

We tell our students to go home and practice.  
**Do they know how?**

**Dr. Charles Laux**  
Lassiter High School,  
Cobb County School District





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# What do students actually do when at home?

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“Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude.”

*- Zig Ziglar*

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# Teacher Survey About Student Practice

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I wanted to answer these questions:

- ❖ Do most of my students practice regularly?
- ❖ Do my students have everything they need in order to practice at home?
- ❖ Do my students set practice goals and know what to practice?
- ❖ Do my students know and utilize a variety of practice strategies?
- ❖ Can I grade my students on the **amount** of practice they complete?



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# Student Practice Habits Survey

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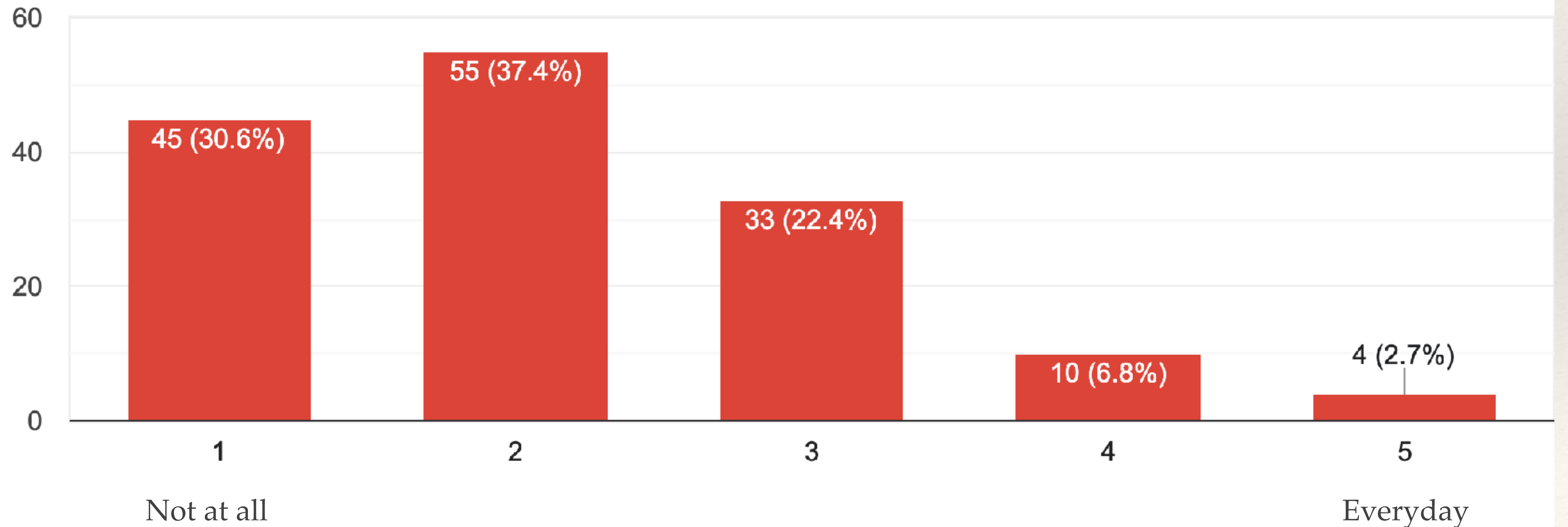
- ❖ Beginning of the semester (kids are motivated)
- ❖ ~150 high school students
- ❖ Among 4 levels of orchestras (from remedial to elite)
- ❖ Anonymous (an attempt to get the most honest responses)



# Student Practice Habits Survey

I practiced my instrument over the summer.

