

Guide to Learning All-State Etudes

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This guide was created to assist high school students in learning their TMEA all-state etudes, but the strategies and guidelines contained will prove useful for students of all levels when approaching new and difficult pieces of music.

Learning the Etudes

1. Portion the music out into small manageable chunks or phrases.
2. Start at the final phrase and work your way BACKWARDS towards the beginning.
3. For each phrase....
 - a. Say and finger the notes
 - b. Clap and count the rhythm
 - c. "Air play" the phrase, combining the notes, rhythms, and articulations
 - d. Play through the phrase slowly
 - e. Isolate problem areas and correct mistakes. Make marks on your music as needed.
4. Do uneven rhythms multiple times to smooth out difficult technical areas.
 - i. Swing (alternating long and short)
 - ii. Backward swing (alternating short and long)
 - iii. Quarter-quarter-eighth-eighth
 - iv. Eighth-eighth-quarter-quarter
 - v. Movable fermata on the first, second, third, and fourth notes of groups of sixteenth notes
 - vi. Moveable fermata on trouble notes, and the notes before and after the trouble notes
5. Once you feel confident that you know the notes, play the phrase with the metronome slowly.
6. Bump up the tempo slightly (2-4 clicks) until you find the fastest tempo that you can **accurately** play through the section of music. This is your perfect tempo; mark it in your music.
7. Work your way up towards the beginning and repeat steps 1–6 for each section
8. After you complete a new section, **REVIEW** and play through all the sections you have worked on so you can work on the transitions.

After you get past the sight-reading stage, repeat steps 1–6 and record new perfect tempos daily. This will help you to work towards the goal tempo of the piece while maintaining great tone, accurate rhythms, smooth technique, and, most importantly, attention grabbing musicality. Your perfect tempos do not have to be fast in the beginning. All you must be able to do is play through all three etudes at a slow steady tempo with minimal mistakes. *Practicing slowly and accurately is much more effective than practicing quickly and inaccurately.* Consider creating a practice plan to organize your practice as well; an example is shown at the end of this document.

Practice Tips

- ❖ Before practicing an etude, practice exercises (scales, arpeggios, etc.) within that scale.
 - This will help you to be ready to adjust to the key signature. One of the hardest aspects of these etudes is being able to play within the key knowing, knowing which notes should already be sharp or flat, and recognizing accidentals quickly.
- ❖ Refrain from always starting at from the beginning.
 - If you always start at the beginning, you may run out of time before reaching the end of the etude, or may neglect the middle or end sections.
 - Start from a different section of the music (beginning, middle, end) each day.
 - Mix up the order of which you practice your etudes, and make sure to spread your practice time evenly amongst the etudes.
- ❖ Always practice with a metronome!
 - Whether you are up to tempo or not, it is important that you make sure that your time is steady.
 - Keep your metronome at your “perfect tempo” and gradually move it upwards.
- ❖ Sing, Buzz, Play.
 - For each phrase, sing through it, buzz it (if you are able) and then play it. The better you can sing or buzz a piece, the more effectively you can play it.
 - When singing, prioritize interesting musicality. This is music, not an exercise in pressing valves and articulating.
 - When you are singing, tap or conduct along. You should feel the rhythm.
- ❖ Practice, Practice, Practice!
 - If you are able, practice your for **at least** two hours a day, six days a week, from the moment you receive it. Consider doing three 40-minute practice sessions a day with 15 to 30 minutes of between each session. This will help you to build and maintain your endurance. You can also spread sessions out throughout the day (this may be difficult on school days)
 - “When you’re not practicing, someone somewhere is. And when the two of you meet, assuming roughly equal ability, the other person will win.”
- ❖ Do not overwork yourself.
 - While it is important to practice the music as much as you are able too, do not push yourself further than what your body will allow. Practicing is just like working out, and your body will get tired and fatigued and needs time to recover.
 - Take multiple quick practice breaks throughout and stretch. Try not to spend too much time doing repetitive movements. You can always alternate between sections and come back to something that just isn’t happening in your fingers later.
 - Keep your fingers or slide arm light and play without tension.
 - Prevent injury by ensuring that your posture and hand position are correct.
 - Incorporate mental practice into your sessions. You can think through the music and this will help give your body a rest while still using your time efficiently. *This can be as (or more) effective than “normal” practice.*

