

Help Students Practice

You may say to yourself, “I want to help my child be successful in band but I do not know

anything about music or band. How can I help?” The following is a guide to help parents help their child be successful and also to be accountable for the time and effort spent. One of the most important aspects of playing a musical instrument is the ability to practice correctly. While time and regularity of practice is very important, the quality of the practice is the true determining factor in a musician’s rate of improvement. In fact, 20 minutes of focused and correct practice is more effective than an hour of poor practice.

Practice Environment

In order for our students to get the most out of their practice session, we have a couple of suggestions. The first suggestions will involve the practice environment. Their environment should be:

- **Quiet & Calm** – Much like studying, practicing an instrument is mostly mental. Their practice area should resemble a library as close as possible... with the exception that they are playing their instruments.
- **Good Temperature** – Sometimes students practice in the garage to avoid disturbing other people in the house. This is okay as long as the temperature in the garage is 65 – 80 degrees. Bad temperatures can cause their instrument to not work, can damage the instrument, and can cause them to not enjoy practicing.
- **Chair and Stand** – It is important that their practice area allow them to sit in the exact same position they do during class time. A solid chair is important to help them use the correct posture. Their music should be in a place that they do not have to bend over to see it. Wire music stands are available for purchase through local music company. See Mr. Whitlock for details.
- **Use a Mirror** – It is important that students constantly check their embouchures to make sure they are being formed correctly. Small mirrors (locker mirrors) on their music stands are ideal. Bathroom mirrors work as well.

Practice Sounds

As parents, you may not be able to help your child with band homework like you can with math homework. However, there are a couple of things that you should be hearing on a regular basis.

Students should be practicing items we play in class and lessons in an effort to make their performance in class and lessons acceptable. When your child practices, you should hear:

What you should hear

- A METRONOME BEEPING – Students should be using a metronome 95% of the time when they practice. This helps them keep a steady tempo. As they mature, they will use the metronome less and less. However, they will never outgrow the need for a metronome as even professional musicians use metronomes in their practice sessions.
- Clapping and Counting – The combination of rhythmic counting and clapping to the beat is key to overall success. Counting out rhythms (often similar to sounding out words when learning to read) and then combining rhythms with self-generated tempo will help with the coordination of motor skills and conceptual learning.
- Note-naming – Students should be reading lines from the music and saying the note names out loud. This should also be done with a metronome, and eventually, while fingering or positioning the notes being said.
- Fundamental Sounds – Students should be working on their sound on just the mouthpiece, mouthpiece and barrel or headjoint. This sound might be a little annoying, DMS Bands Home Practice Guide for PARENTS but it is essential in their development of proper embouchure and tone quality. They should work for a steady sound that doesn't waver at all.
- Long Tones – The first sounds students make on their fully assembled instrument should be long and smooth sounds. Their tone quality is one of the most important aspects of learning their instrument during the beginning year.

What you shouldn't hear

- Clowning Around – Sometimes students get curious about their instrument and try new things. Although we want them to look ahead and read new music, they should never make obviously poor sounds on their instrument. Brass players should not be trying to play really high sounds, or really, really fast music.
- All Music – Students should enjoy practicing and should want to play songs as much as possible. However, at this point in their musical lives, they should also understand the importance of fundamentals. So you should not hear just songs when they practice. They should be doing many fundamental exercises along with note-naming and rhythm counting.
- Silence – Students should not just do rhythm counting or note-naming for their practice time. Sometimes students try to say they have been practicing

these items for all of their practice time. This should not be the case. They should play their instrument for at least 2/3 of their practice sessions.

How can you help?

We have a few parents who have played musical instruments, but most parents don't feel comfortable helping band students with practicing. This is understandable. If you are a person who has been in a band program, please feel free to help your child practice. Try to make sure you are helping the students practice the correct way that we teach them at DMS. All parents can help our students practice by doing any or all of the following:

- **Help Their Environment** – Make sure they are practicing in a comfortable place as described. If this means you need to find something for baby brother or sister to do, this might be helpful. Sometimes they can be a distraction. Again, a music stand is a very important part of this. Whatever you do, please don't send them outside or away to practice. Do what you can to not make practicing negative.
- **Consistent Times** – Try to help your child have a regular practice time (preferably when you are home to hear them practice). If they get in the habit of practicing at the same time every day, this will aid in their practice routine.
- **Encourage Performances** – Set up a time every couple of days for your child to perform music for you, or for your family and friends. Encourage them to show off the things they are playing in class or in their private lessons. This will give them performance goals outside of class.
- **Ask Questions** – Have your child explain what his or her plan is for their practice session. Ask them about upcoming playing tests or class requirements.
- **Sit in on a Practice Session** – Listen to your child practice occasionally. Ask them to explain the processes that they go through for each part of their practice session. You can time them on timed not-naming games or mix up their rhythm cards to try to trick them up on rhythm counting. Please, don't just sign the practice log. Please make sure your child is actually doing their work for band. When unsure, have them play for you on the assigned material for that day with this guide in front of you as reference. It will empower both of you to be successful and their efforts will pay off for themselves and out team. Do all that you can to make practicing a positive experience!!! The amount and quality of daily home practice directly impacts their playing level on their instruments.