147 responses

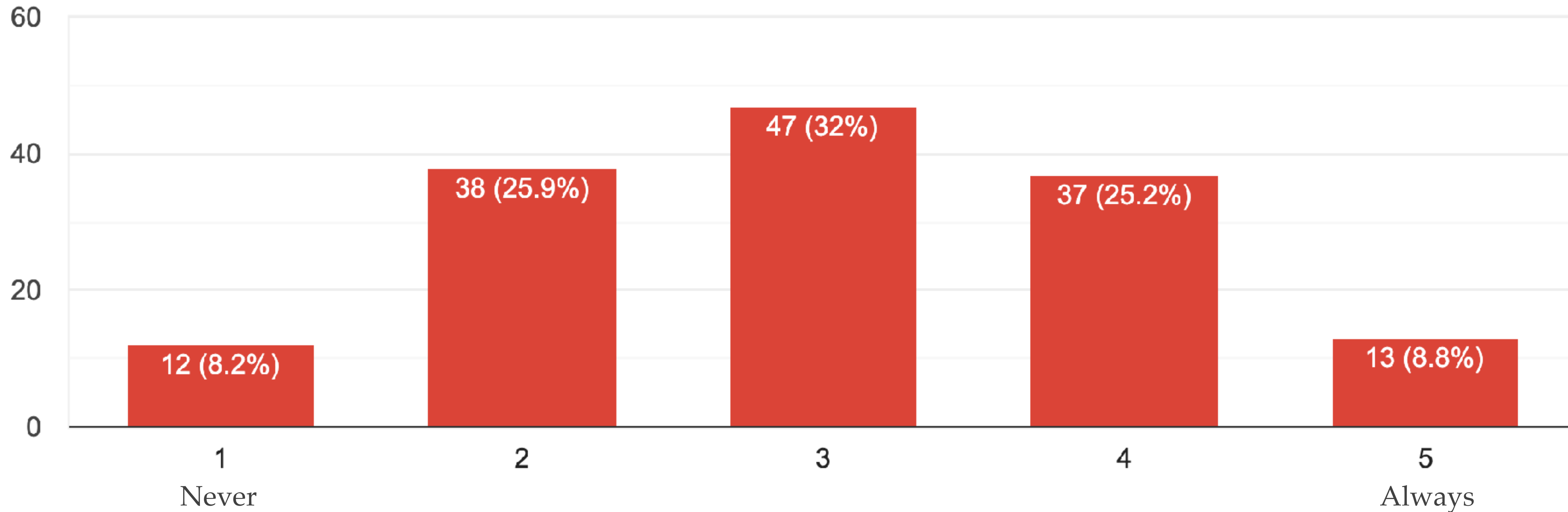




# Student Practice Habits Survey

During the school year I practice my instrument regularly. (at least every other day)

147 responses

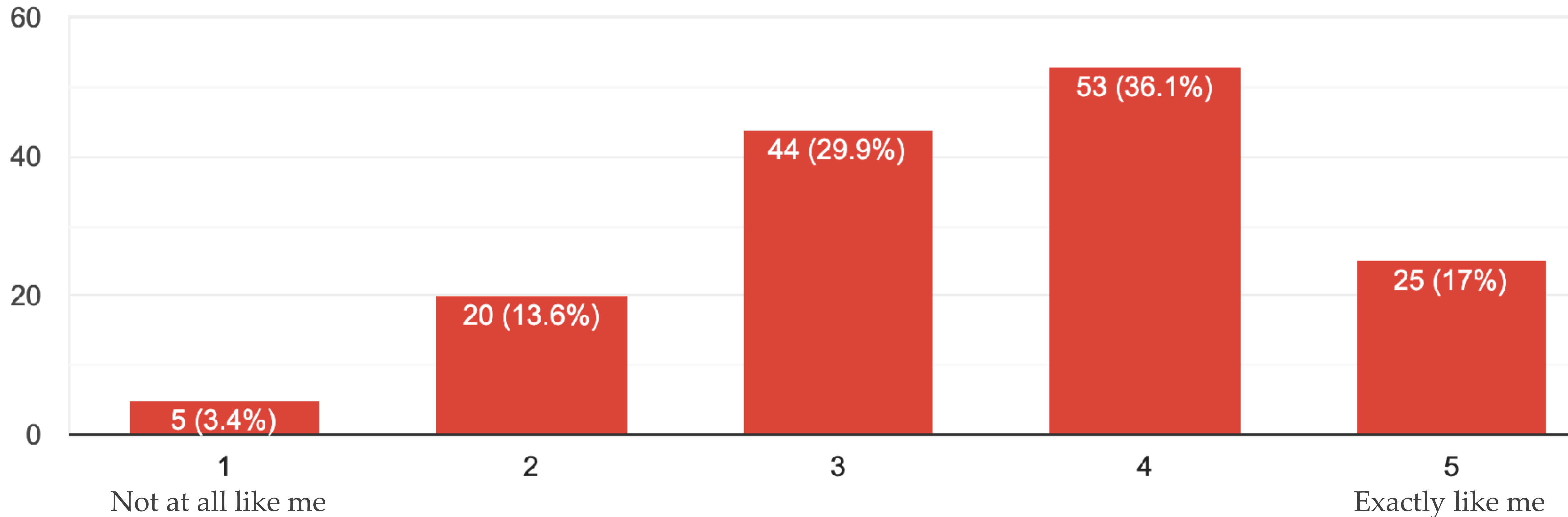




# Student Practice Habits Survey

When I practice, I set goals and am methodical about the time I spend.

