

BRANDON MIDDLE SCHOOL ORCHESTRA

Making a Difference - The Positive Side of Preparation

There are many levels of preparation that evolve from the time a new piece of music is passed out until it is performed. For progress to occur, each rehearsal should yield a higher level of refinement until every member of the group reaches a comfort level that enables them to perform with confidence. Making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process. Conscientious preparation will cause mistakes to diminish over time. Do not confuse making mistakes with poor preparation! There is a big difference between making mistakes while playing a part that has been given a reasonable amount of preparation, and merely stumbling (or not playing at all) through that same part on everybody else's rehearsal time. Frequently, additional technical exercises (scales, rudiments, etc.) will be needed to assist the musician in attaining a desired level of proficiency. As stated before, each rehearsal should yield a higher level of musical refinement. What may have been considered a great start on a piece of music will undoubtedly be considered less than adequate several rehearsals later. Achieving the common goal of making good music is a very special joy to be shared by students, director and audience. This goal is unattainable if inadequate preparation becomes commonplace. This goal, along with the joy and satisfaction associated with it, are held in high regard at Kempsville Middle School. A rewarding, successful experience as a member of the Kempsville Middle School Band is entirely within your grasp. Go ahead, "make a difference." Now let's learn how to practice.

Practice Guidelines: A Brandon Middle School Orchestra member has a personal duty to practice for his/herself, as well as for their fellow orchestra members. Remember, an orchestra is only as good as its weakest player. In order for practice to improve your playing, it must be directed toward proper goals and efficiently carried out. Before you practice, you should have a picture "in your ear" of how your instrument should sound. Listen to live and recorded music so you will know where and how you should direct your practice. Be aware of your immediate goals. What is your greatest weakness right now? It might be sound, strength, facility, note reading, sight-reading, theory or counting. What technical problems do you most need to overcome? It might be scales, arpeggios or rudiments. With this in mind, you can begin to practice more effectively. Let's begin.

How much should I practice?

6th grade 15-20 minutes, three to four times a week, minimum.

7th grade 20-30 minutes, three to four times a week, minimum.

8th grade 30-40 minutes, four times a week, minimum.

This is actual playing time, not including set-up and break-down/cleaning of your instrument. The more you practice, the better your progress will be. Remember a student cannot develop the proper hand and playing techniques if he/she tries to do all of his/her practicing in one or two longer sessions each week. You must spread out the times you practice in order for it to be effective.

When should I practice?

Try to practice at the same time, or times, each practice session. I recommend practicing in the morning when you are fresh, as opposed to late afternoon when you get home from school and you have other homework to do.

What should I practice?

Be sure to play your entire lesson at each practice session. Make sure you spend adequate time on each piece you are studying. You need consistent effort in each piece or subject you're working on, in order to make the best possible progress. In addition to your technique study and band music, you should also practice a piece of music you really enjoy playing. Concentrate on making the absolute best sound possible.

What qualities do I need for good practice?

•Concentration

Use your complete mind. Don't think about other things while you're practicing. Concentrate on the music to be accomplished and improved.

•Care

Make sure you are playing correct notes, rhythms and dynamics. Check and double check to make sure mistakes

are not creeping in. Check other factors, such as hand position, evenness, sound and that the proper counting is written in.

- **Patience**

And give it to me right now!! (Smile) Yes, patience is an important factor. Many students learn pieces badly because they are impatient. Don't play anything faster than you can play it well. Don't try to learn too large a section at one time. Count out loud and finger the notes, practice one measure at a time if that's what it takes to master your part. Keep trying until it sounds better.

How should you practice? Here are a few suggestions:

- **How to warm up**

When you begin each practice session try and be physically relaxed. Practice a scale, a piece of music or a technique which is familiar to you and which you can play comfortably. Then begin the more difficult work of practicing new music or a new technique. Try to stay relaxed at all times.

- **Slow careful practice**

Slow practice is the most important aid for learning to play an instrument. Most students practice an exercise or a piece much faster than they can play it accurately and cleanly. Every time you practice too fast and make mistakes, you are learning those mistakes! Always practice at a tempo (speed) that you can play correctly!

- **Using a metronome**

If you have one of these devices it will assist you in setting a tempo (speed) at which you can play a measure, phrase (or larger section) easily, and without mistakes. Practice your lesson a few times at a slow, steady, tempo. Play the music once more at the same slow tempo, until you feel comfortable with almost no mistakes. Move the metronome up one or two notches. Now play it again at this faster tempo. Practice at the faster tempo until you again feel comfortable with your performance. Keep repeating this until you reach the desired tempo. If you begin to make mistakes, move the metronome back, or practice at a slower speed.

If you do not have a metronome, follow the same process above. You will just have to be more aware of your pacing.

- **Repetition**

Divide the music into short phrases (small parts) usually from one measure at a time, to a line of music. Practice each phrase many times in a row. You will learn more quickly this way than if you work on long sections or a full page at a time. Be sure to work on connecting the smaller pieces you practiced into longer, understandable phrases. Whenever you have a technical exercises (scales, arpeggios, rudiments) repeat it many times.

Beginning to learn a new piece of music

When you begin to learn a new piece of music, ask yourself the following:

- **What is the character of the piece? Is it relaxed, excited, song-like, dance-like, fast, slow, smooth or separated? Does the piece increase or decrease in excitement.**

- **What is the most difficult measure(s) of the piece? Start practicing these first. Then and only then should you begin to combine measures into phrases and phrases into an entire piece of music.**

- **What is the tempo (speed)? You will need to keep this in mind in order to determine proper fingerings, stickings, and breaths. Write in the counting, stickings, fingerings or new note names so you don't have to figure them out again from one practice session to the next.**

- **How fast should you be able to play the exercise? Work on it until you have reached your personal best.**

Finally, if you can:

- **Find a good private lesson teacher. A private teacher can help you with your individual problems much quicker and easier than the band director can in large band classes. Many of our up-and-coming players study privately. Contact Mrs. Garcia for private teacher references.**

- **Keep your instrument in good shape at all times. Your instrument should be treated as the expensive piece of equipment that it is.**

Practice Records

Keep track of your practice time and turn in your practice record for your homework grade. Get credit for all of your hard work!! Practice will help you become a better player and orchestra member.