

Practice & Music Learning Tips

How to Practice

The famous football coach Vince Lombardi once said, “Practice doesn’t make perfect, PERFECT PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT”. What this means for us as singers is that if you practice incorrectly, you will sing incorrectly. If you practice well, then your performances will feel like second nature. When you dazzle your audience it will be no surprise to you, because it will be exactly how you performed it countless times.

Singing relies so much on muscles and muscle control that poor practicing can adversely affect your muscle memory, and build in bad habits that can be extremely difficult to break. The following tips will help keep you on track, and make practicing more engaging, and hopefully a little more fun:

1. **Never practice just for practice’s sake:** practicing just to mark off that you completed it for the day is usually counterproductive. Schedule a time each day to practice, and commit to making it worthwhile and engaging. Ten minutes of engaged practicing is better than thirty minutes of half-hearted almost-singing.
2. **Warm up correctly:** the warm-ups we do in lessons are designed to charge up the right muscles and get your body ready to sing. Take a minute or two to stretch, and then sing through an exercise or two so that your body is energized.
3. **Do not practice too little or too much:** if you are getting extremely tired, stop practicing. The wrong muscles will start to get involved otherwise and lead to bad habits. On the flip side, if you are not stretching your endurance a little each time you practice your muscles will not get stronger.
4. **Set goals based on your lessons:** after you leave each lesson you should jot down two or three things you wish to work on for the week. Every time you practice, write down a couple of goals you wish to address, then at the end of your session write down how you did.
5. **Use your recordings:** each of our lessons will be recorded on to a mini-DVD. Refer to those DVDs in your practice – particularly comparing how adjustments affected your sound. Effective use of recordings can be similar to having several free lessons a week!

After a few months it is a great idea to look back at your practice logs to monitor your progress. Sometimes in the moment it seems you haven’t really come that far (mainly because there are always things to work on), but by looking back at your progress you will be amazed how many issues you used to have are now solved.

How to Learn Music

Music learning is a fun yet demanding process. Just sitting down and singing through a piece while you are still learning it can install bad habits into your body which you will have to fight later on. If you learn it correctly from the beginning, you will save yourself a lot of hassle and heart-ache in the future.

Here are the steps to learning a song:

1. **Learn the words by themselves:** speak through the words as if they were a poem. Then speak them with good breathing, support, & posture (it sounds something like singing without pitch, or moaning). Many people will actually memorize the words by themselves first. This is a good suggestion as it will save you time in the future.
2. **Learn the words in rhythm:** now speak the words with good technique (speak singing) in rhythm. Do this several times until the rhythm is almost second nature.
3. **Add the music:** first learn the melody without words by either playing it on the piano or sight singing using solfeggio or “la”. Once the melody is certain, carry over that good spoken technique into singing it with the melody.
4. **Memorize:** after steps 1-3 you may be surprised how close to memorized it already is. There are several memorization strategies, so of the following choose which works the best for you:
 - a. 3 times, then move on: pick a phrase and singing it three times from memory, then sing the next time three times from memory, then add them together and sing them three times from memory. Continue this process adding a phrase, singing it three times, and then singing the entire thing you have learned three times.
 - b. Sing with music 5 times a day for 5 days: this works particularly well with a piece in your native language. Just sing with your music, and as you go each day try to gradually pull the music away (when you are sure you know it) until after five days you do not need it at all.
 - c. Combine method a & b: for some pieces that are a little harder I like to combine the first two methods. I will learn a piece, memorize it using the three lines method, and then make sure I can sing it by barely using my music five times a day for five days.

In my experience, using good learning technique is actually quicker than just picking up a piece and trying to sing it through until it is learned/memorized. Also, I strongly advise against learning a piece using a recording. You want to perform in your own way, and not build in the interpretation and/or bad habits of others.

Just remember, **amateurs practice until they get it right, professionals practice until they can't get it wrong.** Be a professional!

(for more see www.erichansontenor.com/teaching)