

## Mr. Richardson's Guide to: Practicing

1. **Practice EVERY DAY!**

Practicing is a lot like bathing – if you don't do it every day, you start to stink.

2. **Practice WITH PURPOSE!**

Aimlessly playing through your music won't help you any. Make it a point to have a very specific goal each time you pick up your instrument.

3. **Practice what YOU DON'T KNOW!**

Don't focus all of your practice time on the stuff you can already play. Focus on a specific section with which you are having difficulties. Toward the end of your practice session, you can go over the stuff you know to keep it fresh.

4. **You are NEVER TOO GOOD TO PRACTICE!**

Even Wynton Marsalis, Kenny G, Miles Davis, Itzhak Pearlman, and any other professional musicians who have perfected their instrument practice every day. There is always something you can do to get better at what you do. Don't ever assume that since you can play all of your music, you can quit practicing.

5. **Don't wait until rehearsal to learn your music!**

There is a difference between practice and rehearsal. Practice happens at home – the time to learn your notes. Rehearsal is when we all put it together to make music. We don't have time in rehearsal for you to learn what you should have done at home.

6. **But Mr. Richardson, I don't know what I should do when I practice...**

Okay, here are my suggestions:

- a. Get a metronome – either a stand-alone, metronome-tuner combo, or a metronome app on your phone or online at [www.metronomeonline.com](http://www.metronomeonline.com)
- b. Divide and conquer – split your music up into sections (rehearsal mark to the next is a good start) – practice one section at a time – then start to group sections together – eventually working up to being able to play the entire song
- c. Start at a tempo that you can play without having to stop – start slow at first – work your way up to performance tempo; When you can play it perfectly 3 times in a row, bump the tempo up 3-5 clicks.
- d. If you mess up – stop and go back. It doesn't do you any good to keep practicing mistakes. Do not accept mediocrity from yourself – you wouldn't accept that from a professional. Rhythm first, notes second, articulations and dynamics third. Imagine how you want it to sound – if you can “hear” how it goes in your head, you will have a difficult time recreating what it should sound like on your instrument. Singing helps a lot. Play your parts on a piano/keyboard – just remember to transpose your parts.
- e. Find a recording, if you can, of the piece on which you are working. Most of the music we play in band can be found on [www.jwpepper.com](http://www.jwpepper.com) or [listeninglab.stantons.com](http://listeninglab.stantons.com) – find it, listen to it, practice with it. Practice with a friend if possible (one in the same section or part preferably).
- f. When all else fails, ask questions – If you just can't get it, ask for help. If you want to schedule a private lesson to get extra help – just ask.
- g. Don't just practice your music. Practice scales, long tones, flexibility, articulations, range, dynamics, etc. Make music no matter what you are practicing.