

Practice is so much more than spending a certain number of minutes with one's instrument, although that is perhaps the most basic way of looking at it. The following suggestions are intended for students learning bowed instruments but most of what I include would also be useful for guitar students.

The BEST way to be sure that practice is done regularly is to have a daily time - or TWO times each day - for it so that it is made into a part of the daily routine.

While these are guidelines, this is a realistic progression if a student wishes to become competent at playing the instrument.

Young Beginners aged 4-6 years old	10 minutes per day working toward 15	20 - 30 minute lessons
Beginners to 6 months of instruction, 2nd grade and older	15 minutes per day minimum, working toward 20 minutes	30 minute lessons
6 months - 1 year	20 minutes per day, working toward 30	30 minute lessons
1 year - 2 years	30 minutes minimum (may be done in two sessions)	30 minute lessons
2 years - 3 years	45 minutes per day (may be done in two sessions)	45 minute lessons
3 years - 4 years	1 hour per day	45 minute lessons
4 years - 5 years	75-90 minutes per day	45 minute lessons
5 years and up	90 minutes per day or more on most days	60 minute lessons

Unfortunately learning to play the violin is a progression and there are no shortcuts to training one's brain and body as there are so many systems involved. This is also an important reason for having a personal, living teacher who can address your individual learning needs.

There are strategies though, to ensure that one's learning is successful!

These include:

- planning one's practice before opening the case
- tuning the instrument properly
- including warm up exercises every single time to condition your brain and your body for training specific tasks
- following and reviewing the teacher's instructions
- spending time on basics: using open strings, whole bows, scales, arpeggios DAILY
- working on listening to the sounds one is producing
- listening to great works of music and using guiding questions while listening, and taking notes while listening
- note-reading without the instrument in your hands / flash cards for notes
- bow hold and bowing-techniques
- using the "skill builders" or exercises in yellow in Essential Elements, or other etudes and exercises your teacher assigns to you
- single notes and measures that are difficult in a piece you are learning - breaking things down into manageable chunks
- using a metronome to play precisely without losing beats or adding rests
- listening to different recordings of pieces you may be learning, and comparing
- noting down any questions you have so you can ask your teacher
- care and maintenance of the instrument (and bow)
- visualising what it is specifically you want to accomplish - imagining how you will feel, look, and sound when you reach this goal
- reviewing pieces that you have learned earlier
- identifying features of what you are working on - time signature, key, tempo, accidentals, composer, style, genre, history...what did the composer intend with the piece? How will this inform my practice?
- playing through something (and I hesitate to even put this in because this is the very last step of any practice time, AFTER the work has been done to correct difficulties). This is what you do in the lesson after you have put in the time during the week to perfect your assignment.
- staying positive and keeping an open mind, being receptive to new ideas

Bonus: identify which of these tasks may be done on trips when you may not be able to play the instrument!

If you are not following a practice plan each time, this wastes a lot of time in the lesson when the teacher has to review things over and over with you that you should have done at home for yourself. Your teacher is your guide, not your brain, and you have to train your brain to teach YOUR body the motions, emotions and performance skills from day to day. This is something your teacher can never do for you.

It is no fun for a teacher to have to repeat the same thing week after week, just as it is probably no fun for students to hear the same thing again and again without "putting it into practice" during practice sessions at home. This is also one of the main reasons that the youngest beginners need supervision for their practice.

There are so many great aspects to practice time, in addition to executing many or all of the above mentioned strategies. For example,

- becoming more competent, reading and learning new music
- becoming prepared to play with others
- becoming ready for a performance
- putting your mind on something that helps your thinking in many other areas of your life too
- the feeling of accomplishment after you master a skill
- growing your musical mind & heart to appreciate your work and that of others
- pride in following through on your responsibilities
- learning how to be diligent
- preparing something beautiful that you can share with others
- a sense of self-satisfaction
- being an example for siblings or other family members learning an instrument

just to name a few!

If you have any more ideas, let me know and I might include them in this article!
Wishing you a wonderful holiday season and a happy 2018!

XX,

Bonny

PS I have made a monthly calendar for 2018 which you can print, cut out and glue in the practice notebook. I would leave 4 - 5 blank pages after each month for the lesson notes. [2018 Months - Cut & Paste into Notebook](#)

