

# PRACTICE GUIDELINES



As a guitar instructor, one of the questions I get asked most often by parents of students is “How do I get my child to practice?” This has prompted me to create a few guidelines and recommendations concerning a student’s practice ethic. These guidelines are designed to help create an environment that encourages practice, motivate students to spend the necessary time to master techniques, and to outline proven practice methods that will yield significant improvement.

## Motivation

It is my belief that the sheer enjoyment of mastering the instrument should be a reward in itself to serve as motivation for a student to want to spend the necessary time it takes to excel. Success mastering technique makes practice fun! In addition, I’ve known some successful students to set up “mini rewards” for themselves after putting in the necessary time to work on technique or charted pieces. It could be anything: video games, computer time, TV time, sports activities, treats, etc. Many students find that this sort of program helps them more effectively prioritize their time.

## Environment

It is of paramount importance that the student establish a comfortable area in which to practice, whether that be in his/her bedroom or in a living or family room, Temperature should be moderate, humidity constant, and furniture should be comfortable enough to enable the student to spend the necessary time. More importantly, the student should make sure his/her instrument is “available.” Make sure that the student has taken the guitar out of the case or gig bag between lessons and keeps it in a handy place. I recommend keeping it on a guitar stand for both safe keeping and availability. I often tell students, “That guitar ain’t gonna take itself out of the case and practice itself!” Having your student’s instrument available is half the battle. It is also handy to have a computer, MP3 player, or CD player on hand to demo techniques being practiced and to facilitate playing along.

## Frequency

We all know that in today’s hectic times students have multiple priorities and quite often cite these responsibilities as excuses for not practicing: homework, chores, sports, trips, sleepovers, etc. The truth of the matter is that if students truly want to learn to play with any level of ability, they will somehow find the time. This concept goes hand-in-hand with having the instrument available.

But more importantly, a student needs to prioritize effectively enough to spend at least a little time **daily** to devote to the instrument. I’ve seen this scenario too many times: A student will have homework, chores, etc., piling up one day, so he/she will rationalize and say “I’ll spend twice as much time on it tomorrow.” If enough of these days go by, the student will find that he/she needs to practice multiple hours to make up for time lost. This is **not** an effective way to practice. A small amount of time, even as little as 10 minutes, dedicated every day will go much further towards improvement and mastery of technique than procrastinating all week and trying to play “catch up” by practicing “later” for hours at a time.

## Method

It is just as important to know **how** to practice as well as how often and how long to practice. I recommend that a student approach practice for guitar just as they would for any athletic event, including warm up time, assignment, and cool down. I would recommend the following methods for effective practice:

- ✚ **Tune Up!** (Very important to play in tune to achieve pleasing tonal results) Learn to use your tuner, appropriately calibrated at 440 Hz.
- ✚ **Warm Up!** Play something you know well to establish a positive attitude so that you are ready to take on the next assignment
- ✚ **Work Up!** Play the assignment and don’t be discouraged by mistakes. Some techniques take time. When difficulties occur, take a time out, but make sure to come back to it for your allotted time.
- ✚ **Wind Up!** Finish by practicing something that you play well to end on a positive note so that you will want to come back and practice again.

In closing, nothing can replace the sheer desire of a student to improve his/her level of ability on the instrument. But if that desire is channeled properly using a consistent practice ethic that incorporates some of the methods I’ve lined out above, I truly believe there is no limit on how high a talent level the student can achieve.