

HOW TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL AUDITION

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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 a New Piece of Music

1. Listen to a recording of the piece if possible. Try YouTube or ask your teacher.
2. Portion the music out into small manageable chunks or phrases.
 - a. These should usually be about four measures long.
3. For each phrase:
 - a. Say and finger each note (this may be out of time).
 - b. Clap the beat and count the rhythm out loud.
 - c. “Air play” through the phrase, combining the notes and rhythms.
 - d. Play through the phrase slowly and with a metronome.
 - e. Isolate problem areas and correct mistakes. Your goal is to learn each phrase right the first time.
4. When you’re confident that you know the notes, play it slowly with a metronome.
5. Bump up the tempo slightly (2 to 4 clicks) until you find the fastest tempo that you can **accurately** play through the section of music. This is your *perfect tempo*; write it down.
6. Work through the etude and repeat steps 3–5 for each phrase. You may want to work backwards from the end so you are always moving towards something you feel more confident playing.
7. After you complete a new section, play through all the sections you have worked on so you can work on the transitions and reviewing the notes and rhythms.

Doing this for every phrase will take a while, but it is an important first step. You want to make sure you learn all of the notes and rhythms correctly *the first time*.

After learning the notes and rhythms, the next step is to ingrain what you have learned. This means you need to drill each section many times. It is important that you drill and repeat each section not only until you can play it right, but until you cannot play it wrong. Play with a metronome and work on inching your perfect tempos toward the target tempo during every practice session.

It will be tempting to play near the target tempo early on, but your patience will be rewarded. Your goal when learning a piece is accuracy not speed. *Practicing slowly and accurately is much more effective than practicing quickly and inaccurately.*

Above all, play musically! Be a musician, not just a trombone/euphonium/tuba player. In the more advanced stages of this process, your musicianship will make you stand out.

How to Have an Effective Practice Session

If you are able to, you should practice two hours a day, six days a week. How well you organize your practice session will have a direct effect on how well you learn your music.

1. Start your practice session with a daily routine. This is not just a warm-up, but a chance to work on fundamentals like tone production, flexibility, articulation, low- and high-range, and scales.
2. Listen to great players often, you need to have a mental goal of how you want to sound before you play the instrument.
3. Devise a practice plan to organize your practice sessions, a sample plan is found below.
4. Always practice with a metronome, nobody on earth has had enough metronome practice.
5. For quick progress, record yourself often.
 - a. Try listening to a recording of the etude by a great player.
 - b. Record yourself and be critical of what you hear. Every time you record yourself, you will definitely hear something you did not think you would hear.
 - c. Compare yourself to a recording
6. Distinguish between performance and practice. Get used to the difference in the mindset of experimenting/learning and performing for an audience. At the end of your practice session, try playing for a friend or family member.

Always...

1. Play and think musically.
 - a. Don't learn the notes and then "add the music" later. Music is more than blowing air and pressing the right valve down at the right time. Every note should be a gem and every performance should tell a story.
2. Use a metronome to practice.
 - a. Seriously, just do it.
3. Play *everything* on the page accurately, this includes...
 - a. Pitches
 - b. Rhythms
 - c. Articulations
 - d. Dynamics
 - e. Style and expressive markings
 - f. Tempo markings
4. Play with a great, resonant sound and great intonation in all registers.
 - a. Listen to great players to know what you want to sound like.
5. Plan your breathing so you get used to it.
6. Record yourself, listen back, listen to what needs to be done, play it again, repeat.

Practice Techniques

1. Metronome Games

a. +1/-1

- i. Use this to drill notes, rhythms, and tougher passages. Start the section at half tempo. Play through the section you're practicing, and if you played it successfully, add one click to the tempo. If you mess anything up, subtract one click from the tempo.

b. +10/-5

- i. Use this to practice playing the piece at a variety of tempos and to build consistency. Start the section at half tempo or slower. After your first successful play through, add ten clicks to the metronome. After the next, subtract five. Continue this until you find your limits.

c. Penny practice

- i. Use this to practice consistency. Grab any number of coins (or similar small objects) and put them on the left side of your stand. The more you have the more difficult it will be. Play through the section you're practicing, and if you are successful move one penny to the right side of your stand. If you mess up, move all of the pennies back to the left

2. Before practicing an etude, play exercises (scales, arpeggios, etc.) in the same key. This will help you adjust to the key signature.

3. Play uneven rhythms multiple times to smooth out difficult technical areas. Try the patterns shown below. This is especially helpful on long passages of sixteenth notes.

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Regular Long-short Short-long Long-short-short-short Short-short-short-long

4. Sing, Buzz, Play

- a. For each phrase, sing through it, buzz it, and then play it. The better you are able to sing and buzz the etude, the better you will be able to play it.
 - i. Try to sing it *exactly* like you want it to sound. In time, in tune, great style.
 1. When you sing, tap or conduct along so you can feel the beat.
 - ii. Buzz it as closely as you can to how you sang it.
 - iii. Play it as closely as you can to how you buzzed it.
- b. This is a good technique to use when you keep cracking notes or are having issues playing fluidly.

5. Air, Buzz, Tongue

- a. Try playing each phrase in three stages to build your sound up from the bottom.
 - i. First, play through each phrase with only air and slide, no buzz or tongue. Your airflow should be constant with no “bumps.” Your slide arm should be accurate, quick, and relaxed.
 - ii. Second, add buzz back in and gliss the entire phrase, making sure that the glissando between notes is just as loud as each note. The slide should be rhythmic.
 - iii. Finally, play the phrase again normally, and add as much tongue as you need to play but as little as you can get away with. Your sound should be much more resonant, continuous, and even.

6. Mental Practice

- a. Sometimes, going through and saying note names, conducting and singing, planning breaths, analyzing your music, etc. can be more effective than playing the instrument. *This can be as (or more) effective than “normal” practice.*

7. Apps for your phone

- a. There are several apps that you can use to help your practice
 - i. Tonal Energy: Great as a tuner, metronome, and recorder.
 - ii. Amazing Slow Downer: Upload files and slow them down to play along.
 - iii. Tempo: A great basic metronome.
 - iv. Click Pitch: Excellent if you are working on orchestral excerpts.

Recommended Listening

Below are some fantastic musicians that you should be listening to for their sound quality and musicianship.

Tenor Trombone

Christian Lindberg, Jörgen van Rijen, Joseph Alessi, Colin Williams, Toby Oft

Bass Trombone

Stefan Schulz, James Markey, Blair Bollinger, Ben Van Dijk, Ilan Morgenstern

Euphonium

Demondrae Thurman, Adam Frey, Brian Bowman, Steven Mead

Tuba

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

Trumpet

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

Singers

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Fritz Wunderlich, Jessie Norman

Making a Practice Plan

Planning for an audition should begin weeks or months before the audition; organization of your practice time will make your life much easier. Keep your etudes in one place (like a binder) and create a long-term practice plan. Practice plans are a great tool and are effective *if you stick to them*. This example practice plan (below) is based on three 40-minute practice sessions a day. Your plan should include the following...

1. The order of the etudes you will practice that day and which sections you will practice.
 - a. Spread your time out evenly between each etude, especially when starting to learn the etudes.
 - b. Rotate which etude you start with. Your practice plan is a set of goals, and you may not always reach the end of your scheduled practice session.
 - c. Don't always start at the beginning. Portion the etude into thirds and plan your sessions so you will sometimes start at beginning, the middle, or the end.
2. Which steps you want to do and for how long. Set goals for when you want to know the notes and rhythms, when you want to reach the target tempo, etc.
3. For example, on July 26 you will begin with the top third of the second etude and practice steps 3–4 for 40 minutes. Then, do the same with the top third of the first and third etude. The key is to practice each etude equally for enough time during the day to make improvements.

Your plan might not look like this, and they do not have to be perfect. Your practice plan is your list of goals that you want to achieve and when you want to achieve them. Personal growth is the goal, making region or all-state band is the reward for your hard work.

	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 1–2	Top Third of each piece, Step 3	Middle Third of the Piece, Step 3	Bottom Third of the Piece, Step 3
	26-July	27-July	28-July	29-July
:40	2	3	1	2
:40	1	1	2	3
:40	3	2	3	1
	Top, Step 3–4	Middle, Step 3–4	End, Step 3–4	Top, Step 5–7
	30-July	31-July	1-August	2-August
:40	3	1	2	3
:40	2	3	1	1
:40	1	2	3	2
	Middle 5–7	Bottom 5–7	Top and Middle, Drill, increase perfect tempos	Middle and Bottom, Drill, increase perfect tempos

If you practice... by Tom Ervin

“Let us discuss the benefits that come from focused practice, and the need for such practice by any trombonist who is ambitious, or is considering a musical career. This article was originally submitted to the trombone list in September 1996. The list also holds many fine posts on structuring and optimizing practice time.

If you practice the trombone for 2-3 hours weekly (six half-hours) you will slowly learn the notes and some rhythms. You can develop a fairly nice midrange sound if you simulate a good example, like a teacher. You can have fun. Many beginners, junior high trombonists, and some high school players practice this way.

(And I'm not counting ensemble rehearsal time in this. It does not really count. Well, yes it might build your endurance, you can memorize the field show, and you learn a lot about playing with other musicians, how to act, how to follow a conductor maybe, how to take directions. But this is not the same as the skills gained in the practice room.)

If you will practice 5-6 hours a week, you can actually make some slow progress if you manage that time very carefully. You will probably find time to do a more comprehensive warm-up routine. You may actually get material ready to play in a lesson, learn the studies well enough to play them with no reading mistakes, no hesitations and few errors. You may find time to work on your band parts. There may also be a little time available to truly practice some of the plain technical work and maintenance that we should all try to do: extensive flexibility routines, scales and arpeggios galore, the weird keys, dynamic workouts, etc.

If you can get the practice hours up to ten, week after week (40 a month), you will notice some important and valuable developments in your playing. You will become more "fit." You will handle 5 or 6 books at a time, or more. There will be more time to regularly address things that others often neglect: air exercises, tunes by ear, high and low range, some jazz, recording yourself, clefs, the outside keys, real sight-reading, duets with peers, tough etudes, audition materials, orchestral excerpts, jury solos, vibrato and quality time with pianists. Your reading will really improve! You won't be sore the day after a big blow. You will use the metronome, mirror and tuner properly and do dozens of flexibility routines, scales and arpeggios. If you find something really hard, you will have time to work it out, and work it up. There will be time to solve bad playing habits. You will be thinking about trombone while you sleep! You'll be quite proud of your playing and your progress. You will deserve to get some work.

If you will develop the stamina to really practice 15-20 hours a week, then you get (this is like a Chinese restaurant!) *all of the above plus* you'll tear through the literature much quicker, build a repertoire after a while, learn tunes and their changes, progress quickly with unusual techniques, review old material, be a serious competitor at professional auditions and much more.

If you cannot do this then the benefits will be elusive. You should know that there are students all around the country practicing 20+ hours a week and that you will meet them at many auditions. There will be one winner.”