

Print Version - [Click here](#) to return to the normal view

# Finding and Scheduling Practice Time: Tips for Students

By [hornworld](#) • January 16, 2013 • [Print-Friendly](#)

With the beginning of the spring semester underway, now is a great time to evaluate your practice regimen. The following tips are geared towards college music students, but I use them when planning out my own practice schedule. Finding practice time requires that you be 1) organized and 2) motivated to improve. If you have these two things, you might be surprised at how much *quality* practice time you can find in your day.

- **Decide how much time you want (need) to spend practicing each day.** Consult your teachers for recommendations, and be realistic about your expectations. My general guidelines are 1.5 to 2 hours a day for music education majors, and 2.5 to 3 hours a day for performance majors. Again, these are only general guidelines, and can vary depending on the student. Recitals, auditions, and other performance commitments may require a more intense daily schedule as well. If you want to increase your daily practice time, do so gradually (but consistently) over time.
- **Make a master schedule.** Include all of your responsibilities and commitments, including classes, large ensembles, small ensembles, study/homework time, work, meals, and leisure time (it's important!) Only once you've done this will you have an idea when you will have sufficient time to practice. You can use a paper schedule, smart phone app, or download a [free template](#) to make your schedule.
- **Figure out your peak practice times.** In other words, when are your energy levels highest, and when are you the most productive? Try as much as possible to schedule at least one practice session per day during these productive periods. Some of these peak times will be filled with other obligations like classes and rehearsals, which is ok. I teach in the mornings every day of the week, but I make sure to get at least an hour of playing in before my first class. Not a morning person? Then find other times which work for you. Whatever you decide, put those practice times in your master schedule (see above), and **stick to them**. Don't assume that an empty slot in your schedule will magically turn itself into practice time. You have to make the commitment by putting it in the schedule. Otherwise, "free time" often gets spent on other things like Facebook, YouTube, email, etc.
- **Don't skip meals!** I hear lots of students talk about skipping lunch or breakfast in order to be more "productive," but skipping meals actually makes you less productive because of the resulting low energy levels. Eat [healthy meals](#) more often than not, and eat small snacks throughout the day if necessary to keep your energy up. If your schedule is extremely busy, just remember that lunch doesn't have to take up an hour every day. Munching on a sandwich, granola/protein bar, or fresh fruit between classes or rehearsals may not sound like much, but it's far better than nothing!

- **Decide when your work day is going to end.** I think it's helpful whenever possible to set a firm deadline to end your work day. Some days may end later than others, but not having a "quitting time" on any given day can be a recipe for [burnout](#). This deadline helps keep me on track throughout the day, and I am actually more productive because of it. It is up to you to decide what time you will call it quits each day, but make sure you build in some time to unwind and relax at the end.

There are numerous ways to put together an effective practice schedule, but the important thing is to spend some time thinking critically about it. **Everyone** is busy, but with organization and motivation you can make the most out of a limited amount of time. Here's to happy and productive practicing in 2013!