

PRACTICE HABITS AND TECHNIQUES

- **Use the right tools:** Music stand. Good lighting. A good chair or room to stand. Good reeds. Sticks and mallets in good condition. Metronome. Tuner. Pencil. Quality mouthpiece with no chips or dings (woodwinds) and a perfectly round shank (brasses).
- **Begin with the end in mind:** What are the goals for this assignment?
- **Hear it in your mind:** Have an excellent sound model in your head so you know what to aim for.
- **Prioritize:** 1) Tone 2) Rhythm 3) Pitch 4) Articulation 5) Phrasing/ dynamic contrast 6) Fluency
- **You must have the technical foundation of tone, rhythm, pitch and articulation before you can "be musical" and play fluently.**
- **Use the rubric:** Compare your performance to the front of the rubric. What words REALLY describe how you're playing?
- **SLOW PRACTICE = FAST IMPROVEMENT:** Find the slowest tempo where **all areas** are at Proficient. Practice 20% slower than that tempo.

- **Isolate the problem:** If you can't play with a good sound, focus on tone production. If you can't play the right rhythms, put your instruments down and work out the rhythms. If you can't play the right notes, slowly play one note at a time and ignore the rhythms. Look at the tips below for more specific information on how to address these areas.
- **Useful repetition - "high five":** Play a section, or an individual idea (one rhythm pattern, one group of pitches, etc.) five times in a row at the Proficient level. Be picky and don't allow errors. If you make an error on the 2nd, 3rd or 4th try, **slow down the tempo by 10% and go back to the "1st try"**. Repeat this until you can play the segment five times in a row without any errors.
- **Practice for performance:** Put your instrument down. Do something else and come back in 10 minutes. Pick up your horn and play the part "cold". Can you play it accurately, musically and without stopping just like you would in a performance or playing test?
- **Record yourself:** Does it match what you hear in your mind? Use a pencil and mark your music if you hear mistakes.

