

Practising

- Develop your ear. Every practice session should result in an improvement in your listening and aural imagination.
- Be completely clear in your mind about what you intend to achieve before you go into the practice room — timetabled minutes with an instrument are too precious to waste in deciding what to practise!
- Make sure your objective for each practice session is a realistic one and that you can complete what you set out to do in the time available. (Two bars, left hand alone, with the correct fingering and brought up to a moderate tempo may well be enough).
- Congratulate yourself for having achieved what you set out to do!
- Reinforce each new passage learned by repeating the practice on it for at least three days running.
- Use prime time for solving the most difficult problems. (Prime time is the first ten minutes of the first practice of the day, and the most difficult work is usually the learning of new notes).
- It isn't necessary to start at the beginning of a new piece. Look at the most difficult bits first and make them into daily studies.
- Use a practice notebook to list the passages you find most troublesome and to make a note of what you intend to work on in the next session.
- Do as much mental preparation as you can away from the instrument. Again — timetabled minutes are precious. Study the score, memorise notes, analyse harmonies, conduct and sing, imagine the sound, solve rhythmic co-ordination problems. This not only helps you to learn pieces faster, but avoids overuse injuries as well.
- Warm up before you practice. No professional footballer would run onto the field without having done thorough warm ups and stretches. Your finger and arm muscles are at least as vulnerable as those in the legs! Do cool downs too, to get rid of lactic acid build up after practising.
- Never play through pain. Tell your teacher if you experience discomfort whilst practising.