



Melanie Keller's Flute Studio

Home Assignments & Smart Practicing--- What does this look like?

Helpful tips for "At Home" Practice!

Parents often ask, "How can we help at home?" I have some helpful hints! I know that taking music lessons is one of the many activities your child or you may be involved in every week. But, I also know that there is truth to "What you put into something is what you get out of it." In my flute studio, I help my students with step-by-step homework guidelines that help students succeed. I want them coming back every week, feeling encouraged, ready for that next step. If home practice becomes "tough," let me know sooner rather than later. Chances are, this student has forgotten how to break down the steps into small enough "bites" --- trying too much all at once.

I can help!—this is the part about teaching that I really care about! If a child is consistently doing little bits every day, I know from experience that everyone progresses and feels encouraged by the process. See the tips below for helpful tips on what smart practicing looks and sounds like!

Tip #1: Small steps each day climb the mountain.

Consistent Practice, 5 days per week is much, much better than cramming it all into 1, 2 or 3 sessions. spurts and bursts create frustration and a feeling that a skill is not dependable. We know that the turtles "win the race" in the game of music lessons. Music lessons provide good time-management life skills in general. My job is to make these small, weekly steps attainable, building self-esteem in my young flutists!

Tip #2: SMART PRACTICE SOUNDS LIKE...

It sounds slow. Students who practice slowly, progress more quickly! Playing a musical instrument is a fine motor skill, and it also involves reading a new language. Racing through the routine creates sloppy habits that are harder to undo the longer they persist.

It sounds like the ADD-ON Game—little pearls on a necklace, being pieced together. In the beginning stages of learning a new song, students should work bar by bar. I use something called the ADD-ON Game, which is a post-it placed on the music, which the student moves forward note-by-note, rhythm by rhythm, until they can string it together. This process is highly effective, removing all fear from working on new songs or new skills. Students of all ages find the ADD-ON Game comforting and success-building! Ask me more about it!

Tip #3: SMART PRACTICE LOOKS LIKE...

It looks like a routine – not a daily marathon, just a focused, effective routine. From my years of experience teaching especially music, we can see that that the students who practice at the same time each day, for a regular amount of age-appropriate minutes get consistently better week to week. Regularity of practice is what matters, not length of practice. Don't ask a young child to sit for a long period of time – this will backfire. Set age –appropriate goals, and talk to me about the best plan for your child. Follow the action steps on the weekly assignment sheets from me.

It looks like relaxed, tension-free posture. Set your ergonomics correctly from the beginning. Tension-free playing means easier access to flowing, musical technique.

It looks like Purposeful Practice: Read Teacher Tips, follow the advice, and record Practice Minutes daily, on the weekly assignment sheets – Treat it like a journal. 5 days per week of consistent practice is my standard. Help your child stay accountable to their assignment by writing in their daily practice minutes, and totaling their weekly progress. They take pride in this and I cheer them on to do their personal best each time.

It looks like starting from the challenge spots in your songs, not the beginning each time. Don't start at the beginning each time – start at the challenge spots I have marked for you, and do these challenge spots many times, until the problems are gone. Then start at the beginning, and try to piece it all together. Starting in the middle sections is a good idea too.

Tip #4: Smart Practice Speaks too!

Be able tell your teacher & parents what you improved upon, week to week. I ask my students at each lesson, “What do you feel you did well at home this week?” If the student is reading the teacher tips each week, and practicing purposefully, students of all ages should be able to tell you what improved. Even the smallest improvement counts. Let's cheer them on together.

Smart musicians count out loud. You should hear your young flutist counting their rhythm numbers out loud, especially when first learning a new song. This can be challenging at the beginning, but I have games and activities to make this skill easier.

Here is what Smart Practicing does NOT look like:

- Playing over and over from beginning to end, with the same mistakes over and over again. This is just making your mistakes more ingrained – it takes longer to correct these mistakes, and progress slows down
- Practicing without referring to the tips your teacher sent you home with.
- Leaving more than 1 day between your lesson and the first day you practice your new home assignment.
- Playing your song 1 time per day, and thinking that is enough. This is a muscle memory activity. Just like athletes do repeated exercises, musicians do too. Make your songs second nature, and you will grow in to a “natural” musician.



