

101 Practice Ideas

*Compiled by James Hutchins and Hilde Singer in honor of the
1st Suzuki Convention of the Americas in Cancun, Mexico 2019*

ORGANIZATION

1. Create “To do” and “Done it” jars.
2. Make a bingo chart of what to practice.
3. Roll dice for how many review pieces, repetitions, total pieces, minutes of practice. Dice come in many sizes and lots of colors. Some have 30 numbers on them!
4. Give the student ownership from the start with rosin, bow, case, and working to partial practice alone.
5. Write weekly assignments on different cards. Student picks a card to mix up the order of practice.
6. Put review pieces on popsicle sticks in jar. Child chooses one and plays until jar is empty then repeat.
7. Ask child questions about what and how to practice rather than telling them what to do.
8. Ask your teacher how to manage practice.
9. Call practice “playing” the instrument instead of “practicing.”
10. Set a clear and simple routine.
11. Set a consistent routine.
12. Don’t go to bed without playing at least one piece, tonalization or scale.
13. Morning practice means afternoons off, if not completed in the morning, finish after school.
14. Practice on vacation--if done earlier, everyone is relaxed; gives child breaks from overwhelming relatives and shows extended family this cool thing your child does.
15. Use Friday or Saturday early morning to plan weekend practicing so everyone is more relaxed.
16. For older students, put practice time on your and/or your musician’s Google calendar with alert. Ask them to schedule practice. What does this week look like? When will practice work best each day?
17. Practice right after lesson so teacher’s recommendations stick.
18. Practice with your child’s internal clock. Is your child more alert in morning or afternoon?
19. Write a list of what your child should practice and let them pick 6 things. This typically adds up to 30 or more practice minutes. This lets student control what they do, so parent doesn’t “boss them around.”:)

20. Do at least one scale, tonalization or technique challenge after breakfast no matter what.
21. Put pieces to practice in a fishbowl or hat. Pick pieces to practice until bowl is empty then repeat.
22. Work on “repertoire list” instead of review list-sounds nicer!
23. Put the recordings on everyone’s mobile devices to listen anytime, like during unexpected waits.
24. Schedule a “review day!”
25. Make cards with assigned technical goals on them. Choose one to focus on for the practice.
26. Put the name of a scale on different cards. Pick one or two to do each day.

TIME CRUNCH or LIMITATIONS

27. Practice/listen in the car to work on bow holds, pluck a piece, singing, rhythms.
28. Ideas for practicing away from home without instrument: flashcards, listen to recording, tap/clap rhythms, sing, do note reading, bow hold exercises with a pen or pencil.
29. Practice during TV commercials, better yet, pause/mute the show during the commercials.
30. Practice as long as your child is allowed screen time each day.
31. Play a piece before and/or after brushing teeth.
32. Right after school, have a snack, then practice. The later the practice, the less progress made.
33. Listen to the Suzuki CD in the car as you drive to other activities. After you listen to the whole thing once and the pieces working on at least 5 times, switch to whatever your child requests.
34. Listen to the recording during practice time as a short break.
35. Choose 3 things to practice on busy days, several short practices are better than one long one. Three minutes with joy!

FUN or INTERESTING

36. Play outside at the park, playground, on your porch or deck, or in the backyard!
37. Find 10 different ways to practice a section--parent and student do this together.
38. How many “ways” can you play a piece? Stand on one foot, play for pet, eyes closed, sit on floor, wear silly hat, lights off, etc.
39. Play duets or review pieces with a friend or sibling.
40. Older student practices with younger student.
41. Make a recording for a relative or friend.