- ❖ Practice the etude until it does not feel like sight-reading.
 - This can be attained by reviewing what you practiced, during your session, at the end of your practice, and at the beginning of your practice session the next day. Always review what you have learned and build upon it.
 - The goal is to at least be past the sight-reading stage with **at least** one month before the audition. That will give you about four weeks to ensure you absolutely know the notes, rhythms, and articulations of all three etudes. The faster you get past knowing those things the faster you can begin to polish and beautify your performance of the piece of music so that your audition stands out from the rest.
- ❖ Always play musically.
 - Even though these etudes are an exercise they are still pieces of music.
 - Always play with dynamics, expression, and with a beautiful tone. It is very hard to add those things in later. Also, plan your breaths and decide where you are going to breathe very early on because your breaths dictate your phrasing which must be practiced.
- ❖ Record yourself, and listen to your performance of the etudes often.
 - Your phone makes a great recording device. By listening to yourself, you will hear things that you have not heard while you were performing. It is best to concentrate on playing while you are playing, and to concentrate on listening when you hear your recording.
- ❖ Listen to great players.
 - This is one of the most important things we can do. Every day, listen to great players so you are aware of what a great **sound** on your instrument is. At least once a week, listen to a different instrument so you are aware of what great **musicianship** is.
 - If there are recordings available of the etudes, listen to them. **PLAY ALONG** with them. Several apps exist (audacity, the amazing slow downer, YouTube etc.) to slow down music, experiment with these.

Recommended Listening

This list is not exhaustive (not even close), but these are some of my favorite musicians.

Euphonium

Demondrae Thurman, Adam Frey, Brian Bowman, Steven Mead

Tenor Trombone

Christian Lindberg, Jörgen van Rijen, Joseph Alessi, Nitzan Haroz, Matthew Vaughan, Toby Oft

Bass Trombone

Stefan Schulz, James Markey, Blair Bollinger, Ben Van Dijk, Randy Hawes

Tuba

Øystein Baadsvik, Phillip Sinder, Carol Jantsch, Roger Bobo, Arnold Jacobs, Gene Pokorny

Trumpet

Adolph Bud” Herseth, Wynton Marsailis, Tine Thing Helseth,

Singers

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Fritz Wunderlich, Jessie Norman

Pianists

Valentina Lisitsa, Glenn Gould, Lang Lang, Daniel Barenboim, Arthur Rubenstein

Composers (various orchestras or players)

Brahms, Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Stravinsky, Debussy, Schumann, Vaughan-Williams

Practice Plan Example

	22-July	23-July	24-July	25-July
:40	Etude 1	2	3	1
:40	Etude 2	3	2	3
:40	Etude 3	1	1	2
	Sight Read, Step 1	Bottom Third of the Piece, Steps 2-3	Middle Third of the Piece, Steps 2-3	Top Third of the Piece, Steps 2-3
	26-July	27-July	28-July	29-July
:40	2	3	1	2
:40	1	1	2	3
:40	3	2	3	1
	Bottom and Middle, Perfect Tempo Steps 4-6	Middle and Top, Perfect Tempos Steps 4-6	Top and Middle Perfect Tempos	Middle and Bottom Perfect Tempos
	30-July	31-July	1-August	2-August
:40	3	1	2	3
:40	2	3	1	1
:40	1	2	3	2
	Bottom and Middle	Middle and Top	Top and Middle	Middle and Bottom

Organization of your practice time will make your life much easier. Keep your all state etudes in one place (like a binder), and create a practice plan. Practice plans are a great tool and are effective *if you stick to them*. This practice plan is based on three 40-minute practice sessions a day. It tells you the order of the etudes you will practice that day, and what you will practice. For example, on July 26 you will begin with the second etude and practice steps 4-5 for 40 minutes; then, you will do the same with the first and third etude. When the chart says bottom, it means the last third of the piece, and the same for the middle and the top thirds. The key is to practice each etude equally for enough time during the day to make improvements.

Most importantly, do NOT get discouraged. If you're feeling discouraged, take a day off from practicing to listen to some of your favorite music, and consider some of the inspirational quotes from some of the greatest athletes of our time. The most important thing is that we learn something from this process. Personal growth is the goal, making region or all-state band is just the reward for your work. If you have any questions let me know! You can contact me through my website: www.paulvgarza.com

“When the game is over I just want to look at myself in the mirror, win or lose, and know I gave it everything I had.”

Joe Montana

“Each time I step on the basketball court, I never know what will happen. I live for the moment. I play for the moment.”

Michael Jordan

“The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field.”

Vince Lombardi

“Every time your back is against the wall, there is only one person that can help you. And that is you. It comes from the inside.”

Pat Riley