

Building a Daily Routine: A Starter Guide

Your daily practice should consist of several different layers of study. It is important not just to focus on things you need to prepare for school or for an audition, but to also devote practice time to the basic building blocks of good playing and good musicianship. The better you get, the better you sound, and the better you sound the more fun you have!

For each aspect of your routine, write down the book and exercise number for the study you are currently using. Keep this sheet handy as a reference for what you are working on.

1. Warm-ups (10-15 minutes)

No day should start without a solid warm-up. Like stretching before physical activity, properly warming up your face and instrument prevents injury, helps strengthen tone, and provides a good foundation for your daily playing.

Breathing exercises

LongTones

Lip Slurs

Flexibilities

Remember to take things slow at first, focusing on good breath control and tone production. Keep things long and smooth. Start in a comfortable mid-range and then work lower and higher as your muscles adjust. Even if you don't have time to hit the rest of your routines on a particular day, try to at least play through your warm-up series.

2. Fundamentals (20-30 minutes)

There are so many facets to making music well that it is important to incorporate daily exercises touching upon a variety of styles to provide yourself with the tools to perform at a higher level. Many of these can be combined in one or two exercises, but make sure you have at least one for each.

Scales and scale patterns (including arpeggios)

Ear training (tunes, singing, drone CD)

Articulation

Dynamics

Range building

Rhythmic studies

Sight-reading

Prepare EVERYTHING you're learning with these four concepts in mind:

Accuracy: Are you playing the correct notes in the correct key signature? Is each note singing out clearly without fuzziness or cracking? Are you in tune?

Tempo: Can you maintain accuracy across the exercise at one steady tempo? Are you increasing tempo in small increments at a pace with your accuracy?

Style: Does your articulation and phrasing match what's on the page? Is it consistent? Is it genre-appropriate (i.e. swung vs straight, baroque vs romantic, etc)?

Musicality: The best musicians make even the most dull etude or exercise sing. Can you express yourself, and can you be flexible in what you are expressing?