147 responses

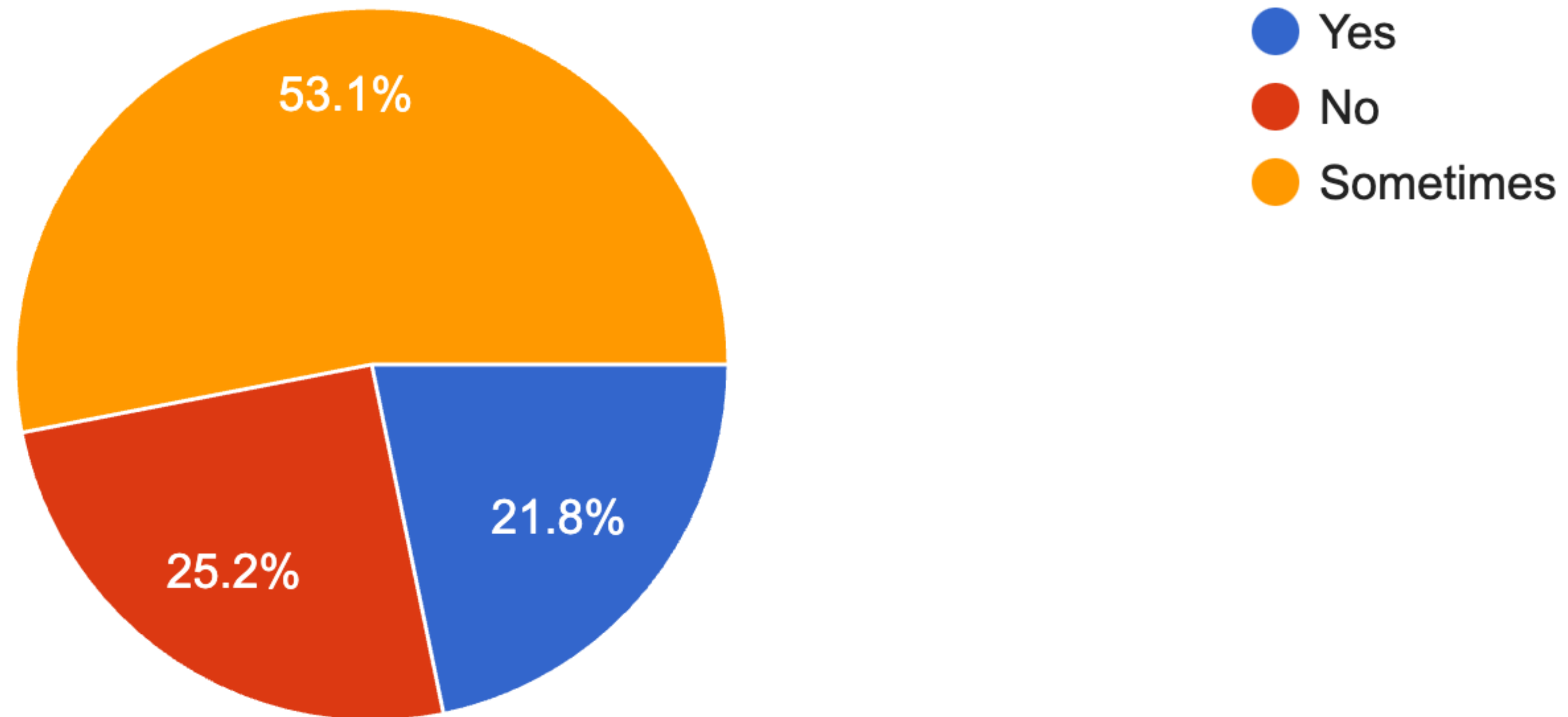




# Student Practice Habits Survey

I keep to a regular practice schedule during the school year.

