



10 Top Practicing Tips

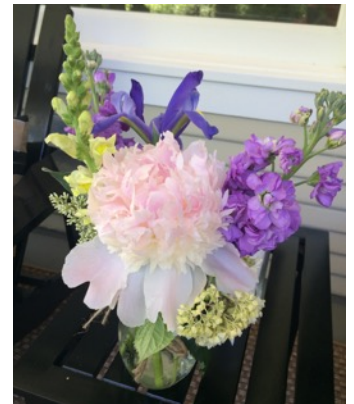
1. **Create a Practice Nest.** Here are suggestions for one that is welcoming:

- **Central Location:** When choosing a location for your piano, select a space that is lived-in, welcoming, and well-lit. Keep it close to “the action” but not in the action. It will be easy to gravitate to the piano more often if it is in a central place in your home.
- **Make the space warm and welcoming.** Encourage spending hours every week in this space. Is it a happy place to be for this amount of time? Small adjustments to lighting and heating can make a world of difference. Seek out places with natural light and make it a cheerful & welcoming space to encourage visiting the piano often for pure enjoyment.
- **Ensure all required materials are at hand.** Put together a small basket or bin of everything needed for home practice. Pens, pencils, highlighters, and post-it notes will give a sense of organization that will then spill over into practice habits. Adequate lighting to see the music, and a comfortable bench at the correct height to practice comfortably and correctly are necessities.
- For Children, **make the “Practice Nest” a communal space.** Children of any age appreciate company while they practice. Having a chair, couch, beanbag chair or pillows nearby where family members will be inclined to sit, listen and enjoy the music immediately sets the tone for happy time on the piano. Encourage siblings to stop by and listen



quietly, and allow yourself even just 10 minutes to sit and listen with undivided attention each time your children practice.

- **Set the stage for organization.** Ensure your practice space is uncluttered and organized. Clear out old sheet music and books from the piano bench, use a magazine organizer to hold current and favorite materials, and minimize knickknacks and other distractions from the top of the piano. If you can, avoid having the piano room do “double-duty” for laundry, toys and other clutter. Always having needed books readily available saves time - no wasting time searching for lost or crumpled music. Always place the piano books in their appropriate space right after each piano lesson so they are ready and waiting.
- **Add small surprises** to the practice nest (fresh flowers, a new sticker pad, a special pen, and, additionally, for children, a hand-written note of encouragement, a small treat, etc.) that will brighten up the space and help to the pianist feel special. Preserving the “specialness” of the practice space encourages positive feelings towards home music time.



2. Schedule practice sessions into the week. Organization is key here, otherwise there will be a scant improvement at the next lesson which will be frustrating for all. It’s better to practice little and often than cram a three-hour session the night before your lesson. My biggest recommendation is to **piggyback practice sessions** either before or after another daily activity.



3. **Set goals.** Decide what you want to achieve and set a time frame. It may be to learn a particular piece, to set a piece to memory, or sit Grade 2 piano. Goals are tangible, bestowing a necessary sense of achievement.

SET GOALS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



4. **Structure practice time.** Structuring practicing allows you to gauge improvement, as well as giving practice sessions a sense of purpose and direction.



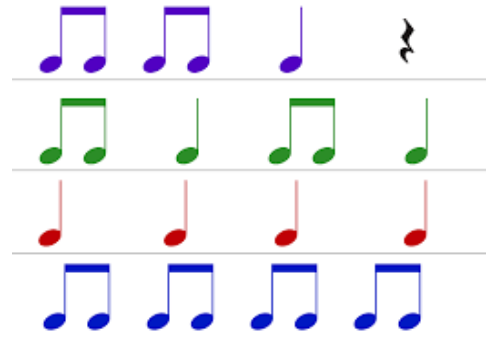
5. **Technical work.** Starting in the Level 1 of a method book, to play well, some technical work must be done; whether this be scales, arpeggios, *A Dozen a Day*, or Hanon exercises. Honing your technique will really improve your playing, providing it is worked at correctly. Perform technical work at every practice session.

6. **Small steps first.** Try to work in very small sections, breaking piano pieces up thoroughly. Divide into sections, play hands separately, and perhaps use different rhythms, accents and articulation for practice purposes. Work diligently and slowly. **Slow practice** is essential for good playing. Playing at speed becomes relatively easy once a piano piece has been mastered and fully assimilated slowly. Work at difficult passages separately, always mark them up in the score, and isolate left hand passagework.

7. **Fingering.** Write fingering on the score before you start and learn it properly so that it becomes a habit. Good habits such as suitable fingering will aid smooth playing and this is especially important during tricky, complicated passages.



8. **Get rhythmical.** If you don't enjoy using a metronome, ensure a suitable method for keeping time and divide beats into small denominations. This will aid rhythmical playing. Learning to 'feel' the pulse is vital and takes time so patience is key. Playing piano duets is a useful way to learn to keep the pulse because hesitation isn't an option when working with others. As with most elements, start slowly building up speed.



9. **Learn succinctly.** Resist the temptation to play through pieces without learning them properly first. Sight-reading is always a good component in a practice session, but it's best not to read works you plan to perform. Practice tends to make permanent, which goes for incorrect fingerings, rhythms and notes too. Learn precisely from the beginning.

10. **Use your ears and focus.** This might seem strange, but it is easy to practice digitally without listening properly. Try to listen constructively to everything your play. Also focus and concentration are vital when practicing, avoid going into the 'play through' mode!

