

On behalf of my colleagues, please know that we are thrilled that you have entrusted us to help to guide you toward your goals as a musician. We are totally vested in your growth and development--not only as players and scholars, but also as human beings. Most of us went into this line of work because of the reward associated with mentoring students. It is a real privilege to watch you as you figure things out, as you stub your toe, as you clear a difficult technical hurdle, as you resist the urge to toss your instrument down the stairs and as you develop your own voice as a thoughtful creative artist. As you travel through your academic career at UGA, please know that the faculty and staff of the School of Music stand not behind you, but rather beside you as you make the journey. YOU are the reason that we are here, certainly not the other way around.

For the past few years, I have given a talk to the brass area on day one, covering some tips on being an effective student of music. The suggestions are fairly universal, whether your goal is to perform or to teach. I would like to share them with you today.

1. Take your classes seriously. Theory, Ear-training and Music History provide you with the tools to understand the language of music and your mastery of these subjects WILL help you play your instrument better. If you have had a math course beyond algebra, music theory should present no problems, as it is structured in a very systematic way. Ear-training will help you learn what you need to hear, whether you are playing your instrument or standing in front of an ensemble. Music History will equip you with the tools to approach your interpretations from informed perspective and will give you the insight needed to play and conduct with style. Just like your Math or Organic Chemistry class, if you need extra help, all you have to do is ask is ask your professor or TA! I think my colleagues would agree that we all use what we learned in Theory, Ear-training and History on a daily basis.

2. Listen to as much music as you can! Spotify is fantastic. The Naxos online music library is a great resource, as is our incredibly complete music library. A hard, but not impossible, goal is to spend the same number of hours listening that you spend practicing everyday. Listening to music and familiarizing yourself with a broad spectrum of music is where your REAL musical education will take place. Strive to be relevant by knowing music outside of your comfort bubble. Ska, Bop, Grunge, Hip-hop, Klezmer... these are not just great dog names... try to know a little of everything!

3. Learn and know your scales and arpeggios, as they are the building blocks of western music. They have not changed in some time now, and the word on the street is that they will not be changing anytime soon! Realizing that virtually everything that you play is constructed with scales and arpeggios will make mastering your instrument exponentially easier.

4. Schedule your practice time as though it were a class and make yourself a tough attendance policy. Success in music, like anything else in life, is dependent upon disciplined and persistent effort. Hard work will trump talent any day of the week. The world is filled with incredibly talented people who never reached their potential because they were undisciplined. Each of you has the power to positively affect the climate of music at the School of Music, simply by doing what needs to be done in the practice room. It is really cool to not suck... Daily practice will help you to appreciate your potential and your ability to improve.

5. Go to concerts! There is no substitution for listening to live music—every performance you hear provides you with the opportunity to learn something about your own performances. A good friend of mine put it this way: “It is the next best thing to being under the podium.” Whether you will teach or perform, you will spend the rest of your life evaluating performances and diagnosing the strengths and weaknesses of what you hear. You will develop this skill much more quickly if you are going to concerts. Do NOT go to 10 concerts in the last week of the semester! Compulsory listening yields no results. If you love music, attending at least one concert a week should not be a chore!

6. Embrace what technology has to offer us in developing as musicians. Rhythm and Pitch are the two empirical truths in music--- either they are right or they are wrong. Don't look at your metronome and tuner as though they are nagging you that you are not good enough—learn to make chamber music with your Dr. Beat and learn to look at your tuner as the teller of truth. **RECORD YOUR PRACTICE!** Almost every one of us has this neat little computer in our pocket 24 hours a day and we choose to use it to post funny pictures of cats on Facebook or to take pictures of our food. Use your phone, a digital recorder like a Zoom, or your laptop to record your practice. It will double, if not triple your pace of growth and will enable you to become your own teacher. Don't just nod when your teacher suggests this... Do it!

7. Be curious! Strive to know the repertoire for your instrument. Practice something every day that is NOT part of your lesson assignment for the week. Read ahead in an etude book or check out some music from the library. This will help your sight-reading skills immeasurably. I've never met a great musician who was not also a great sight-reader! Like everything else, sight-reading improves the more you do it! Strive to be a comprehensive musician, not just a jock on your instrument!

8. Play with your peers! Form a chamber music group or play duets with a peer as much as you can. Chamber music empowers each of us to make musical decisions without the input of a director, which is a critical skill. Playing chamber music will also help grow your ears in a dramatic way.

9. Be serious about your pursuit of excellence. Set the bar high and work hard to be the best that you can be. Music is an extraordinarily competitive field—remember that there is always someone somewhere that is working harder than you are and someday you will meet them at the audition or the interview. You owe it to yourself to be the best musician that you can be. You will only be a great band director if you are first a great musician.

10. Know that every great musician in the world still considers himself or herself a student of music. Wynton Marsalis is a music student. Evelyn Glennie is a music student, as is Yo Yo Ma, Simon Rattle, Kathleen Battle, Emmanuel Ax and Lil' Wayne. Make lifelong improvement and lifelong learning your goal. When the great cellist Pablo Casals was asked why, at the age of 93, he continued to practice three hours a day, he said "I'm beginning to notice some improvement." Use this blessing of an opportunity that you have as a full-time music student to your advantage. Your hard work will pay off in the end!

The last thing that I want you to consider as you begin the year, is what each and every one of you can do to create a higher culture of music at the School of Music. Our students and faculty are as strong as just about any other school in the United States and, remarkably, both groups get stronger every single year! The difference between us and the X School of Music or the University of Y is not nearly as great as you might think. What we have not yet achieved at UGA that those other schools already have, is a climate where hard-nosed serious work by ALL of the students is the norm. Where the attitude is "we are here to get something done". How can each of you help to move the ball forward in this regard?

It is cool to care. It is cool work hard. It is cool to watch your peers accomplish great things. It is cool to over-achieve. It is cool to have pride in your work and it is REALLY cool to feed off the collective energy of a colony full of worker bees. Together, we can make the Hugh that colony of worker bees, that colony of budding creative geniuses. Remember, only in the dictionary does success come before work.

Have a great year. Work hard. Play hard. Make these the years that you will remember, for all the right reasons. Go Dawgs!