147 responses

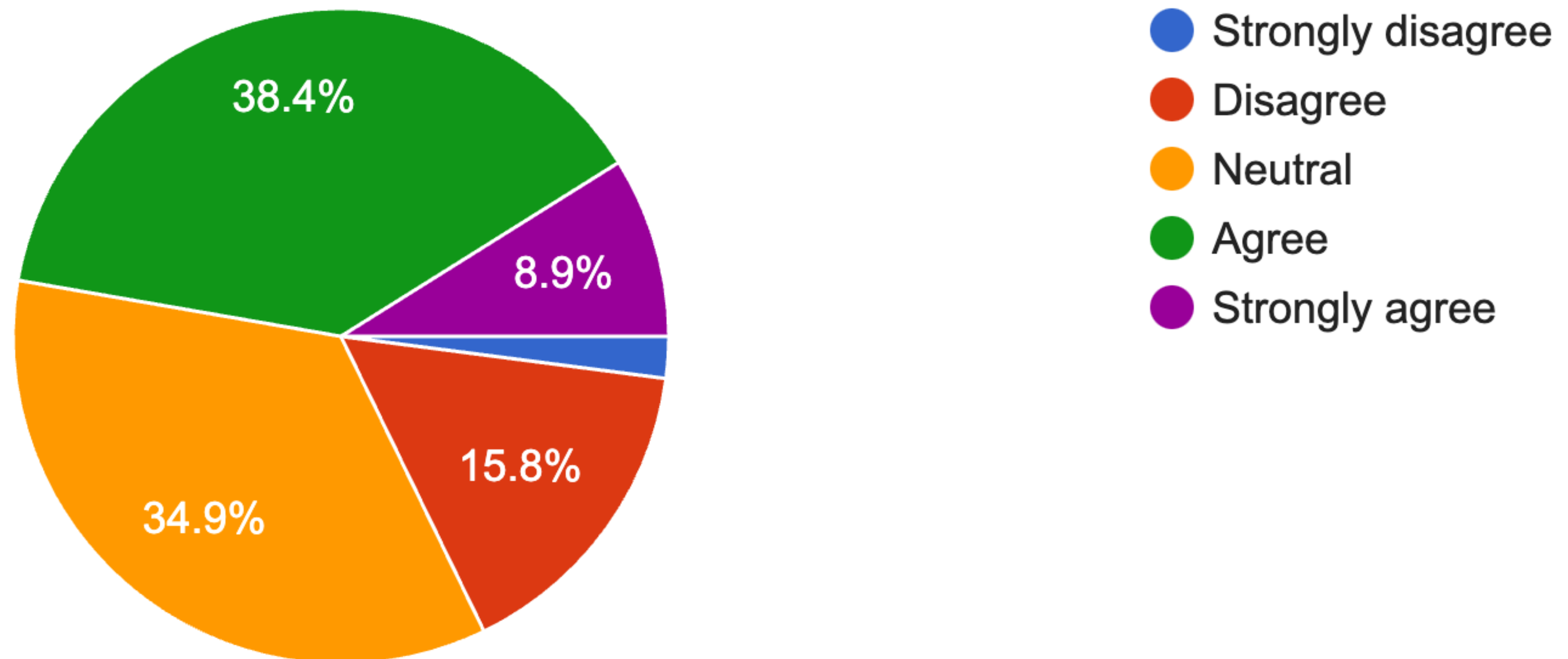




# Student Practice Habits Survey

I feel like I can learn my music in class without practicing at home.

146 responses





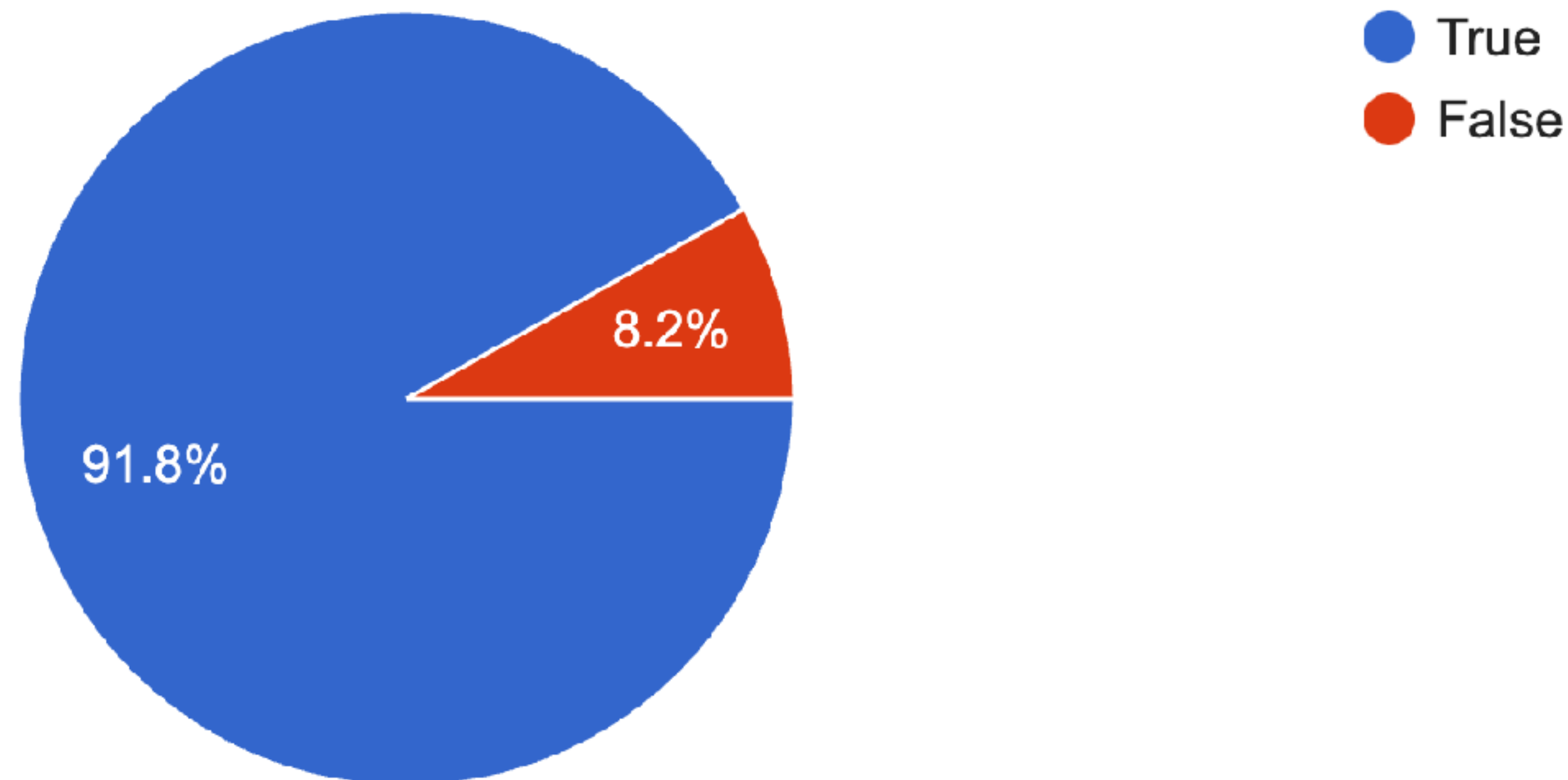
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# Student Practice Habits Survey

