

# Washington Music Educators Association

## The Practice of Effective Practice

Presented by

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Getting students to practice consistently in a meaningful way is a big challenge for teachers. As teachers we must teach our students how to develop the necessary time management skills and effective practice strategies to reinforce the likelihood and quality of student practice.

### Practice Location

Effective practicing is significantly influenced by environmental factors. To learn a musical instrument, a student must be able to concentrate and persevere through different tasks in the face of many potential distractions. Make sure the chosen location has all of the required materials (stand, tuner, metronome, music, pencil, etc.). Find an appropriate chair and have appropriate lighting. In addition, make sure to eliminate potential distractions by turning off the TV, computer, and cell phone.

### Setting Goals

Practicing must be directed. Students must know what and why they are practicing. In working with students to develop goals, make sure the goal is not to just "put in the time". Write goals on the board for your rehearsals. Model to students what appropriate goal setting looks like in rehearsal.

### Practice Strategy Use

It is important that teachers deliberately work with students to build a repertoire of practice strategies. Teachers should provide examples of effective practice strategies, demonstrate their use in context specific situations, and provide feedback about their effectiveness. Examples of practice strategies include repetition, chunking, mental rehearsal, marking the music, varying tempo, singing, modeling, recording oneself, and listening to a recording. When practicing pay attention to transitional sections, start at a slower tempo to avoid errors and then work progressively faster, and organize practice into small structural units and then expand them into larger units. Teach students to analyze their music. Work with them on pattern identification, phrase structure, how different parts function with each other, and musical expression. Deliberate practice emphasizes not just behavior but the role of cognition.