42. Make up new Twinkle rhythms.
43. Ask student to teach. Teach you or stuffed animal a technique or how to play their new/favorite song.
44. Make up silly lyrics to songs.
45. FaceTime/Skype a relative or give a concert for a visiting relative.
46. Host a Bach, Handel, Suzuki, Gavotte, or Minuet party for family or with studio buddies.
47. Practice 10 minutes for every inch of snow or rain.
48. Guess the piece I am thinking of. Keep playing pieces until they get it.
49. Think of different songs in your head and when your child says "stop", shout the song you are thinking of and have them play it--hysterical!
50. Go to a farmer's market or busy corner and play for cash. Bonus if you donate it to a charity!
51. Hire high school Suzuki student as practice partner--make sure they get instructions from teacher.
52. Hire a Suzuki student as a babysitter-they practice, play songs, and play games with your child.
53. Have another adult family member help with practice-make sure to give specific instructions.
54. Plan for something fun to do after the practice.
55. Suzuki loved sports, be a cheerleader!
56. Always end with something great!
57. Draw a face or other picture for practice repetition: 5X's = an eye, 8X's = a nose, etc.
58. For every 3 things done from the practice list, play 3 chess or checkers moves.
59. Do 5 things from your assignment, play 5 turns of a game or cards.
60. Jenga--for every 5 pieces played, pull out a Jenga piece until the tower topples.
61. After practice, feed the fish, walk the dog, or brush the cat.
62. Make an elaborate drawing by adding one component per practice session. Hang it up when done!
63. Hangman--for every 3 pieces, do one letter of hangman. Student or parent can come up with a word.
64. Build something with legos, for every piece played, add a set number of legos.
65. Write a novel! After every practice, add several sentences or a chapter to a story you create together.
66. End the practice with a treat tune by letting child play whatever they want!
67. Use board games for practice. Make your own to include things like "give Mom hug" or "do 5 jumping jacks" after playing each piece successfully.
68. Use pizzicato to pick out notes of a new piece.

69. Bow new piece on shoulder without the violin or on an open string.
70. Write stories about the pieces to inspire expression.
71. Step beats with feet while doing review pieces.

MAKING REPETITION FUN

72. Practice in every room of the house, great for repetitions too!
73. Repetitions using skittles, raisins, cheerios, blueberries, chocolate chips, etc.
74. “Plus 7” games--student takes a step forward each time they play a spot correctly and a step back if not. Keep going until you get to 7 steps forward.
75. Repetitions using different rhythms, bowings, dynamics.
76. Place a bean in jar each time a repetition is completed. When the jar is full, celebrate!
77. Play a piece or several repetitions at the top and/or bottom of every hour all day long.
78. Use game spinner to decide how many times to play a spot or cover with names of review pieces.

MOTIVATION

79. Light a candle--varying sizes depending on the goal and celebrate when candle is done!
80. Practice challenge goals, such as 10, 20, 50, 100 consecutive days or minutes practiced every day.
81. Put a piece of a puzzle together for each practice session or every 3 songs played.
82. Pizza and practice! Ten days of consistent practice equals pizza night, for example.
83. Watch a 90 minute movie after 90 minutes of practice.
84. 30 days of great practice rewarded by a trip to the ice cream parlor or hosting a sleepover.
85. 100 days practice chart—draw or color something each day with a reward/celebration when done.
86. Earn allowance with practice—place coin in a jar for reward until enough for prize.
87. Go to a sporting event after a certain number of positive practices.
88. Put student’s names up in studio for accomplishing 100% review completion in a given week.
89. Provide reasons to practice, such as recital, concerts or other performances, and workshops.
90. Parent does something goofy with the student after practice.
91. Go to the playground after practice for as long as the practice lasted.

92. For older kids, after consistent months of practice get driver's license, computer, first phone or new phone, extend curfew, phone apps, go to the movies with friends, etc.
93. Have practice replace a chore—30 minutes of practice = no tidying the bedroom today.
94. Extend bedtime for extra practice.
95. Read to your child for as long as the practice session.
96. Dr. Suzuki loved chocolate—make a chocolate for practice deal!
97. Prize or celebration for every 10 times child *initiates* or starts practice on their own and completes.
98. Time for the next size instrument coming up or need to buy new clothes? Earn it with practice.
99. Double up with two great practices one day and take the next day off.
100. Have teacher be “the bad villain”—we are doing this because your teacher suggested it.

And #101 is...

Hide something for your violinist to find after the practice.

AND while we are thinking about it... :)

Games are a temporary tool to motivate practice

There is a fine line between motivational tools and extortion :)

Make sure rewards are for the child who did the work, so if they earned ice cream, it's for them,

not for them and the sibling.

Always have rewards ready to go when they are done with practice.

Only give rewards for positive practice.

Make sure you do other fun things with your musician besides practice. You don't want to be known for being nothing else but the practice monster!

These ideas are from us, our awesome studio families, students, and Suzuki teachers from around the world.