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I have everything I need in order to practice at home. (instrument, bow, accessories, music stand, a quiet place - free of distractions)

147 responses

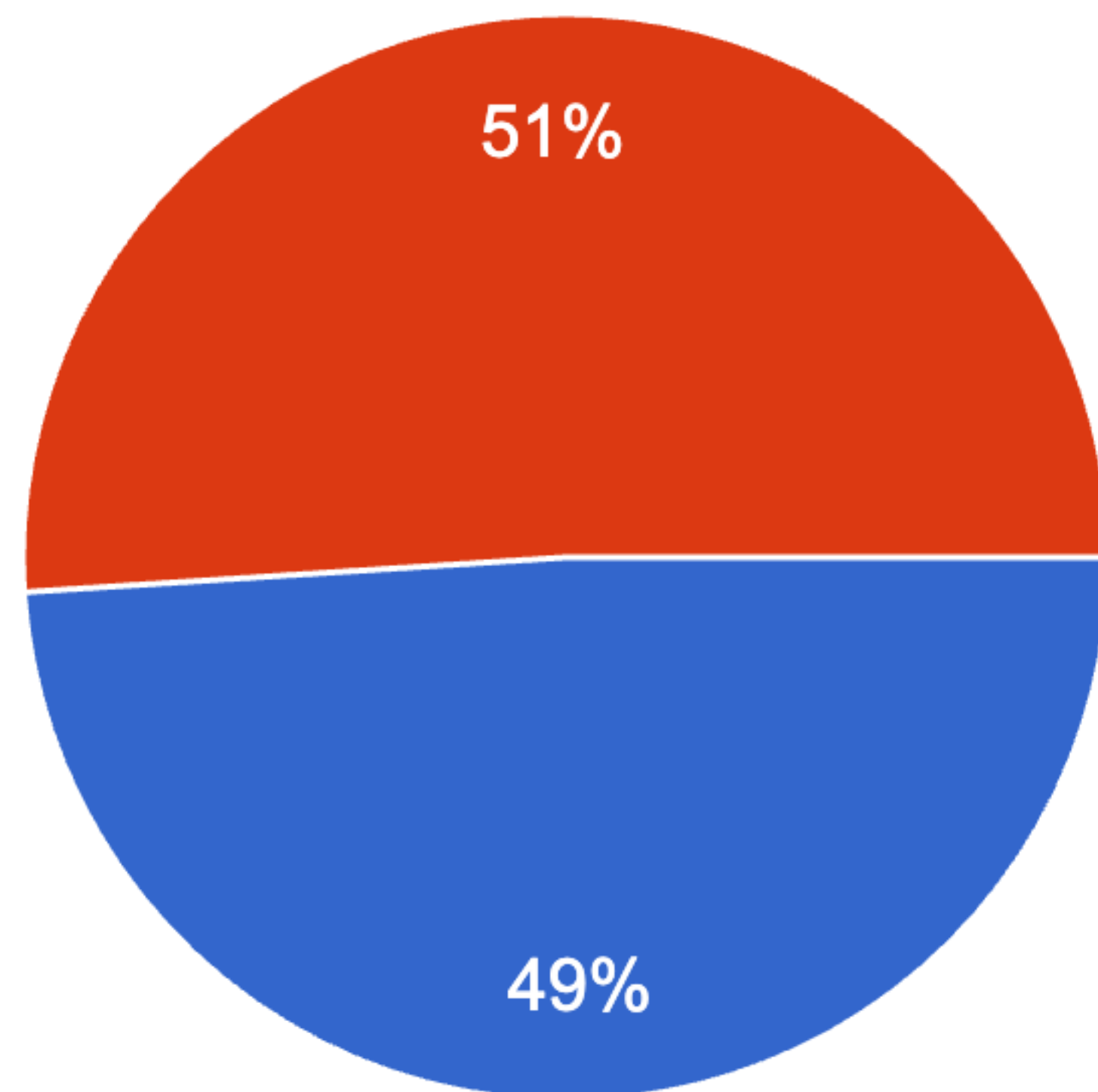




# Student Practice Habits Survey

My practice is deeply meaningful to me; I seldom feel bored.

