

How to Practice at Home by Suzanne Dicker

Decide what time of day is best for you and your family and automatically go get your cello at that time each day.

Have everything you need by your side **especially your assignment and a notebook**. Print out your assignment from your Google Drive folder if that is easier than using it from a screen every day.



Don't ever lean your cello against a chair!

The essence of good practicing is using Practice Strategies to work on the hard spots in tiny phrases.

A sign of good practicing is not how many hours you practice but whether you get good results! My job as a teacher is to help you learn how to use your practice time at home so when you have your lesson with me, you will feel that you have made progress and you'll want to show me your progress! This is good for you and it's good for me. I can only guide your next steps if you know how to work well on your own at home.

Your **assignment** is a list of all the 'items' that I want you to practice each day. For some of them, you might only spend 3 minutes, for others you might give much more time. That is up to you.

Be disciplined enough to work on at least part of each item every day.

Any type of notebook is fine!

In the **notebook**, write the date and what time it is when you start practicing and decide what you will practice first. You don't need to start with the same thing every day, just find out what works best for you. You might want to just go down the assignment in order. When you have worked on the first item (an exercise, scale or piece) write down the time, the exact measures you practiced and what you noticed or improved. Then write the next item you will practice. Example:

Feb. 1st, 2021

6:35pm Bb scale - shifts are messy

6:40pm bars 15-20 of etude #33 - filmed it and worked on intonation slowly

6:55pm finger flexing exercises - I can feel my fingers are supple

Always bring your notebook to lessons so I can know exactly what you did which will help me offer advice.

Practice Strategies

to learn or improve a phrase:

- say finger numbers while using left hand fingers only (no bow)
- Add-a-note (start with the first note, repeat it and add the second note etc.)
- dotted rhythms (like "long, short")
- "Ready Fingers"

Are you mentally alert but calm? While practicing you need to always be thinking about what you are physically doing. It's easy to just keep playing your cello without consciously noticing what you set out to focus on. When this happens, you will not be getting good results from your practicing!



Without your teacher, you have to assign yourself specific tasks from minute to minute as you practice and you also have to supervise your own work. You can do it!

It can be helpful to pretend you have an imaginary creature who sits on your shoulder, who can talk to you once in a while to ask,

- are you focusing on what you are supposed to be doing?"
- are you getting frustrated and need to go slower or move on to something different?"

Also use your brain to think creatively



When practicing, use your imagination to help you play more musically or to help you work on a technique. If you are working on a piece of music, think up a story or images that will help you understand and express the music more beautifully. If you're working on a bow stroke, you could imagine a sport that might use the same type of body motion. Practicing is enjoyable if you use your imagination to spark energy and ideas.

Be calm.



You might want to just sit on your chair for a minute before starting to practice just to calm yourself. Tell yourself, "hey, this is a time to enjoy the sounds I can make from playing my beautiful instrument."