

PianoWorks Music Studio

Parent's Guide to Practicing

Daily practicing is always the most difficult part of piano lessons, as we're sure many of you parents have already discovered! There's always more fun things the student would rather be doing...that's human nature. We teachers can attest from our own piano study that daily practicing can be a struggle. Even non-pianists can attest to the difficulty of establishing discipline every time you promise yourself to start a new daily workout program.

Daily practice is of course vital to learning an instrument. Unlike cramming for a final exam, the skills developed one day are reinforced at the next session. However...daily practice requires discipline which can be very hard to acquire. At PianoWorks, we want to help establish a partnership among the teacher, student, and parent to help the students develop that discipline.

Because daily practicing can become such a negative issue, we try to offer positive solutions. That's why we offer the Practice Challenge. If you're not familiar with the Practice Challenge, then speak with your teacher. Your teacher is working with all students from Kindergarten through 7th grade at each lesson tabulating points for prizes. We are very proud of this program, which is an innovative system of external motivation...essentially bribery for practicing. Younger students are simply unlikely to eagerly run to the piano every day for their practice session. We hope that the prize levels will help students push themselves farther, even if it's only for the chance of getting that Main Event party.

BUT...with all that being said...it is normal and healthy for students to resist practicing from time to time. EVERY student will experience ups and downs. We ask that parents keep in mind that this is to be expected. The teacher is not the "Practice Police." Our goal is to keep lessons as positive as possible and work within what the child was able to accomplish that week. Your teacher will speak with you if they feel the student is not progressing and there is cause for concern.

Here are some other helpful tips for students 10 or younger:

- 1) Please do not expect the student to always be self-motivated to practice. Your child will need your help and guidance to do so.
- 2) Set up a routine for your child. Perhaps right after school and snack, or right after dinner. Try to tie practice time to a family event rather than a time and stick to it.
- 3) Be involved and encouraging! Try to spend some time listening to your child's practice and checking that they are completing assignments. Positive reinforcement works so much better than negative. Praise when the student practices but try to avoid being negative when they don't. Children like to do things that please their parents so being positive and encouraging help them feel better about doing it.
- 4) Please speak to your teacher about appropriate practice daily practice time. A beginner will usually do fine with 10-15 minutes 4-5 times per week.

Here are some other helpful tips for students older than 10:

- 1) These students are usually starting to have very full schedules. Please be realistic about practice time.
- 2) After looking at your family's schedule, then set up a routine. If Mondays at 5 pm are good times to practice, then stick with it. Even older students may need help.
- 3) Some families find that turning off television and minimizing other distractions can help students make the most of their practice time.
- 4) Try to help the students think about their goals. If they really want to do well at the next contest, then daily practice according to the teacher directions will help them reach that goal. We as adults easily make that connection between choice and consequence but students are still developing that skill.

Studying the piano is what we hope is a long-term relationship for your child and the instrument. As in any relationship, there are stages of growth and we as teachers are committed to helping the students work through the difficult periods. We are working at each lesson to develop our students to their highest potential. Effective teamwork among student, family, and teacher increases the students' chances for success!