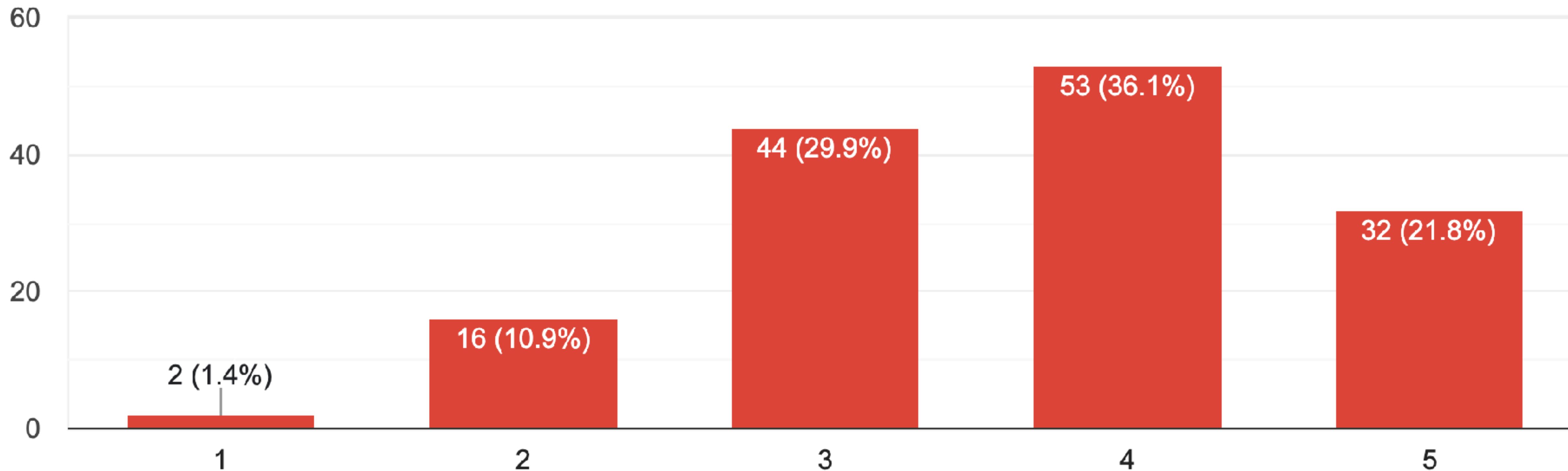
147 responses



# Student Practice Habits Survey

I feel that I understand a variety of practice strategies to help making my practice more efficient

147 responses

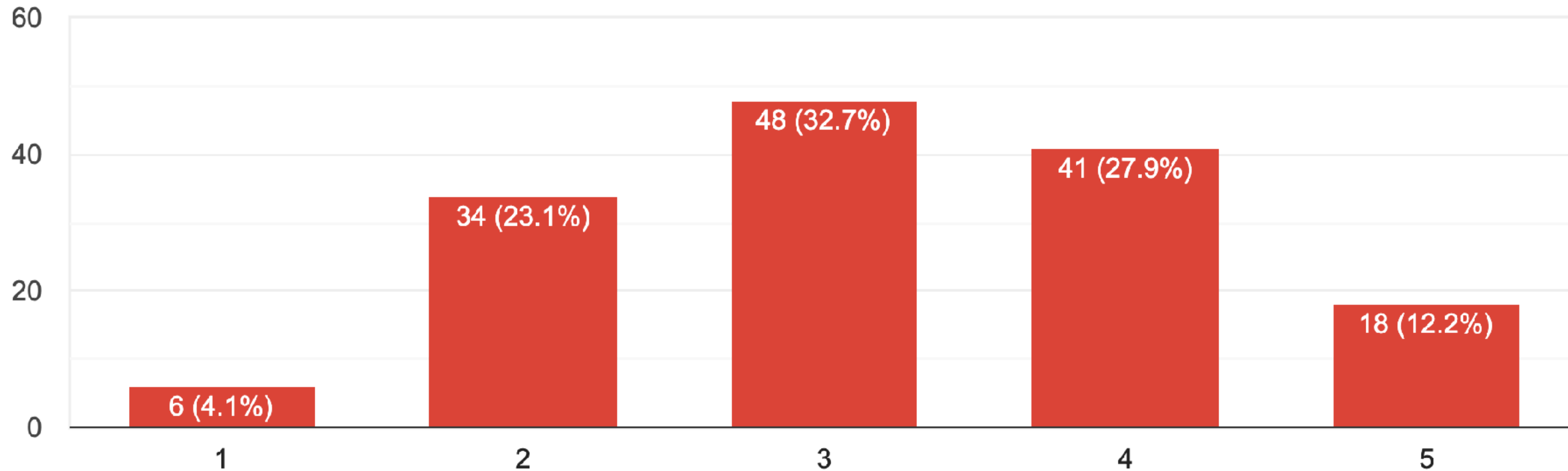




# Student Practice Habits Survey

I set detailed goals before beginning to practice.

