

10 WAYS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF MUSIC LESSONS

These guidelines will help you to have a successful, rewarding experience learning how to play your favorite music on any instrument. These are practical tips that we have discovered from years of teaching and our experiences with instructing hundreds of students over the years.

1.) Take Lessons in a Professional Teaching Environment

Learning music is not only a matter of having a qualified music teacher, but having an environment that is focused on music education. In a professional school environment, a student can not be distracted by TV, pets, siblings, ringing phones or anything else. We at the Music School of CNY provide such an environment where we can produce excellent results with our students since the only focus at the time of the lesson is learning music. Students in a school environment are also motivated by hearing peers who are at different levels and by being exposed to a variety of musical instruments and styles. At the Music School of CNY, the lessons are not a hobby or a side-line job for the teachers but a profession and responsibility which are taken very seriously.

2.) Choose the Proper Class or Program for You or Your Child

One of the key elements to success on an instrument is the proper class setting or type of lesson track that you may be on. There are various lesson settings that one may choose. Group classes work best for preschool or elementary age children. Make sure to enroll your child in a program that specializes in teaching children. It is also important that the parents are involved in the lesson. This way parents can see what is going on and can ask questions to help the child practice at home. The class size should be small. Good programs will have no more than four children in a class so that the children can both play together and get quality individual attention as well. There are many children's programs available, but the parent should value a program that builds a skill for the child and is fun.

Private lessons are more suitable for the older or serious student that is learning a specific style of music. The benefit of a private lesson is that the student is the primary focus of the teacher. The student will learn at their own pace and the teacher can focus on the individual's strengths and weaknesses. Ask plenty of questions and make sure that the teacher is knowledgeable of the style that you want to learn.

Another group setting is the general or introductory music course. These classes are a combination of students of different ages, backgrounds, and musical interests. The main appeal of these classes is that they are short term and inexpensive. The big problem with these classes is that the class materials offer little to satisfy the varied musical interests of the individual students. This setting is okay if the student would like to see what trying out an instrument is like, but overall offers very little lasting value.

3.) Use Recognized Teaching Materials

There are many method books and teaching materials available these days. There are some excellent materials developed by professional music educators that are made for students in a variety of situations. For example, in piano there are books for very young beginners and books for adult students that have never played before. There are books that can start you at a level that you are comfortable with. These materials have been researched and are continually upgraded and improved to make learning easier.

4.) Use Suitable Sized Instruments

Time after time we have seen students with instruments that are not a suitable size or suited for the style of music that they want to pursue. This is very common with guitar and bass students. It is vital that the student gain optimal playing capabilities and learn on a size-appropriate instrument. There are many fractional size instruments available such as guitar, violin, viola, and cello that come in 1/4, 1/2, 3/4, and full sizes. The student will less likely become frustrated and lose interest in learning when they can easily hold and play the instrument properly. Learning to play on an instrument that is too large and hard to play will result in faulty technique and ultimately lead to repetitive stress injuries such as tendonitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, or focal dystonia.

5.) Make Practicing Easier

As with anything, improving music takes practice. One of the main problems with music lessons is the drudgery of practicing and the fight between parents and students to practice everyday. Here are some ways to make practicing easier:

TIME - Set the same time everyday to practice so that it becomes a routine or habit. This works particularly well for children. The earlier in the day the practicing can occur, the less reminding is required to get the child to practice.

REPETITION - We use this method all the time when setting practice schedules for children and beginners. For young children 30 min. may seem like an eternity. Instead of a time frame, we use repetition. For example, practice this piece 6

times a day and this scale 5 times a day. The child does not pay attention to the amount of time they are practicing but knows when they are on repetition number 5 that they are almost finished.

REWARDS- This works very well for both children and adults. Some adults reward themselves with a cappuccino after a successful week of practicing. Parents can encourage children to practice by granting them occasional rewards for successful practicing. In our school we reward our students for a week of successful practicing with praise. Praise tends to be the most coveted reward. There is no substitute for a pat on the back for a job well done!

6.) Use a Practice or Lesson Planner

An excellent tool that will help the student during the week is a practice or lesson planner. A practice planner is a simple way for students to develop better practice habits. The student or parent is able to write down weekly lesson assignments and clarify any specific goals that the teacher may give. Practice planners are usually divided into a few different categories. Some categories include repertoire, warm ups, and exercises. A practice planner will also have a daily log for each task to help the student and parents actually see how much time is being spent on a specific task throughout the week. Everyone involved in the lesson benefits from using a practice planner. The teacher can communicate the tasks for the week, the student is reminded of what to do during their practice sessions, and the parent as well as the student can monitor progress throughout the months.

7.) Immerse Yourself in the Style

Immersing yourself in the music you are studying is one of the best ways to develop the sense and sound of it. For example, if you are a guitarist learning the blues, listening to the masters like Stevie Ray Vaughn, B.B. King, and Robert Johnson will give you some real insight into that style. Going to live performances and comparing different interpretations of the same or similar music is always a good idea. This may give you new ideas in your interpretations or solidify some that you may already have. Another great way of developing a good sense of style in any particular era is by reading about a specific artist or group. There are many articles, books, records, CDs, and DVDs that are available and offer a wealth of information for students.

8.) Record Yourself Periodically

Recording yourself periodically is an effective practice technique. There is a difference in perception between listening to yourself while you are playing, and listening to yourself on a recording. Focusing on the technical aspects of playing can be a distraction from listening critically. Recording yourself will allow you to go back and compare a previous recording with a current one, as well as enable you to identify areas that require improvement. This is an excellent way to provide immediate feedback while practicing, and is a great way to monitor your growth.

9.) Be Patient With Your Growth

Many times the student will have unrealistic expectations in their abilities. All too often we are impatient with our progress and try playing beyond what we are capable of doing properly. Going down this road ALWAYS leads to bad habits and other deficiencies in playing. Some skills may take a few tries to learn while others may take weeks to master. Any teacher will agree that the main goal is to do a task properly and effortlessly. Be sure to take the time each day to practice slowly to refine your skills. The teacher is a great resource in monitoring the student's growth. The teacher will have a much more realistic expectation for the student's growth and will stress patience as well as offer encouragement.

10.) HAVE FUN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Making music is a great recreational activity that you will enjoy for a lifetime. Learning to make music on your instrument will offer you a very rewarding life long experience as well as a sense of personal achievement. There is nothing like playing your favorite music by yourself or with a few friends!! Learning an instrument and making music can take you to many places that you never thought possible. The most important thing to do is enjoy the journey and **HAVE FUN** and **LOTS OF IT** because that is what it is really all about!!

The Music School of CNY is a dynamic and exciting school that offers a unique approach to private guitar and piano instruction in the traditions of rock, folk, classical, and jazz. Our up-to-date facilities and personable staff provide a comfortable learning environment to meet the needs of our students. Our instructors are well-trained, experienced professionals dedicated to providing instruction second to none. We aim to establish a new set of standards in music education. The **Music School of CNY** is also proud to feature The **Childbloom Guitar Program**, which is a nationally recognized program developed for children between the ages of 5 and 12. The Childbloom Guitar Program offers fun and personal achievement in a low pressure environment. The Childbloom curriculum prepares the student to play music at a high standard quickly and enjoyably. Register now by calling us at **455-5006** or visit us at www.musicschoolofcny.com