quickly one *learns* as a result of good practicing. When time devoted to practice fails to help a student improve, spending more time is just a waste of time. If practice is guided by the number of minutes, students will soon start staring at the clock, fiddle with their instrument, and avoid really practicing as much as possible. Many students resort to playing only familiar songs, avoiding challenges and distracting themselves until their “jail time” is over.

A practice session can be considered “long enough” when progress toward at least one goal has been made. Remember: “Wishing without effort will always lead to disappointment”

## Focus, Assess and Adjust

This is the meat of the practice session. Focus your efforts by making sure every exercise or song you play relates back to your daily goal. When practicing, you should sound somewhat awful (as though you’re playing something too difficult for you). In fact, you **should** be practicing something too difficult for you! Don’t just play through your music. Skip the easy parts; they’re easy! Find the hard parts, isolate them and make each one of them a goal to complete during your practice sessions.

It’s easy to fall into the trap of practicing things you already know how to do. Practicing older material is probably more fun and will make you feel better about your playing ability, but it doesn’t help you improve. Make sure you’re continually pushing yourself during practice time and save the songs you know for relaxing at the end of practice sessions.

Assess your progress informally to set your immediate goals. Don’t be overly critical. Be objective; monitor your progress. Practice that is adjusted by ongoing reflection and assessment leads to heightened focus, improved motivation and more practice. Practice without ongoing reflection and assessment can be de-motivating leading to less or no practice.

When challenges have been identified and isolated, the following strategies can be used to take them on:

### Divide and Conquer

Invariably, students start to learn a song or exercise by attempting to play through the entire piece. Most likely, they will be unsuccessful. Unfortunately, too many students use only the ‘complete play-through’ method of practicing, building frustration with each unsuccessful attempt.

After the first play-through, students should make a mental note or mark in their music those places that present a challenge. This will enable them to break tasks and challenges into small, manageable parts. This is ideal for learning music and developing physical skills. To learn large groups of information efficiently, you must study the material in small sections. If you can’t accomplish your goal, try reducing the size of the section. If there’s no progress after about 20 seconds, work on half as much. If you fail to quickly learn the section you’ve chosen, divide the section in two again. Continue dividing until you reach a size where you can progress quickly. You may find you need to work on just two, three or four notes. Each of these sections will become goals for you to accomplish during this and subsequent practice sessions.

Be sure to start each section slowly and increase speed and accuracy with each repetition. After isolating and mastering each problem area, try joining the sections until the piece may be played through. After playing the piece through, monitor what’s left to work on. Go back to working on those sections that still need work.

### Slow it down

Before muscle memory takes effect, one must think of every step to coordinate fingers, lungs, lips and body to execute a skill. Thinking takes time and performing slowly provides the time for the brain to coordinate all the appropriate muscles. Once you are able to perform something slowly, it is a very easy to gradually increase the speed up to the tempo it should be performed. Muscle-memory will begin to take over and thinking is no longer needed.

### To do . . .

To determine if I **practice enough**, ask the following questions:

1. Have I made progress on at least one goal my teacher or I set?
2. Does it seem I will need to “carry over” this week’s goals to next week?
3. Did I at least put in 5-10 minutes on the days I knew I couldn’t practice?
4. Do I rely on “practice marathons” to get ready for my next lesson?

### To do . . .

To evaluate how well I **adjust practice strategies**, ask the following questions:

1. Have I played through the piece to identify the difficult parts?
2. Which part needs the most improvement?
3. After practicing it slowly a few times, am I still having difficulties?
4. Have I divided this section in two halves?
5. Have I practiced each section into loops?
6. After mastering each section, have I tried putting them together again?
7. Have I followed this strategy for each difficult section in this song?

## ||: Repeat, Repeat, Repeat :||

Repetition is the cornerstone of all learning. **We can't learn without repetition. We can't repeat without learning.** By repeating, you are "training" your mind and muscles to perform music - no different than training a circus animal to do tricks.

Once challenging sections have been identified and isolated, they need to be played through slowly over and over until your muscles can do them without error. This may not be accomplished during one practice session and most likely will take many practice sessions.

**Looping:** Isolated problems may be performed over and over as in a loop. Many repetitions may be accomplished in a few seconds. Speed may be increased while repeating the loops.

**Linking:** The last note of a challenging section may be linked to the first note of the following adjacent challenging section to bridge the two into one entity. As with looping a single passage, linked passages may be looped.

### Give it a rest

When progress on a particular problem seems to have reached a plateau and frustration begins to build, put it away for a day or two. This rest period will give you the opportunity to focus upon other goals. Recent research in cognitive functions of the brain is discovering that brain activity continues during waking rest and is correlated with better memory consolidation.

### Keep it interesting

One of the big issues in learning is how to get the repetition we need to fix something in our brain. Simple repetition can be boring however, boring tasks are not the most effective means of getting the brain to do things. Our brains respond much better to the surprising, the novel, the emotional; the interesting.

