

Pianodao

The Way of Piano



Initiating Practice

Guest Post by Roberta Wolff

This post is about helping our students harness this enthusiasm and turn it into regular and habitual practising time which is entirely self-initiated! Parents will love this and will also benefit from this article.

The free resources below will help you start a studio wide practice challenge. **To Download and save, simply click on these links:**

1. Initiating Practice – student chart

2. Initiating Practice: Teacher chart (master-sheet)

The Two Challenges

There are these two challenges for students:

- 1: To be the student who initiates the most practice sessions this term/half term.
- 2: To be the student who makes the greatest progress (regardless of length or number of sessions) this term/half term.

The Rules

- Parents must not mention anything to do with practice, no reminders, no hints, children need to know that this is their chance to take control, it may take a little while.
- For a session to count it must be at least the minimum length agreed on by student and teacher.
- For a session to count it must be logged on the student's competition sheet.

The Reason

This challenge is not about practising every day – it is about encouraging those students who don't already to **choose** to practise, because with this choice comes the positive mindset needed for learning.

The Unheard Conversation

The message parents unintentionally send when they 'remind' children to practise is:
You can't be relied on to do this.

The conclusion the child makes is:
If I need to be reminded it must be because practice is unlikeable.

The child will resent the reminder and transfer this resentment onto the task of practising.

Well-intended reminders can quickly turn to nagging and this is best avoided. A parent once relayed a conversation to me where she reminded her child to do their piano practice.

It ended with, *"From the response she gave me you would think I was asking her to tidy her room!"*

Not a good start for any practice session!

"Nagging points out all the things that are wrong with the person, and implies that he or she is not worthy because he or she has not done certain tasks. Nagging is a way of finding fault, and it tends to wear people down instead of build them up."

Dr Robert Myers, child psychologist.

Positive Reinforcement

After practice has taken place:

Parents can help by complimenting a direct outcome or aspect of the practice session, rather than providing blanket praise. For example:

- *Good job! And on your busy day also.*
- *I admire the discipline you have shown over the last few days, can you share some tips with me because I want to do better with my exercising?*
- *I could not help over-hearing your practising today, what patience you showed working so slowly and accurately, you must be proud.*

Parents can also help by making sure there is a timer on the piano set to the minimum length.

Teachers can help by:

- Encouraging students
- Creating a healthy sense of competition by displaying the master sheet
- Regularly spending a moment looking at each student's log and commenting on any patterns.

Incentives

The momentum of this Practice Challenge and sympathetically chosen minimum practice times (I have one student who will probably have to start at around 7 mins a day) will all help with creating a new and more positive approach to piano practice. I have a treble clef

trophy which will be awarded to the student who initiates the most sessions – you may want to consider some incentive too.

Practice skills develop faster when there is an utter certainty that tomorrow you will find yourself sitting in the same place, doing the same thing.

Today you have the power to make tomorrow slightly easier – or slightly trickier! Practising by choice results in a positive mindset, and is far more productive than practising because you were told to. Daily practice allows students to become satisfied with taking small but meaningful steps in the right direction.

By contrast irregular or ‘binge’ practising becomes pressured and end-focused. There is seemingly less time to explore and create, and from what I have seen more frustration develops. Ultimately the work is never as secure and there is a feeling of looking for shortcuts.

Practice is an art, and a rather abstract one at that, but there is one concrete and inescapable fact: we should all be doing it every day!

On that note, I am off to my piano!

Roberta Wolff

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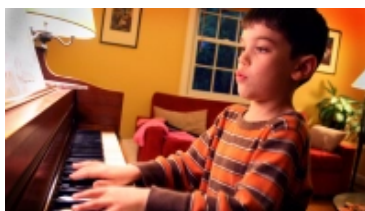
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