

Practice Games from the Suzuki Association of the Americas

“6” things a day

Pick 6 things to practice. For example—10 perfect bow holds (counts as 1 thing), some drill work on the working piece, 3 review pieces, preview for next piece.

Birthday Candle

Light a birthday candle (make some type of holder) and have that be the length of the practice session.

Music Tour

Take the student “on tour” —playing something different in each room of the house (the big tome produced in the bathroom is very exciting!), in a different place in the yard, or at different neighbor’s or relative’s homes.

Student as Parent

Let the student be the parent for one day of practice. This can have mixed blessings because a parent will often see his own behavior reflected in that of the child’s.

25 minutes = 25 cents

Practice for 25 minutes, earn 25 cents.

Recital

Plan a recital for stuffed animals, friends, family, etc. and make a program and decorate it. Practice for a week in preparation and let the child decide the pieces that will be played, what favorite cookies will be served, etc. Set up a stage and make a spotlight!

Dice

Roll a dice to determine the number of repetitions of a piece or for drill work (ex—play this section the number of times you roll on the dice.) Or, roll the dice to determine which measure to play and repeat a certain number of times. Buy a package of math dice—these dice have more sides with higher numbers.

Deck of cards

Like the dice game, only use cards. Assign repetitions to each card. Aces count as 1, face cards mean the parent has to perform the task.

Draw a name

Write the piece names on pieces of paper. Put in a hat and draw to determine piece to play and order. Or put practice item on paper (bow holds, scales, etc.)

Silly Cards

Make silly cards and let child draw a silly card as a reward. Ex—stand on one foot, stick out your tongue, sing the piece, play pizzicato. For example, if child needs to play twinkle and draws “stick out your tongue,” must play twinkle with tongue out the whole time. It’s quite amusing.

Make a video

Regularly video tape your child playing violin. You’ll be amazed at the progress they make.

Chip Game—

Use “chips” (pennies, marbles, any kind of token). Set a goal—for example, keeping thumb bent while playing piece or keeping a good violin posture for entire piece. Give child and parent 5 chips each. If child meets goal, gets a chip from parent. If misses goal, parent gets a chip. Keep playing until someone has all of the chips.

Games by Simon Horsey

Cheating Chess (or any other game!)

I like to play chess (and Cheating Chess is good alliteration) but you can adapt most two player games. Noughts and crosses (X-O) is probably the simplest game to use with young children, although you may have to get used to losing a lot of games!

The rules are simple.

- Divide the new piece or section to be learned into smaller sections (the teacher may do this during the lesson)
- The student makes their first move
- The student then plays one of the phrases. If the notes are 100% correct, they get *another* move. Note that if they are just learning this piece it is the **notes** that need to be 100% correct. They may hesitate or stop and work notes out while playing.
- The student then plays the same phrase again. If the notes are 100% correct, they move again.
- Each section is played five times. If the student gets 100% correct notes all five times... a bonus move is awarded!

This game is great for making sure students are playing with 100% correct notes right from the start when learning new pieces. It also gently gives them some early experience of playing under pressure. Each time they play correctly they are one step nearer to the bonus move so the pressure they are playing under is gradually, but subtly increased. As they progress through the week extra restrictions may be added such as 100% notes and correct timing at a certain metronome speeds, inclusion of dynamics etc.

Some people have asked me about playing the learning new pieces games for money with the students. They earn money for each time they get it 100% correct. I’m not a great fan of using money to encourage practice, because the money becomes the reason for practice, not the progress in playing. Having said that, if you were to do this I would advise making it count towards something musical such as an upgrade to their instrument, new music, CDs, an iPod or similar. The student doesn’t actually *get* the money - it is put

into the instrument upgrade fund. Additionally, to preserve the gradually increasing pressure the amount needs to go up slightly for each time the section is played correctly.

Just a minute

The aim of this game is very simple: to see how many times can you play a section with 100% correct notes in a minute when learning new pieces. This can be played with somebody timing you or on your own if you have a countdown timer on your watch or mobile

- Divide the piece or section into smaller sections
- Either set a countdown timer for a minute or, if possible, have somebody with a stopwatch to time you
- Play through a section as many times as you can *with 100% correct notes* in a minute. You can stop to work notes out if you are not sure - in fact, this is encouraged as you would lose 2 points for getting a note wrong!
- Score 1 point for each time you play correctly and minus 2 points for each time you make a mistake (that is getting even a *single note* wrong by-the-way!)
- Check your score on all sections you are learning.

There are various options for winning this game. You or a teacher can set a target score to achieve for each section, you can play against one or more friends to see who gets the highest score or you can find which section has the highest score and have a target of getting all sections to that score.

Collect the animals

For this game you need some pictures of animals printed. Eight should usually be enough. Try to pick animals your child/student likes. Use picture - not just the word written on a piece of paper. One enterprising parent said she played this with silhouettes and the student got extra points for recognising the shapes! You could also play this game with cards using a single suit or the picture cards. Anything collectable.

