Effective Practicing!

By Carli Castillon

So, you've just had your lesson and were told "Go Practice!" Now what??

1. Reflect on your lesson. Did you record your lesson? Did you take notes during the lesson to notate what to work on? If so:
    a. You're golden and you have an idea of what lesson-specific material to add into your practicing rotation! If not:
    b. Stop! Don't go any further with your day until you write down what you did in the lesson and what was assigned for next week. You think you'll remember, but then next thing you know it's the night before your lesson and you're woefully unprepared.
2. Plan out your weekly practice! As college students, we are all incredibly busy with changing schedules. There is not one correct way to practice- if your routine is different from your peers' that's okay! (so long as you stick to what works for you). Does your practice look like this:
    a. I have my practice session scheduled out to the exact minute of each day. I know that every week after this certain class I am in the practice room. Or:
    b. I have a constantly changing schedule and therefore have to change around my daily practice times. But that's okay because I'm a night owl (or early bird) and will go practice at odd hours of the day even if it changes weekly.
3. Well you've planned, so now nothing left to do than get out the horn and go shred in the practice room!

But Carli, what should I practice? There's too much to do!

Great question! Let's evaluate the many different options:

1. Multiple sessions per day:
    a. Start with a warmup! Your first session can just be a nice, healthy warmup. Long tones, lip slurs, the works. We'll chat more later on that.

b. Second session and beyond can be focused on any lyrical/technical etudes assigned in lessons, clef studies, excerpts, techniques, solo repertoire- the list is endless! Whether you practice 2 hrs. a day in one sitting or have 3-5 25 min sessions, as long as you knock out your checklist there is no correct way to do it.

2. Everyday fundamentals, every other day repertoire practice.
    a. If you have a super busy week, fear not! There are ways to still maintain your chops without dying in a practice room and still getting to study for that exam and write those 3 papers.
        i. Still touch the horn each day (no, this does not include ensemble playing). Ugh I know, so annoying. It's okay even if you just do a warmup or just play through your scales. Do *something* on your horn that is just for yourself, not for your ensemble directors.
        ii. On the 2 days that all you have time for is a warmup session and a bit of fundamentals, make sure you've planned out how to attack the rest of your playing assignments during the remaining days of the week where you can squeeze out an actual practice session. It isn't always about quantity of practice, it's about quality.

Preparing for an audition? A jury? A performance? A concert? A competition? Plan it out! Checklists are your friend. Write out all requirements (musical and supplemental materials) and the **deadline**. Don't let anything slip through the cracks, plan it all out in advance.

- Create a practice spreadsheet! Pop open google sheets and create a chart of the rep you need. Here is an example:

Fake Audition- 1/20/24							
	Rep	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
	Bolero	X		X		X	X
	Hungarian		X	X	X		X
	Tuba Mirum	X		X		X	X
	Creation		X	X	X		X
	Solo	X	X	X		X	X

In this random example of a fake audition, the chart includes the date of the audition, the required rep, and the days of the week. The idea is with a blank chart you check off each thing you practice each day. This helps keep track of how often you have practiced something, and encourages the idea that you *don't* have to get to every single thing every single session. In fact it

will make your life easier if you split it up and do woodshedding work on several excerpts rather than cram them all into one session! This can be applicable to solo preparation as well- you don't have to play the entire solo down each time you're in the practice room. Split it up into attainable chunks.

What should a warmup look like? How can I balance my warmup and fundamentals? Split them up! There are lots of schools of thought on what is a warmup and what are fundamentals, here's just my philosophy on it:

1. Warmup first- this is the act of physically warming up your horn, chops, and body for playing for the day.
    a. Breathing
    b. Glisses/smears
    c. Long tones! Remingtons are your friends. Throw on a met, throw on a drone, do them with friends. Anything to spice it up
    d. Lip slurs! The Edwards book is a great place to start if you like to have things written out, or just create your own slurs. Start slow and easy with half note slurs then work your way up
2. Fundamentals- these can change day to day based on what *you* need to work on at the moment. Sometime warmups and fundamentals can overlap. One day lip slurs may be a warmup for you and another day you need to have an extensive dive into lip slurs fundamentals and need to work on it longer than 5 min. Here are some general thoughts on what fundamentals can include:
    a. Lip Slurs
    b. SCALES
    c. Articulation
    d. Lip trills
    e. Sight reading
    f. Clef Studies
    g. Lyrical/technical etudes
    h. Phrasing studies
    i. Range

Fantastic, now you've warmed up and done whatever fundamental work you need to do. Good job! Now onto the fun stuff: solo repertoire, excerpts, chamber music, practice concert music, etc

Don't forget to warm down when you're finished for the day!

Practice Goals

- Set yourself different levels of practicing goals!
    - Big picture: What is one thing you want to accomplish over the course of the semester?
    - Medium picture: What is one thing you want to accomplish over the month?
    - Small picture: What is one thing you want to accomplish over the week?
    - Micro goal: What is one thing you want to accomplish during this one specific practice session?

Never start practicing without a goal in mind (no matter how small the goal may be) or you will feel unfulfilled. Physically write down your goals. Keep them in your music folder or case so you seen them each time you pull out your stud to practice!

Remember that practicing should be fun, not a chore! If you are feeling burnt out, talk to someone! Whenever I'm down in the dumps about trombone, I think back to the reason why I started, my long-term goals in this profession, and what makes me so passionate about music. If things are going poorly, it's okay to take a step away from the horn. Practice mindful practice! Meditate, reflect, journal. Your practice session can only be as successful as you allow it. Be kind to yourself and keep a positive attitude.

Practice with friends! Play for each other. Play duets. Play trios. Play quartets. Take a practice/chop break by visiting your friend in a practice room. Recharge your mind and then finish your session.

- **My practice goal for the semester:**

- **My practice goal for the month:**

- **My practice goal for the week:**

- **My practice goal for today:**

Notes: