

What does a practice session look like?

This guide is very general. Your goals and strategies may be different and that's OK if it works for you—but the ideas presented here *will* work IF they are approached with focus.

No matter the length of the session, go in with a *specific* plan on what you will be attempting to improve. Practicing without specific goals in mind is like traveling in a foreign country without a map—your odds of getting where you want to go are significantly smaller.

Don't be afraid to go over something multiple times. Just because you went slow and then went fast doesn't mean it was right. Improving a skill—music or otherwise—is a marathon...not a sprint. It can often take several days or maybe even weeks to get something where you want it to be.

Less than 30 minutes

Needs to be extremely focused and only work on a few things. This session should be used on days where there simply are not other options.

2 – 5 minutes

Warm-Up

Depends on how much playing you've already done this day. If this is your first playing or it's been several hours, slow long tones (with a tuner if possible) followed by some scales. If you've been playing recently (within the last hour and a half), scales, lip slurs, or more articulate things like Clarke or arpeggios would be fine.

10 – 15 minutes

Music

Either your class music or an S&E piece. Pick one area—MAYBE two—to work on. Have a plan of why you're working this section. Take things piece by piece.

2 – 5 minutes

Run-throughs/review/fun stuff

This is where you will run large chunks of music that you were just working on, large sections of review from a previous day, or just playing something for fun.

30 to 45 minutes

Should include a good warm-up and can focus on several areas from your music.

5 – 10 minutes

Warm-Up

Should begin with long tone exercises (Remington, 8 up/down, flow studies, etc.) *with a tuner if possible*. Brass players should do lip slurs. Some sort of articulation work (Clarke, arpeggios, scales in certain rhythms). Several scales should be practiced here.

20 – 30 minutes

Music

You should go into this session with several areas for improvement in mind. Think "big/small/big" when practicing. Play a big chunk, determine what needs to be improved and how to do it. Then, break it down into smaller pieces to work on individually. Lastly, put it all back together into big chunks. Repeat this basic process as needed but don't rush it! Take things as slow as you need to—just because you play something slow doesn't mean it actually got any better. Likewise, if you try one method and it doesn't work—try doing it another way.

5 minutes

Run-throughs/review/fun stuff

This is where you will run large chunks of music that you were just working on, large sections of review from a previous day, or just playing something for fun.

45 – 60 minutes

Should include a very thorough warm-up and, in addition to several areas of music, should work on “big picture” musical concepts such as tuning, control, range, chromatic fingers, etc. May include a small break halfway through (no more than 5 minutes—any more than that and you almost have to warm-up again).

- 10 – 20 minutes Warm-Up
Similar to 30-45 minute warm-up above but could include more keys.
- 10 – 20 minutes Music Concept
This may be thought of as an extension of the warm-up. This is where you will delve in depth into some basic concept with the idea of later applying it to your performance music. It could be something like scales (tempo), building range, vibrato, rudimental practice, etc.
- 20 – 30 minutes Music
Same as 30 – 45 minute session as written above. Though not always possible, it would be best if the music being worked on today was also tied to the music concept worked on earlier (i.e., if you were working on improving tone in the upper register, try and apply that concept in your music now).
- 5 minutes Run-throughs/review/fun stuff
Same as above but may include a more lengthy review depending on what else was worked on during this specific session.

More than 60 minutes

Depending on how long you plan to practice, this may be best done over two shorter sessions separated by several hours. With more time, this day of practice should be very detail-oriented and picky.

Session 1 (30 – 45 minutes)

Use warm-up and music concept strategy from 45 – 60 minute session but exploring more keys or multiple music concepts. Be very picky when practicing here and don't “settle” for anything less than what you are striving for.

Session 2 (30 – 45+ minutes)

Should begin with an abbreviated warm-up similar to 30 – 45 minute warm-up and possibly some review of the music concept worked on earlier in the day. The rest of the session should be spent on music rehearsal similar to the 45 – 60 minute session but possibly exploring more music. Again—be very detail-oriented and picky here.

As always—conclude with review or just playing anything you want for fun.