

Practicing faithfully is vital to being a responsible member of the Orchestra. See “Practice Reports/Sample” in the “Grading Policies” section of this handbook. The following section explains how you should practice.

Goals

Strive for the following when you practice:

- Rich sound
- Good dynamics
- Clean sound
- Good articulation
- Good intonation
- Controlled tempo
- Musicality
- Good reading skills

Pointers

Practicing is part of showing that you are a dedicated Orchestra member. Here are some tips to help:

- **Always warm up first.** Play a few scales slowly. Then play an etude or some arpeggios. Then concentrate your time on the particular troublesome passages or measure you’re trying to master.
- **Don’t try to eat the whole cow.** That is, take each problem one at a time. It is too discouraging to try to learn the entire piece in one practice session.
- **Use your time wisely.** Are you improving or just practicing, making the same mistakes over and over again? What’s your ratio of times played correctly to times played with mistakes? Perfect practice makes perfect!
- **Use a metronome.** Build up gradually, if necessary, to the correct tempo. This really does work!

- **Tape yourself.** If you do this consistently and listen to the results objectively, you'll become your own teacher and improve quickly.
- **Listen to several recordings of each entire piece.** This is really important for the learning process and is also lots of fun.
- **Keep your instrument in good repair.** Replace dead strings, and re-hair your bow at least once a year. Wipe off excess rosin. Have a technician check your sound post placement once in a while. Your instrument will sound its very best when it's well cared for.

Exercises

Exercises are designed to improve your technique. The more technique you have, the more advanced music you can play! Technique is made up of many little physical *and* mental skills that help us play our instrument.

“Mental?” What does that mean? It means you have to actually *think* about what you're doing while you practice and decide whether it's producing the right result in your playing. If you do your exercises each week **correctly** and with a specific goal in mind, over time you'll build up a fabulous technique.

Practice correctly

How do you know you're doing it correctly? You can check the way your hands and body look in a mirror while you play, or you can try to match the same sound or feel you got when you did it correctly in your lesson.

Practice frequently

Practice simple exercises (the ones that don't take much time to do) about five times a day. Why so many times a day? Well, it's so that they become a habit in your playing, so that you can think about more sophisticated and difficult things while you play your pieces.

Challenge yourself

Play exercises that challenge your technique and take a while to learn at a very slow tempo first and then gradually speed up as you feel more comfortable. Sometimes exercises aren't very much fun at all, but if you do them correctly, they can make your pieces more fun to play because you'll be playing them better than you did before.

Types of exercises

These exercises may include

- Practicing holding your bow or your instrument a certain way
- Practicing standing or sitting in a certain way
- Practicing very simple rhythm exercises for good tone and bow control
- Keeping an eye on a part of your body (sometimes with the help of a mirror) to make sure it does what it's supposed to do.
- Practicing scales or special studies called *etudes* that focus on a particular part of playing such as string crossing, bow distribution, intonation, bow strokes, flexible left-hand fingers, shifting, vibrato, and special tricks.
- Reading exercises to help you identify note names, intervals, rhythms, and dynamics on the printed page.

Repertoire

Repertoire is whatever pieces you are currently working on in your lessons or solo experiences. You can find the techniques you are working on in your pieces.

Sometimes it is good to keep an eye out for these as you play your pieces. Other times, you can focus on making the piece interesting for your audience. To do this, think a lot about the phrasing, dynamics, and mood of the pieces. It is a good idea to do this away from your instrument, listening to the music while looking at the music on the page or singing it in your head. After

that, put the ideas you get into your pieces the next time you practice it.

When we practice pieces, we play them in little chunks so we can think about the technique or the musicality of just one section at a time. However, it is also good to put it all together and play the piece straight through as if you are practicing for a performance.

Review

Review is an important part of your practice. You can play through pieces you already know, or work on exercises you did in your lesson the last week. If you get really bored with exercises one day (not every day), it's good to play through your favorite review songs. Remember that when you review, you have to keep trying to **play your very best**.

Listening

When you are listening to a new piece, listen without doing anything else like reading a book, watching TV, surfing the net, or doing homework. Listen carefully.

For worksheet

If it is one of the pieces for which you are supposed to listen to and answer questions on a worksheet, listen a couple of times: once before you've looked at the worksheet and once after you've read the worksheet through. Then answer whatever questions on your worksheet that you can answer. For a few of the questions, you may have to listen to the piece again.

After you finish the worksheet, continue listening to the piece for enjoyment. You might find that it is something you will want to play one day.

To learn

If you're listening to a piece that you are getting ready to learn, listen to it as many ways as possible. This means that you should:

- listen to it when doing nothing else

- listen to it when you have your instrument out or while you're doing homework
- figure it out on your instrument; just be listening to it carefully and matching the pitches.

Writing down questions

Write down any questions, insights, problems, or comments you might have while you practice. Some examples of these might be

- “I’ve been practicing this one exercise again and again to improve my tone, but nothing seems to be getting better. . . What do I do?”
- “This exercise/piece is boring me to DEATH. Plus, it’s easy. Why am I doing this?”
- “I can’t seem to get my shoulder (pinky, thumb, etc.) to do what it’s supposed to do, no matter how much I watch it in the mirror. How do I fix it?”
- “The other day I was practicing and found that it really helped my tone if my right hand stayed relaxed on the bow.”
- “This is too much (or too little) work for me to do. Can you change what you assign me in lessons?”

Performing

When you perform with the Orchestra, you will need to wear a uniform and follow certain guidelines that differ in some ways from what we do during rehearsals.

Attire

You must comply with uniform guidelines and instructions before a performance to be allowed to perform. Your director has the final say as to whether your performance dress is appropriate. Please inform your director **AT LEAST** one week prior to an event if you have an extreme hardship in meeting the uniform requirement.

Our Orchestra uniforms will be the following:

Casual Uniform

Your casual uniform will be the MISD Orchestra shirt and nice jeans (no torn jeans) with tennis shoes. The cost of the shirt is included in your \$25 MISD Orchestra fee. Parents may purchase additional shirts for \$10. **Flip-flops are never appropriate for a performance!**

Formal Concert Uniform

For our December and May concerts, you'll wear a solid white dress shirt or blouse, solid black dress pants or skirt, and solid black shoes (black socks for young men).

Pointers

Follow these pointers to help you in performing:

- **Prior practicing prevents poor performance.** This motto is used constantly in the corporate world. Nothing beats proper preparation.
- **No performance will ever be perfect.** This is why we practice and rehearse with much repetition.
- **Posture improves your playing.**
 - Keep your back straight.
 - Don't touch the back of your chair.
 - Place your feet flat on the floor and uncross your legs.
 - Sit up straight to keep your back from hurting.
 - When standing, **balance yourself on both** legs; be able to shift your weight from foot to foot and move to the music.
- **Remember to breathe.**
- **It's all right to miss a note.** Just remember: once that note goes by, it's gone forever. Keep concentrating on what's ahead. A fast recovery is the name of the game.

Most of all, enjoy making music! Not everyone has a talent like yours, and many wish that they did. Work hard, but don't forget that the goal is not "getting in or getting a good chair," but rather performing and enjoying some really great music!