### Blocked practice verses random practice

- **Blocked** practice involves giving total focus to one aspect of technique, practicing the same thing over and over until it is correct.
- **Random** practice is where, like shuffling cards, a number of skills are practiced in random order, with the goal of avoiding or minimizing continuous repetition of any single task.
- While it is encouraged for musicians to use both methods, random practice has been proven by numerous experiments to be much more effective for long-term retention.

### Alternate between learning and reviewing.

- Start your practice with something familiar.
- Then focus on your goals and new challenges
- Continue alternating between familiar and new to rest one part of your brain while a different part works.

### Get it right!

There's the old saying, "Practice makes perfect." Actually practice makes *permanent*. So practice carefully. Every music teacher has experienced lessons where the student returns with music that was learned incorrectly. The student needs to relearn the piece slowing down the rate of progress and increasing levels of frustration.

- You'll learn whatever you practice.
- Don't practice music casually. Be specific.
- Anything repeated becomes partially memorized. Don't memorize just anything!
- Don't practice it wrong! Don't play wrong notes, leave notes out, or play wrong rhythms. This just teaches you to play it wrong.
- If it's too difficult to play right, slow it down enough that you can play all the notes in rhythm, correctly, no matter how slow this is.
- Life is too short to unlearn something you learned wrong.

### To do . . .

To evaluate if I **repeat** enough, ask the following questions:

1. Do I isolate problem sections and repeat them?
2. Do I make loops out of the problem area?
3. Do I link adjacent problem areas and play them as a loop?
4. Have I repeated the (section/song enough so I can play it without pausing or making mistakes?
5. Do I keep my practice interesting by alternating my repetitions of problem areas or playing them in random order?

### To do . . .

To evaluate if I **keep practice interesting**, ask the following questions:

1. Do I change my strategies during my practice?
2. Have I tried looping and linking challenging music?
3. Have I tried practicing challenging parts randomly?
4. Have I given challenging parts a rest for a day or two?
5. Do I try to evaluate my progress as I repeat sections?

### **Keep it right**

- Your memory thrives on patterns. It especially notices recurring and repeated patterns.
- If you repeat actions casually, without precision in time and motion, your memory will probably discard your good efforts, or it may link them with a number of wrong and imperfect bad habits.
- Exact repetition allows you to memorize quickly and efficiently. Your brain literally stores new repeated memories by creating new physical structures in your brain.
- Once your memory is hard-wired in this manner, it is lightning quick at serving up perfect or imperfect movements, depending on what or how you've practiced.
- Make the movements the same every time you repeat a passage.
- Refine your movements with attention to relaxation and economy of motion. Don't just aim for right notes. Extra motion will slow you down and tire you out.

### **Other tips:**

#### **Patience**

When adopting the practice methods above, students meet face to face with delayed gratification. Practicing without a plan will lead to confusion and frustration. Playing songs from the start to the end feels like a lot more fun, but may accomplish little by doing so. The pay-off comes from tackling the difficult parts, one at a time, in small sections, played slowly. From there it is very easy to put the parts together and increase speed. By learning music this way, students reap the rewards that accompany true success.

It's rare that you pick up right where you left off the day before. This is especially true for beginners. There will come days when your best efforts will fail to bring you to the level of yesterday's accomplishments or perhaps, you'll reach yesterday's level, but not until your practice is nearly over. Achievement won't always follow a straight line, and improvements won't always come at a steady rate - and it's OK. Don't let it get to you.

#### **Warm-up First**

Practically everybody wants to skip the warm-up. This is true for beginners, advanced students, young students and adults. The complaint is that the warm-up "keeps you from getting to the fun part." This is a shortsighted view. A good warm-up will heighten your skills, and will make it easier for you to play well during the rest of your practice.

- Always start your practice with something easy, preferably something familiar.
- Play some exercises or easy scales. Then play an easy piece or two. In doing so, you'll establish a baseline for the day - a preflight check, a list of what's working and what's not. Then continue your warm-up and try to improve on these points before working on new or challenging material.
- If you skip the warm up and fail to establish a baseline at the start of your practice, you may proceed with unrealistic goals for the day, launching in unaware that certain skills are working, while others are temporarily dormant.
- If you practice more than once a day, you may shorten or skip your warm-up in the later sessions.

#### **Review Frequently**

Review is your best practice tool. If you've tackled a few new sections, and you can play them by heart, review each section occasionally during your practice.

- Before you end your practice session, briefly review all the material you've practiced once again.
- In just a few tries, see if you can revive each accomplishment to the best level that you achieved during this practice.
- It's always fun to play one or two of your favorite songs you learned before at the end of each practice session

## Parental Guides

Consider the following: Most students start with an instrument in 45-minute group lessons once a week. They are asked to “practice” at home with very little notion of what practice means. Unless their parents have some musical knowledge, very few students receive any further instruction between lessons. Beyond the few minutes of formal weekly instruction students received in their lesson, students are asked to assume the most responsibility of their learning alone. Very few students have the maturity and self-discipline to establish consistent practice routines nor are they sufficiently aware of how learning happens. For these reasons, the following recommendations are provided:

1. Until practice habits are established, parents **must take an active role** in helping their child develop consistent practice habits.
2. Parents may need to help structure their child’s time to make room for practice as well as homework, and other activities.
3. Parents may need to monitor practice from time to time to see if practice methods are productive. This can be done informally just by listening from another room or during a family “concert time.” Parents may need to gently insist their child maintain regular practice schedule
4. Parents may need to help students clarify their child’s goals and their bolster motivation
5. Parents should have regular communication with their child’s music teacher.