The aim of the game is to collect all the animals. The rules of the game are

- Divide the piece to be learned into small sections (2 - 4 bars each depending on the length of the piece)
- Label each section as one of the animals (cards, etc.) you have
- The student chooses which animal they will attempt. Once this decision is made they cannot go back and change until that animal is achieved.
- To win the animal they must play the section five times in a row 100% correctly.
- Once an animal is achieved they have to play the section 3 times in a row correctly to keep it on subsequent days. If they make a mistake during those three times the animal goes back and they have to win it again.
- Organize some kind of prize or treat (it could be animal related!) if they have all the animals at the **end of the week**. If they have them all in the middle but lose them by the end there is no prize
- Optional: They can lose an animal for each day they don't practice during the week. This is a great way to keep them working if they manage to collect them all early in the week! One of the keys to success when learning new pieces is constant review.

Playing practice games when learning new pieces helps the time go quicker and makes practice a positive experience. Having early positive experiences when practicing is essential as students progress much further and faster if they have a positive attitude to practice.

Music Practice Games by Stephanie Railsback

Learning music is a lot more fun if you can make a game out of it. Here are some music games for having fun while you practice!

On Tour

- Variety is the spice of life. If always practicing in the same room is getting boring, go “on tour”!
- Play a different song or exercise in each room of the house. Notice how different your instrument sounds in different places.
- You could even extend the tour to locations outside if the weather is nice. (Stay in the shade though. Direct sunlight is not fun for your instrument!!) Perhaps you can stop by a neighbor’s house and play them a song.

Loopy Loops

- Playing something over and over is known as a repetition or a loop. Loops are very important for training your fingers and your muscles.
- Here are ways to make your repetitions fun:
- Play each repetition while also doing a funny trick like: sticking out your tongue, standing on one foot, closing both eyes, closing one eye, doing a fish mouth, laying down on the floor, or wiggling as you play. For a bonus, see if you can do more than one of these tricks at the same time!
- For each repetition, place a random object on top of your head. See how many you can fit. This will probably look pretty silly, but with each new repetition, you get to put something new on your head. In addition to being fun, keeping things balanced on your head can be a great way to improve your posture!
- Sometimes moving to different locations makes practicing more fun. Make numbered cards and place them around the room or around the house and stand by them or on them, in order, for each repetition. Number your cards 1-5 or 1-10 depending on how many repetitions you’re going to play. Save the cards for future practicing.
- Roll one or two dice to see how many times to repeat a passage. You can also use this idea to see which song to play during review sessions. (The number on the dice equals the song number in the book.)

Music Director

- Have your parent video tape you while you play. Then, watch the video to see what improvements you can make. If you were the teacher, what would you say was good about your performance and what needs improvement?

Mr. Chips

- In this “chips” game, start with ten chips (pennies, marbles, some kind of token, or even potato chips!). You and your parent each get 5 chips.
- Set a goal. For example, keeping your thumb bent while playing a song or keeping a good violin posture for an entire piece.
- If you meet the goal, you get a chip from your parent. If you miss the goal, your parent gets a chip from you. Keep playing until you have all the chips.

Happy Birthday

- Have your parent light a birthday candle, and your practice session lasts as long as the candle burns.

Hidden Treasure

- With your mom or dad out of the room, hide your rosin, pencil, or metronome. When your parent returns, tell them what you hid. (But, don't tell them where!!) Their goal will be to find the hidden item.
- Start playing repetitions of your song. Play louder when your parent gets closer to the hidden object and play softer when they get farther away from it. Keep up this pattern until they find the hidden object.
- This is a fun way to review pieces and to practice playing different dynamics!

By Invitation Only

- Invite an audience of stuffed animals or other toys into your practice room. Quickly put them in place so they can listen to you play. Perform for them.
- You can even make a recording or video of this concert and share it with your brothers and sisters, parents, grandparents, and friends.
- This is a really good way to get ready to perform for a recital.

Five Pairs in a Row

- Find five pairs of matching cards. Line up one card from each pair on a table or on the floor. Keep the other cards.
- Each time you play through a song successfully, put down a matching card to make a pair. You win the game when all five pairs are matched.

Miscellaneous Practice Games

Envelope/Cup Game

Place a variety of envelopes out for view, but put a candy/gum/prize in one envelope. For every repetition that meets a practice goal, the student can open an envelope. You can do the same thing with inverted cups. Repetitions continue until the prize is found!

Balancing Game

- For the kids that are getting grumpy and grumbly about repetitions, I will sometimes place a random object on top of my head for each correct repetition of practice goal they complete. This sounds and looks ridiculous, but that is the whole point— the kids will do an unearthly number of repetitions just to see how many folders you can stick on your head. They will also then want to do it themselves, which will help improve posture!!

Multitasking Game

- Have the child do each repetition doing a different physical thing; sticking out tongue, closing eyes, standing on one foot, doing fishy mouth, mouth wide open, one eye closed, making rabbit face, wiggling bottom etc. For a silly bonus rep have them try to do all of the things at the same time.....

Musical Hopscotch

- After making a list of ten things that need practicing, the child tosses a pair of rolled up socks or a coin. The child hops out and retrieves the object and then plays a given goal/exercise/phrase/activity corresponding to the number. This game is time-consuming so plan accordingly. Hope you have fun.

