

Practice Tips

Our SmartMusic tests are not meant to be done in an instant. It is very unusual for someone to get a 100 percent in one take. The assignments are meant to be practiced.

There is a really good movie about practicing called Tackling the Monster: PRACTICE by Winton Marsalis. You may have seen this on TV. Marsalis offers 12 things to consider about your practicing: 1.) Seek out private instruction, 2.) Write out a schedule, 3.) Set Goals, 4.) Concentrate, 5.) Relax and practice slowly, 6.) Practice hard parts longer, 7.) Play with expression, 8.) Learn from your mistakes, 9.) Don't show off, 10.) Think for yourself, 11.) Be optimistic, 12.) Look for connections.

There are some obvious things on the list that SmartMusic can help you to do.

Relax and practice slowly (number 5)....

The best plan for really learning new music is to start with a speed you can do well. SmartMusic can slow the music down for you. Look for a little window that has a 2 or 3 digit number in it. Lower that number to a speed you can do well. Run through the music at that speed several times, then bump the speed up 1 or 2 beats, then practice it several more times and bump it up again if you are doing well. Keep repeating the process until you get up to speed. THIS COULD TAKE WEEKS (and that's OK!) When you are setting goals and planning your schedule, plan your time for this kind of practice carefully.

Practice the hard parts longer (number 6)....

To be really effective, spend time on the new and harder parts of your music. This makes sense. If you have a problem spot, figure out the problem spot. Sure, you can run through the easy stuff, but make that the reward time for a job well done. Have you thought about making a practice loop of the tricky part? It's a good idea and SmartMusic can do this, just use the loop button and pick your start and stop measures.

Learn from your mistakes (number 8)...

Use the assessment feature to analyze what you are doing. Is there a spot where you always make a mistake? Is it always the same mistake? What do you need to do differently there to fix it? What do you need to look for so you don't do that mistake on a different piece of music? The red and green notes in SmartMusic can give you lots of clues. It also takes intense concentration (number 4 anyone?) to be on time with the right note.

Play with expression (number 7)...

Have you listened to the recording? What did you think about your use of dynamics? Does the volume change or is it always the same? How is your articulation coming across? Is this tempo the right tempo for you?

SmartMusic is not the same as getting private help that Mr. Marsalis is talking about. You still need to seek someone out, but it will help with many of the other things about practicing that are so important. Use SmartMusic to make the practice time more productive.

Not sure how to use SmartMusic? Check out their videos at: http://www.smartmusic.com/support/default.aspx?page=page6_4