*To do . . .*

To evaluate **parental participation**, ask the following questions:

1. Am I taking an active part in my child’s musical education?
2. Have I helped establish consistent practice schedules?
3. Do I monitor my child’s practice?
4. Have I helped my child set goals?
5. Have I provided a practice space that is conducive to learning and family harmony?
6. Am I in regular communication with my child’s teacher?

## General Hints for Parents

1. The student’s first attempts on the instrument are likely to produce sounds of questionable musical worth. Be prepared for strange sounds at first.
2. Do not expect the student to perform even the most elementary tune for a while. Mastering a secure tone and musical rudiments must be learned first.
3. When the student does play a recognizable melody, make it a point to tell him/her how well it pleases you.
4. As the student gains more confidence, s/he will want to show you his/her new abilities. Find time in your schedule to hear a song or two or an exercise s/he does particularly well.
5. Arrange a “concert time” in your family’s schedule during the week where s/he may perform his favorite song or songs for several minutes.
6. If reluctant, do not force a student to perform for visiting friends or relatives. S/he may feel quite secure performing for the family but visitors can be too much of a challenge. Yet, on the other hand, if there is no reluctance, by all means, let him/her perform.
7. Avoid reacting to any faltering or wrong notes as the student plays for you or the family. Encourage the rest of the family to do likewise. If things go really bad, you may tell the student that although s/he is having problems now, you are sure that with a little more practice, it will sound better. When s/he does learn it, be sure s/he knows how proud and pleased you are of her/his progress.
8. S/he may have a particular favorite song that s/he will almost always play. Although you may have heard it frequently, try not to show your tiredness of it. You may indicate to her/him how much better s/he now plays the song as when s/he played it several weeks or months ago. You may also ask her/him to play another song that he may have had before, as it may be a favorite of yours. Regardless of exactly what you say, show that his/her playing gives you pleasure.
9. If you hear a child play the same few songs during his practice time, it’s an indication he/she is not challenging him/her self or is avoiding the new material for some reason. Time to have a conversation about the problem.

## Supplementary Help

1. If you have a CD collection, find some music in which his/her instrument is easily heard. Any type of music will do. Your child will be able to hear ways in which the instrument is used in music. It also reinforces the concept of proper tone.
2. If you do not have a collection, purchase some CDs or download music files for this purpose.
3. Occasionally, tune in to television or radio programs featuring a prominent musician or musical group. Concerts are frequently broadcasted on Public TV stations. Daily concerts of classical music is heard on WCRB (99.5) and jazz on WGBH (89.7) FM radio stations.
4. Bring the student to a live concert where s/he may hear and see in person. The Boston area is known for its cultural opportunities where fine performances of a tremendous variety of music are available every week. Boston area college and university music departments, professional and semi-professional musical groups advertise the dates and locations of their performances in the newspapers and online. Do not overlook the

high school and middle school concerts in Westwood and other towns. Church and temple choirs often perform large works with instrumental accompaniment, especially on special observances.

5. As the student advances, s/he may be ready and motivated to perform songs of her/his own choosing. If possible, bring him/her to a music store or an online vendor that sells sheet music for his/her instrument. There are many collections of songs in books especially arranged and graded for developing musicians. Generally, a student should have had at least two years of instruction before s/he is ready for this. Consult with his/her lesson teacher for advice.
6. For his/her birthday, or any other occasion, you may consider including a small accessory for his/her instrument or something to carry his/her music, a music stand or a book about music his instrument, a famous musician who plays the same instrument. You may consider giving your child a memory stick or CD filled with MP3 recordings of music associated with his/her instrument. Music stores, online vendors and book stores carry many items of musical interest. If in doubt, consult with his/her lesson teacher for advice.

### **The Practice Area**

1. Provide a place where the student may practice without disturbance from others and where the sound will not disturb the rest of the family.
2. The area should be comfortable, well ventilated and lit. Avoid places like the basement, attic or hallway. A corner of a bedroom is ideal.
3. Arrange the lighting to illuminate the music from behind with no shadows on the page.
4. Provide some means to support the music upright. An inexpensive music stand should be purchased. Practice should never be attempted with music on the floor. This encourages poor posture and improper handling of the instrument.
5. Provide a firm armless chair with a backrest. A kitchen, dining room or desk chair is ideal.
6. Practicing on the edge of a bed, sofa or soft chair promotes bad posture, which cramps the diaphragm and lungs.