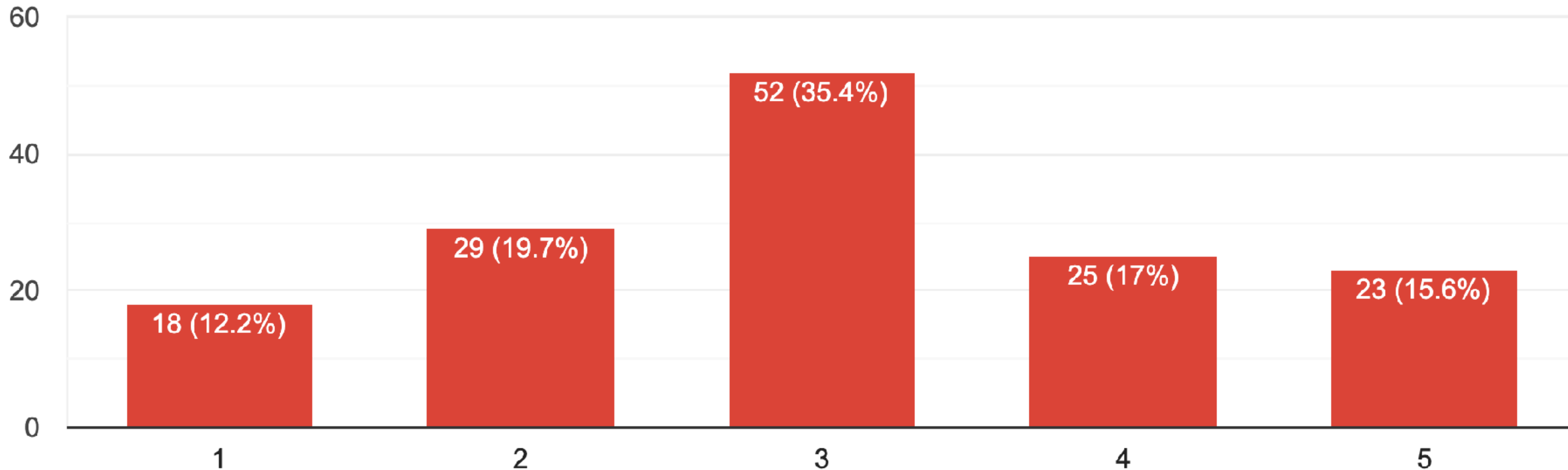
147 responses



# Student Practice Habits Survey

I feel it would be good to earn a grade on my practice time and effort.

