

Creating a Practice Journal & Blocked and Spaced Practice

Autumn 2023

Materials needed:

Autumn 2023 *Piano Inspires Kids*

Piano or keyboard

Writing Utensils (e.g. pencils, pens, colored pencils, markers)

Notebook or Journal

Creative materials (e.g. stickers, highlighters, washi tape)

Timing device (e.g. phone, tablet, watch, stopwatch)

Objectives:

- To create and consistently write in a practice journal.
- To experiment with blocked and spaced practice.

Lesson Plans for Creating a Practice Journal:

1. Read the article “How To Create a Practice Journal” on pg. 3 of *Piano Inspires Kids* with your students, or ask them to read it at home before arriving at your studio.
2. Ask students to bring a notebook to their lesson or group class that will serve as their practice journal for the year. Writing utensils and other creative materials can be supplied by the student or teacher.
3. Guide your student to create their first entry in the practice journal. Begin with:
 - a. The student’s name, grade, and age. They can decorate this page during the lesson/class or at home with pictures, stickers, or other creative items.
 - b. The date of the first practice session.
 - c. The assignments to be practiced at the first practice session.
4. Provide examples of journal entries.
 - a. Some students might not know what to write or be too shy to put their thoughts about practicing on paper, especially if they know someone else will be reading them.
 - b. Consider using lesson time to practice and create the first journal entry together to model expectations for home use.
 - c. Provide examples for ideas and inspiration such as:
 - My left hand in measure 15 is still too loud. I practiced it with a *staccato* touch like my teacher asked, but I think I need to practice it more in my next practice session.
 - I memorized my piece! I’ve been working hard on it and think I’ll be ready for the upcoming recital.
 - It’s difficult to play triad inversions with both hands. Today, I just practiced moving from root position to first inversion. I will add the second inversion triads tomorrow.
5. Assign practice journal entries for each day your student practices during the week. Encourage them to create entries in words, pictures, or in any other creative ways that inspire them!

Lesson Plans for Experimenting with Blocked and Spaced Practice:

1. Read the article “Reader Poll: Is It Best to Practice in One Block of Time or in Several Small Sessions?” on pg. 17 of *Piano Inspires Kids*.
 - a. Talk with your student(s) about how they practice at home:
 - Is there a specific time they practice?
 - Do they practice all at once or several times throughout the day?
2. In their practice journal, create a schedule for the week.
 - a. If a student typically practices in one block of time, look at their schedule and identify days that would allow for several smaller practice sessions.
 - b. If they already practice in several small sessions, identify days when they can extend their practice into a longer block of time.
3. Write a reminder in the journal to practice with a timer. It may be tempting to fall back on old habits and practice for a shorter or longer period of time than intended!
4. Ask students to write their thoughts about blocked and spaced practice in their journal throughout the week.

Assignments:

1. Go through your student’s practice journal at the next lesson or group class.
 - a. Read through their entries and ask:
 - which type of practicing they preferred,
 - if their practice plan changed for any reason,
 - their thoughts on continued use of blocked/spaced practice.
 - b. If this activity is part of a group class, have students share their thoughts with others in the class.
2. Go to kids.pianoinspires.com/submit and have your students vote for their favorite type of practice. Results will be printed in the Winter 2023 issue of *Piano Inspires Kids*!



More Teacher Resources from the Frances Clark Center:

Articles:

- [What Does Research Tell Us About the Learning Process?](#) - Suzanne Schons
- [Driving Practice Home](#) - Shirley Penzi

Webinars:

- [Off to a Good Start: Promoting Success in the New Teaching Year](#) - Marvin Blickenstaff
- [Music Cognition: Patterns, Prediction, and Practice](#) - Sheryl Iott

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