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| Tone | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open your teeth. • Use faster and/or more air. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firm your embouchure from the corners as if saying the letter "C". |
| Breath support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use less mouthpiece pressure. • Use a mirror and check that you have enough bottom lip (single reeds) or both lips (double reeds) in front of your teeth. • Lower your tongue (everyone except clarinets). • Use a high-quality reed that is not too hard. • Cover 1/3 of the tone hole and check the direction of air across the tone hole (flutes). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blow slightly slower air. You may be overblowing your reed or embouchure. • Use a high-quality reed that is not too soft. • Use less mouthpiece pressure (brass). • Cover 1/3 of the tone hole and check the direction of air across the tone hole (flutes). |
| Pitch/Intonation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put the instrument down. Blow air onto the back of your hand. Keep the air exactly the same speed for 4 to 5 seconds. If the airstream is steady, take a deeper breath and use stronger "hiss muscle" support. Pick up your instrument and play, keeping the air steady as steady as you did when blowing on your hand. • Use less mouthpiece pressure (brass). • Be sure your air changes smoothly from inhalation to exhalation. Do not "hold" the air or allow it to slow down in any way as you begin to blow into your instrument. • Move your tongue quickly as it touches the airstream, then let it fall out of the way (everyone except clarinets). • Pick a spot on a wall that 5 or more feet away. If you're practicing where the wall is closer than that, imagine a wall in the next room or a tree outside. Blow the air firmly enough that it will reach that spot. • Cover 1/3 of the tone hole and check the direction of air across the tone hole (flutes). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play with a resonant, focused tone and centered pitch on every note. • Play notes against a synthesized drone from a tuner or app. • Turn on a tuner and put a pencil on your stand. Select a 3-4 notes and play each for 2-3 seconds. Carefully watch the tuner for each note. At the end of the group, mark an arrow next to each note to show needed adjustments. If a note is flat, mark an up arrow next to the note to show you need to raise it. If a note is sharp, mark a down arrow next to the note to show that you need to lower it. Repeat slowly and make the adjustments. • Use less mouthpiece pressure (brass) or embouchure pressure (reeds). • Use a faster, better supported airstream. • Cover 1/3 of the tone hole and check the direction of air across the tone hole (flutes). |
| Pitch center | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put the instrument down. Blow air onto the back of your hand. Keep the air exactly the same speed for 4 to 5 seconds. If the airstream is steady, take a deeper breath and use stronger "hiss muscle" support. Pick up your instrument and play, keeping the air steady as steady as you did when blowing on your hand. • Use less mouthpiece pressure (brass). • Be sure your air changes smoothly from inhalation to exhalation. Do not "hold" the air or allow it to slow down in any way as you begin to blow into your instrument. • Move your tongue quickly as it touches the airstream, then let it fall out of the way (everyone except clarinets). • Pick a spot on a wall that 5 or more feet away. If you're practicing where the wall is closer than that, imagine a wall in the next room or a tree outside. Blow the air firmly enough that it will reach that spot. • Cover 1/3 of the tone hole and check the direction of air across the tone hole (flutes). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play with a resonant, focused tone and centered pitch on every note. • Play notes against a synthesized drone from a tuner or app. • Turn on a tuner and put a pencil on your stand. Select a 3-4 notes and play each for 2-3 seconds. Carefully watch the tuner for each note. At the end of the group, mark an arrow next to each note to show needed adjustments. If a note is flat, mark an up arrow next to the note to show you need to raise it. If a note is sharp, mark a down arrow next to the note to show that you need to lower it. Repeat slowly and make the adjustments. • Use less mouthpiece pressure (brass) or embouchure pressure (reeds). • Use a faster, better supported airstream. • Cover 1/3 of the tone hole and check the direction of air across the tone hole (flutes). |
| Articulation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide how the articulation should sound - "doo", "doh", "dah", touching others, slightly separated, very separated, etc. • Put your instrument down. Speak the rhythm using the appropriate syllable for the musical style (dah, tah, etc.). Listen carefully to be sure that all the "words" start with strong, clear "D" or "T" and have a very clear and open "AH" or "OH" sound. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the appropriate syllable for the articulation style (doo, dah, doh, dee, etc.). • Put your instrument down. Put the palm of your hand 1 foot in front of your face. "Whoosh!" the articulation pattern into your palm. Keep the lips and back teeth open and still at all times. The air should feel strong and consistent no matter the articulation. • Increase the air supply and air speed. • Keep back teeth open. • Tongue more firmly using a harder syllable. • Keep the air flowing steadily beyond the bell of your instrument (brasses, flutes) or beyond the mouthpiece and reed (woodwinds). |
| Note release | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide how the articulation should sound - "doo", "doh", "dah", touching others, slightly separated, very separated, etc. • Put your instrument down. Speak the rhythm using the appropriate syllable for the musical style (dah, tah, etc.). Listen carefully to be sure that all the "words" start with strong, clear "D" or "T" and have a very clear and open "AH" or "OH" sound. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the appropriate syllable for the articulation style (doo, dah, doh, dee, etc.). • Put your instrument down. Put the palm of your hand 1 foot in front of your face. "Whoosh!" the articulation pattern into your palm. Keep the lips and back teeth open and still at all times. The air should feel strong and consistent no matter the articulation. • Increase the air supply and air speed. • Keep back teeth open. • Tongue more firmly using a harder syllable. • Keep the air flowing steadily beyond the bell of your instrument (brasses, flutes) or beyond the mouthpiece and reed (woodwinds). |
| Pulse control | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put your instrument down. Turn on a metronome at below-normal speed. Use your right hand to tap a steady beat on your left collarbone OR pat your hands on your thighs with the beat (left, right, left, right). Do this for twelve to sixteen beats. Continue patting or tapping and speak the rhythm using a "dah" syllable or rhythms syllables while keeping the beat steady. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put your instrument down. Write in the rhythm syllables, then clap and count the exercise with a metronome. Go as slowly as needed to be accurate. • Using ONLY the first note of the selection, play the rhythms in time with a metronome. Do not change notes. If you can't stay in time with the metronome and play accurately, go slower and/or go back the other rhythm tips at a slower tempo. |
| Rhythmic accuracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put your instrument down. Turn on a metronome at below-normal speed. Use your right hand to tap a steady beat on your left collarbone OR pat your hands on your thighs with the beat (left, right, left, right). Do this for twelve to sixteen beats. Continue patting or tapping and speak the rhythm using a "dah" syllable or rhythms syllables while keeping the beat steady. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put your instrument down. Write in the rhythm syllables, then clap and count the exercise with a metronome. Go as slowly as needed to be accurate. • Using ONLY the first note of the selection, play the rhythms in time with a metronome. Do not change notes. If you can't stay in time with the metronome and play accurately, go slower and/or go back the other rhythm tips at a slower tempo. |
| Is your articulation inaccurate (staccato instead of slurred, slurred instead of accented)? | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is your articulation unclear? |
| Is your pulse unsteady? | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are your rhythm patterns inaccurate? |