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Practice Strategies

I do not like the wording "Practice makes perfect" but encourage students with "Practice makes you the best you can be"

As a younger student it is often hard to have the self discipline, motivation or commitment to maintaining a good practice regime and is often relied heavily on guidance and influence of family. With everyone being so busy these days, engaging in long working hours, often where children are looked after by out of school hours care, or family and friends without a piano or keyboard to use, it is often very difficult to schedule a quality practice into the day.

It is here that I would like to make a few suggestions that might help:

- Routine is the key – where possible draw up a weekly schedule and assign all the regular duties that occur each week on the same day to their relevant time slot. It is then easier to see what times are available.
- If afternoons are always busy, then maybe a half an hour practice before school will work. Many people say that this would disturb others in the home. It would be advisable to wake earlier, prepare for the day, then the last 30 minutes before leaving home, use that time for a quality practice.
- If mornings are not suitable, then possibly longer sessions on weekends, whereby numerous 30 minute practices are allocated through the space of the weekend. If this is the case, then it is important to try and find a few times mid week also, or material may be forgotten after the lesson.
- Practice after the lesson is very important as soon as possible. Many students return the following week, having had problems, because the initial practice after lesson time was delayed.
- Practice at school if at all possible. Some schools (or even out of school hours care programs) may provide opportunities for practice before school, during recess and lunch or after school. This is more the case with secondary school, but would be worth discussing with the school personnel if this is an option, providing the student adheres to a strict practice and not "free" time, or the privilege may be forfeited.



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When a student becomes "stuck" with their music:

- Encourage students to go back to the basics and consider each note (and work them out if needed).
- Take the portion of music in "bite size bits" and work on a bar at a time with one hand. This might need to be played numerous times until it appears smooth and comfortable. Then add the other hand numerous times. When both hands are found separate, put them together with that small portion of music. Gradually do this with the subsequent bars and merge them together slowly. You will learn a song much faster and more thoroughly than trying to play it from the beginning to end each time without it making much sense.
- If a student is struggling with one hand only and there are numerous notes in one hand – play the top notes first, then move onto the harmony notes, then combine them.
- Critical elements to "learning a song" other than just "playing a song" include, strict & consistent fingering plus strict counting and timing. Components such as articulation, dynamics and musicality can all be added once the notation is all correct, however can be added at the same time as learning.
- It is better to have a quality 30 minute practice per day, than a 45 minute practice with poor concentration and lack of productivity.