

Standard Grade guide to Performance

Regular practice is essential to achieve a good award in performance in Standard Grade.

Students should be practising a minimum of 15 minutes at least five times a week on both instruments.

Practice should start with some kind of technical warm up e.g. scales, arpeggios, lads, chord riffs etc, move in to the main practice session and conclude with a play through.

Play through and practice are not the same things.

Most students sit down and 'play through' their pieces a few times. They start at the beginning and play through until they make a mistake, then they go back to the beginning and play through again. This is a complete waste of time and achieves nothing other than reinforcing that you have a problem in the same place each time which is not being addressed.

Practice

To practise is to work on a bar, phrase or section which needs perfected, be it the rhythm of a section, or the melody of a section, the harmony of a section, or the phrasing or dynamics, or articulation (staccato or legato), or on piano maybe one hand only, or on chord guitar changing from one chord to another over and over, or on voice checking the pitch of a few notes or checking the pronunciation of a few syllables. Go over the tricky section slowly, listening carefully and checking that it is being played exactly as written. Once you have corrected it at the slow tempo, gradually increase the tempo until it is at the required tempo. (On piano try putting the two hands together before increasing the tempo.) If at any time during this process it goes wrong then reduce the tempo until you can play it perfectly. Never go back to the start and play through at this stage

Once you have perfected the bar, phrase or section which needed perfected then add in the bar or phrase before and play through what was the tricky bar or phrase and add in the bar or phrase afterwards. Once this has been achieved at the correct tempo then you can go back to the start of the music and play through the whole piece. If any other mistakes occur, follow the practice routine again.

This is what proper practice is and the most effective and efficient way to use your valuable practice time.

Play through

Play through should only happen when practice is complete. Use play through as a reward for hard practice. If you have spent 15 minutes practicing the first section of a piece, then complete your practice with a full play through of the piece learned so far.

Always try to leave your practice on a success. Never leave a piece when you are having trouble with a particular bar or phrase or you will dread coming back to it next time.

There is no substitute for real practice – you are only fooling yourself!