

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR PRACTICE SESSION
TROMBONE STUDIO CLASS 3/19/2020

Bruce Faske - Assistant Professor of Trombone - Arkansas State University

BEFORE YOU BEGIN, SET UP YOUR SPACE

- I. Find a space that is comfortable, clutter free, distraction free, and with adequate light.
 - a. Comfortable
 - i. You know your own optimal room temperature. You'll be spending lots of quality time here, so have the things to adjust it if needed. (fan, sweatshirt, etc)
 - b. Clutter Free
 - i. Christmas decorations and camping gear will distract you. Pro Tip: Family members are more likely to be OK with you using the room as a practice space if you are kind and organize the clutter for them.
 - c. Distraction Free
 - i. Close doors that lead to other parts of the residence. Block out TV noise or conversations happening around you. As much as possible, make the room about the task at hand.
 - d. Adequate Light
 - i. Avoid eye strain
 - ii. Certain light colors promote focus – Google it!
- II. Stand, or use a chair that puts your knees lower than your hips.
 - a. Your older, less flexible self will thank you for addressing your posture now.
 - b. Check out [“What Every Musician Needs To Know About The Body” by Barbara Conable](#) for more on how body awareness can help you pedagogically!
- III. Use a music stand!
 - a. This seems like a no-brainer but many don't have a stand at home, and propping music up on an instrument case or reading music laying flat on a table causes weird contortions of the body that impede proper breathing, etc.
- IV. Have what you need at your fingertips. (spray bottle, valve oil, bucket or trash can for instrument water, drinking water, phone charger, etude books and other sheet music, etc)
- V. Brush your teeth! Your repair tech will thank you, and your instrument will last longer.

- VI. Set all smart devices to airplane mode!
- VII. Grab a kitchen timer or use the timer on your phone (Pomodoro technique)
- VIII. Set up your recorder and headphones/speakers before the session (feedback loop)
 - a. Recorder should be in front of you, roughly at your same height sitting or standing, and slightly off center from the direct line of your bell.
 - b. Listening back with pencil in hand and no instrument = built in rest time for your chops

DIVE IN

- I. Breathing Exercise for Focus
 - a. Eyes closed, hands in lap or at your side
 - b. Set metronome to 52 BPM
 - c. Inhale through nose for 4 counts, exhale through mouth for 4 counts, repeat 5 times
 - d. Inhale 5 counts, exhale 5 counts
 - e. Inhale 6 counts, exhale 6 counts
 - f. Visualize your practice session going smoothly
 - g. Your goal is to improve your playing, not solve everything in this one session or day
 - h. Slowly open your eyes and begin!
- II. Use A Timer (Pomodoro technique)
 - a. Choose a duration of time and dive in. When the timer goes off, move on to the next task. This avoids the need to clock watch and avoids the law of diminishing returns that sometimes accompanies practice sessions.
 - b. If specific goals are set before the session begins, you budget out your time accordingly. (3 tasks to complete/1 hour of practice = 20 minutes per task)
- III. Think S.M.A.R.T – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely
 - a. Get clear about what you want!!!
- IV. Practice Your Instrument Is Like Eating a Healthy Diet
 - a. Multiple, shorter sessions are always better than one large, binge session.
 - b. A well balanced practice session is as important as a well balanced meal.
 - c. The occasional treat is fine – play something just for the enjoyment of playing it.
- V. The facets of playing you need to be working on is analogous to the foods you know you should be eating but aren't craving. (Fundamentals = green, leafy veggies)

- VI. Practice Journals
 - a. Highly personal topic, works for some and doesn't work for others
 - b. Good idea to keep some sort of record of what you're working on, if for no other reason than to look at trends/problem solve/brainstorm issues as they come up

WHEN YOU'RE DONE, YOU'RE DONE

- I. Life is a cinch by the inch.
 - a. You will likely lose mental focus before physical fatigue sets in. 25 minutes is about the length of time we can focus without diminishing returns. 25 x 5 sessions per day = 125 minutes or almost an hour and a half. It adds up quickly!
- II. Your brain will need a break before your chops need a break.
 - a. If you maintain your awareness of healthy playing throughout your session, you will probably not need a complex and lengthy warm down session.
- III. This is not a "no pain, no gain" model. If something hurts, STOP.
 - a. Again, if you maintain awareness and maintain good habits, you should not be in pain from practicing!
- IV. You will lose water vapor through exhalation, so remember to hydrate before, during, and after each session.
 - a. There are many formulas for how much water you should be drinking. You know your body best.