

# Parents Guide to Effective At-Home Practice

...as well as effective in-school & after-school rehearsals and successful performances

Dear Parent / Guardian,

This guide is meant to help you effectively assist your child during their at-home practice, which will lead to effective in-school and after-school rehearsals, which will lead to successful performances. It is not a complete overview of how to read music, effectively play an instrument, or understand the complexities of music. If you would like to learn the beginning basics of music, a good place to start would be: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/music/music-basics2>. In the meantime, here are some things that you can use to help your child in their at-home practice sessions!

Musically Yours,  
Shawn Roberts

## Understanding Staff and Measures

In music, we use **notes** and **rests** to tell us what to play. The notes are played to a **beat**. Notes go on the **staff**, which is made up of five lines and four spaces. The staff is split into sections of beats, called **measures**. **Bar lines** indicate the beginning and end of each measure. Measures generally have two, three or four beats. Each measure has a **number** and most of our music at the middle school level is broken into sections of measures using **rehearsal marks**. This information will help you to understand the process that our students are using to practice their music.

Quarter Note:  
Four per measure  
for this song

Bar Line: Splits  
staff into  
measures

Whole Rest:  
Entire measure of  
silence

Half Note: Two  
per measure for  
this song



Measure Number: Tells  
the number of the  
measure

Measure: A section of  
music containing four  
beats in this song

Rehearsal Mark: Tells  
the beginning of end of  
a section of measures

## Practicing versus Playing, Rehearsing, and Performing

There is a clear difference between practicing, playing, rehearsing, and performing. All of the major differences can be found in A *Parent's Guide to Successful Practicing*, at:

<http://practicingsguide.weebly.com/what-is-practicing.html>.

Here are some of the major points from that site:

- **Practicing** is deliberate, goal oriented, repetitive, and is focused on solving individual problems.
- **Playing** is performing music on "auto-pilot." When done without effective practice (i.e. as described below), playing only strengthens the musician's ability to make mistakes.
- **Rehearsing** is the opportunity for all instruments to come together, develop skills, solving group problems, and where students learn how to balance their individual parts with others.
- **Performing** is the culmination of all the planning, practicing, and rehearsing that took place. It is the opportunity to present the final product to an audience in a highly focused environment where students concentrate on being successful as individuals and as a part of a group within the ensemble.

Students should properly **practice** at-home to prepare for effective **rehearsals**, which, when done in an effective manner, lead to successful **performances**. Without effective **at-home practice** and **in-class** and **after-school rehearsals**, where **all students** are present, **successful performances** cannot become a reality.

## Clear Practice Targets Method - Bringing it all together to make the most effective AT-HOME PRACTICE SESSIONS

In order to make at-home practice effective, it must be deliberate, goal oriented, repetitive, and focused on solving individual problems. Effective practice must establish GOOD HABITS. The Clear Practice Targets method helps students to establish good practice habits. Here are the steps:

- **Step 1: Set the Goal.** Often, the goal is set during the in-school rehearsal and communicated to your child as their at-home practice assignment. For example, a class might be assigned measures 37-45 (indicated by rehearsal marks above) for their at-home practice.
- **Step 2: Sightread the Section.** Attempt to play through the entire section of music. If the student must stop, everytime they stop, they should pick-up right where they stopped and continue until they have played the entire section.
- **Step 3: Breakdown into Single Measures.** Breakdown the music into single measures. If an entire measure cannot be played, break it down further until the entire measure can be played. Repeat the measure until it can be played correctly at least three times in a row. If a mistake is made (even on the third time), the student must start over and play it correctly three times in a row (again). Do this for every single measure and do NOT move on until the entire measure can be played correctly three times in a row.
- **Step 4: Put Measures Together.** Put measures together in twos (i.e. measures 37-38, then 39-40, and so on). Work on playing each pair of measures correctly three times in a row. Once all measures can be played in twos, put them together in fours (i.e. 37-41, 41-45). Work on playing each set of fours until they can be played correctly three times in a row. Then, repeat the process for groups of eight measures, and so on, until the entire section is learned. For our assignment, measures 37-45 is an eight measure section.
- **Step 5: Play the Entire Section and Set a New Goal.** Play the entire section correctly three times in a row. Once this is done, the student has reached their goal, and if appropriate, should set a new goal and start the process over. A new goal will always be set the next day in class until the entire song has been learned.
- **NOTE:** Once a song is learned as a class, students set their own goals to ensure that individual problems have been fixed at home and prepare for the next day's rehearsal. So, if your child tells you, "Mr. Roberts didn't give us a section to practice," ask them, "Then, what are your goals for today's practice?" If they don't have a goal, help them to make one!