

The Importance of Establishing a Regular Practice Routine

When children start learning a musical instrument, for most it is an activity and discipline unlike any other that they have tried. The results of learning a musical instrument are fantastic, although the work needed to achieve this is sometimes more than some children feel able to do. This is where the help of parents and the development of a regular practice routine can make the difference. Studies have proved that regular short practice routines on a daily or near daily basis provide the best results for children learning a musical instrument.

For most instruments, when a child commences learning, only a short amount of time is required to practise. For example, 10 to 15 minutes is usually enough for a student to feel comfortable and make progress on their instrument. Even in this very busy lifestyle we live, where children are playing several sports, and a host of extra-curricular activities, we can still find 10 to 15 minutes almost every day to practise. As students improve on their instruments, the amount of practice needed to excel on their instrument will go up, but so should their enthusiasm. This is why a routine helps so much.

Over the years I have seen many different routines implemented. Sometimes students will do their practice before dinner each evening. Others do their practice as soon as they get home from school, before other activities commence. Others practise before they're allowed to watch TV or play computer games. Others still practise before they go to school each morning. I even know of students who practise during the ad breaks during The Simpsons! (Not recommended.) Every child and every family is different, so working out a practice routine that works for you, your child and your family is important.

A regular practice routine helps develop discipline, and aids in the development of music reading skills and better technique, fine motor skills and muscle memory. Students who practise regularly improve far more rapidly than those who practise sporadically. When students improve, they enjoy playing their instrument more, reducing the risk of students struggling to keep up with others, and resulting in students wanting to drop out of music.

Parents can aid so much in encouraging their children to develop these regular practice routines, and this routine, once established, provides a relaxed and enjoyable process that everyone understands and values.

I wish you all well in helping your child develop the joy of music through regular practice.

Dr Phillip Rutherford

P.S. (For those who are interested) Is it practice vs practise? Officially, practise is a verb and practice is a noun. In music we can use both - 'I practise my flute' and 'I'm going to do my practice now'. In the US this difference is no longer used and practice is used for both, hence why this is so confusing - even to us musicians who use the word every day!