

## **PRACTICE: *The proper time... the proper space...***

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Practice, just like studying, requires a setting and atmosphere conducive to learning. However, the piano is a very difficult instrument to isolate. Often the family enjoys displaying the gorgeous wood, the fine craftsmanship, and beautiful tone of the instrument in the living room or even the great room where people tend to congregate and converse. Who could blame them? However, as a result, practicing the piano has to compete with the family, the conversations, the television, stereo, and just the day-to-day general living noise. This makes for poor study habits and weak concentration.

The ideal location for a practice instrument is in a small intimate room without much reverberation and with good lighting for both the keyboard and the music. Practicing in a large vibrant room can be counterproductive for the ear and the eye. It is hard to hear small details for articulation and pedaling with a reverberating acoustic setting like a church or concert hall or even a large living room. Large spaces also tend to take the eye away from the score and allow it to wander off into the surrounding areas.

If the piano cannot move to a more secluded spot then create a schedule for the family allowing the student enough time to practice in an environment that would be conducive for proper study. Piano students, like students of any other subject need quiet and solitude in order to practice well. Practicing is a very private experience for most musicians and definitely not a time for sharing.

The amount of time the student should practice varies with each individual. However, it is not too risky to say that everyone should have shorter doses of practice more often. These doses should take place every day, throughout the day, at consistent times. The student who has been studying for more than six months should strive for three 10-minute periods each day. When practicing for more than ten minutes at a time, the student risks the loss of concentration. Students who are studying for more than 2 years can begin stretching the 10-minute period to 15 and even 20. Students who have been studying for more than 5 years should be able to sit at least two or three times a day for up to 30 to 40 minutes each time.

No matter what the time length, practicing daily is the real key. Skipping a day here and there is quite normal for any student at any age, but cramming at the later part of the week on a regular basis is practically worthless. A little done well is far better than a lot done poorly. Do not forget that instrumental and vocal practice is a physical activity. The body is required to gain certain physical skills, and without a daily routine, the cerebellum cannot record and maintain the patterning and technique.

Daily practice includes practicing on the day of the lesson. Ideally, students should have about 10 to 20 minutes of warming up before their lesson and, at least two regular practice sessions shortly after the lesson. The sooner after a lesson the student practices, the better he/she retains the material covered in the lesson.

Generally, lessons are not practice sessions. For the most part, they are learning, explaining, experiencing, and experimenting sessions. If there is practice, it is a teaching tool to help the student to learn or recall certain practice techniques and/or strategies. Practicing is a very different activity from lesson taking. Everyone should remember that practice is the heart of the music lesson experience. Proper space, time, and duration are absolute requirements for success.