



5 Ways to Get the Most Out of Music Lessons

These guidelines will help you to have a successful, rewarding experience learning an instrument. These are practical tips that we have discovered from years of teaching and our experiences with teaching hundreds of students each year.

1. Understand that learning a musical instrument is a long term process

The foundation of successful music lessons is the understanding that learning a musical instrument is a long term process and requires commitment. Contrary to what many people think, mastering the basic skills required to play an instrument properly can be quite a challenge. A long term commitment to consistent private lessons and practice sessions is essential when studying an instrument. Setting a practical goal at the beginning and then work towards that goal gradually is very important. A common mistake we see is when a student quits taking lessons too soon. In a world dominated by instant gratification, such as high speed Internet, on-demand TV programs and video games, music stands out as something that still requires hard work, daily effort and patience. This is probably the reason why we see a lot of students tend to quit too soon-learning an instrument isn't going to happen overnight! Once a student and their parents realize the substantial cross-discipline benefits of musical studies and make a long term commitment, the outcome will be highly rewarding!

2. Make music lessons and practicing as consistent as possible

Once the initial understanding and commitment is achieved, consistent lesson and practice sessions will be the key to a successful and enjoyable experience. In most cases, music lessons are given on a weekly basis. This will ensure a good pace is maintained for most students and a well-planned teaching schedule for the teacher. Skipping lessons will not only slow down learning and make everything more difficult for the student, but can also make detecting bad playing habits (which is very common) impossible for the teacher. As we all know, correct bad habits can be exceedingly difficult and cause much frustration to both the student and the teacher.

Consistent practicing is equally important when it comes to learning music. Anything learned in the lesson will need a good amount of repetition and practice at home before it can be truly mastered by the student. If we see individual lessons as the coaching part of playing baseball, then practice will be the actual field time spent playing baseball. We recommend that you make a practice schedule with your child and check regularly to make sure that schedule is followed.

Make Practicing Easier

As with anything, improving in music takes practice. One of the main problems with music lessons is the drudgery of practicing and the fight between parents and students to practice every day. Here are some ways to make practicing easier:

* **Time** - Set a fixed time (for example: right after school, before dinner...) every day to practice so it becomes part of a routine or habit. This works particularly well for children. Generally the earlier in the day the practicing can occur, the less reminding is required by parents to get the children to practice.

* **Repetition** - We used this method quite often when setting schedules for beginners. For a young child 20 or 30 minutes seems like an eternity. Instead of setting a time frame, we use repetition. For example, practice this piece 4 times every day, and this scale 5 times a day. The child then does not pay attention to the amount of time they are practicing their instrument, but knows if they are on repetition number 3 they are almost finished.

* **Rewards** - This works very well for both children and adult students. Some adults reward themselves with a cappuccino after a successful week of practicing. In our school we reward young children for a successful week of practicing with stars and stickers on their work. Praise tends to be the most coveted award-there just is no substitute for a pat on the back for a job well done. Some times we all have a week with little practicing, in that case there is always next week.

3. Parental Involvement

Just like any other educational activities for children, parental involvement is crucial to success. From our experience, all successful cases of music learning are supported by parental help, support and guidance. For most students, their parents' active support and involvement will make the learning experience much easier and enjoyable.

It is very important that parents communicate with their child's teacher their expectations and goals from the very beginning. This allows the teacher to make their teaching plan according to known expectations, practice time availability, etc. Communicating with the teacher regularly in terms of lesson progress and lesson preparation is another very helpful step every parent should do. This will ensure parents and the teacher are on the same page with what happens in the lesson and at home. In the case of young beginners, we highly recommend parents sit in the lessons for a period of time so that they can help the student understand and practice better at home. Last, but not the least, monitoring your child's home practice sessions can be a powerful tool.

4. Finding the right teacher for your child

As each parent knows, the right teacher can make all the difference in the world for their child! For music lessons, we find that a complimentary personality and compatible teaching style is very important. Learning music should be a fun and leisurely activity for most kids; they need to feel comfortable and get along well with their music teacher. We highly recommend parents meet the potential music teacher in person with their child before deciding who to choose. At the Bergen Academy of Music, we offer a free trial session to all new students. This trial session allows you to see how your child interacts with a particular teacher before signing him/her up for lessons.

5. Take lessons in a professional teaching environment

We believe that learning music is not just a matter of having a qualified teacher, but also having an environment that is focused on music education. A music school like BAMA offers consistency and structure that in-home lessons can not compete with. In a professional school setting, lessons are given in a learning environment and students can focus without being distracted by other things. With only ½ to one hour of lesson time per week, a professional school environment can produce better results since the only focus at that time is learning music. Students in a school environment are also motivated by hearing peers at different skill levels and through exposure to a variety of musical instruments. Also keep in mind that in a well-run music school, teachers are chosen carefully and their progress monitored regularly to ensure the absolute best quality of teaching. In our music school, lessons are not a hobby or side-line for our teachers and are treated as a very serious responsibility by all faculty members.

Have Fun!!!

Music should be something that you and your children enjoy for a lifetime. So try not to put unrealistic expectations on yourself or your children to learn too quickly. Everyone learns at a different pace and the key is to be able to enjoy the journey.