147 responses

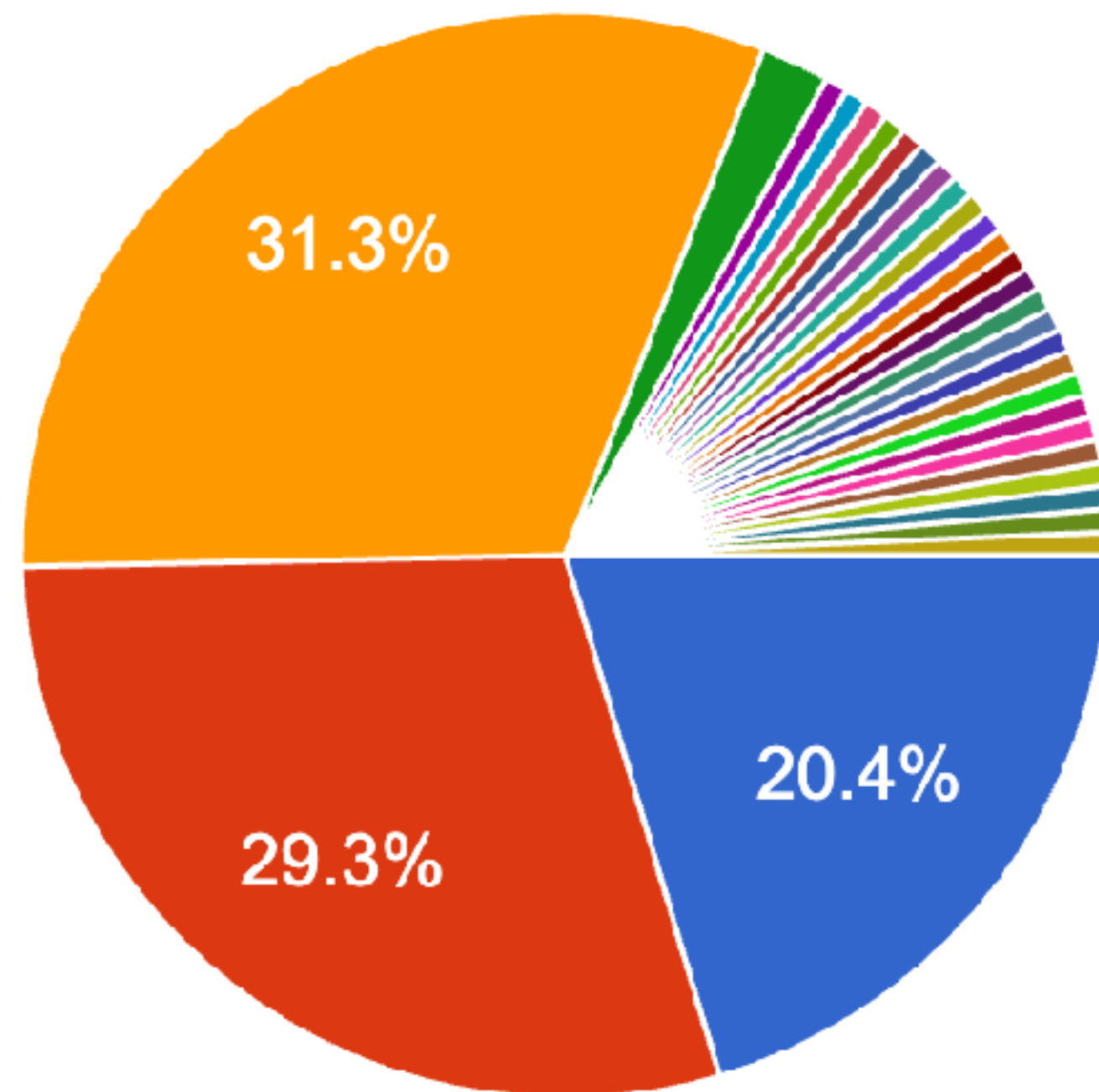




# Student Practice Habits Survey

What MOST motivates you to practice?

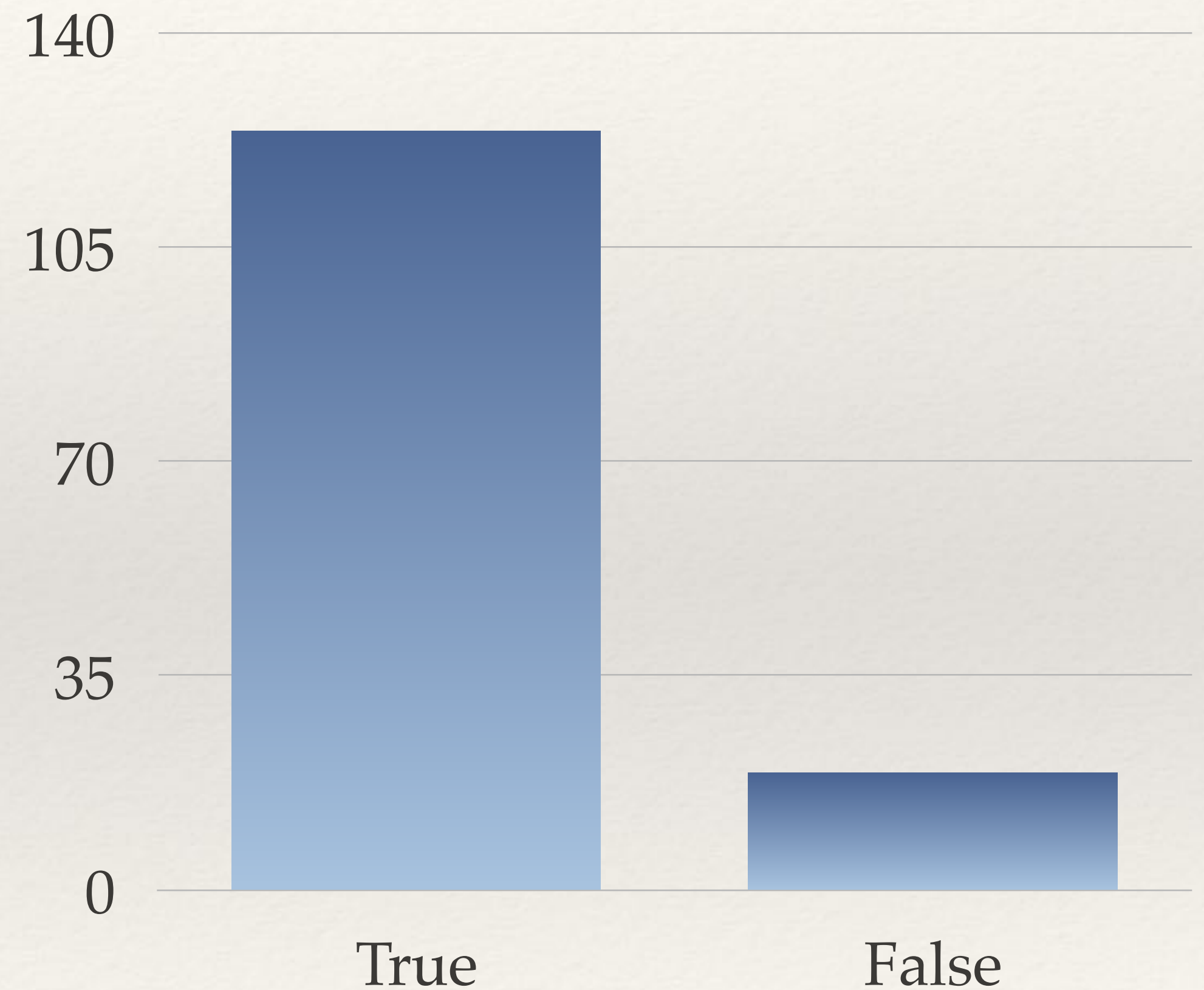
147 responses



- A playing check/test (grade)
- To be prepared for rehearsals
- Fear of being singled out for not being...
- All of the above
- When I don't understand something in...
- to get better at my instrument
- So I can get into chamber. Also not let...
- All of those answersahaha

# Student Practice Habits Survey

- ❖ I can learn my music securely and efficiently.



**Most students who marked FALSE said they like to hear the music first.**

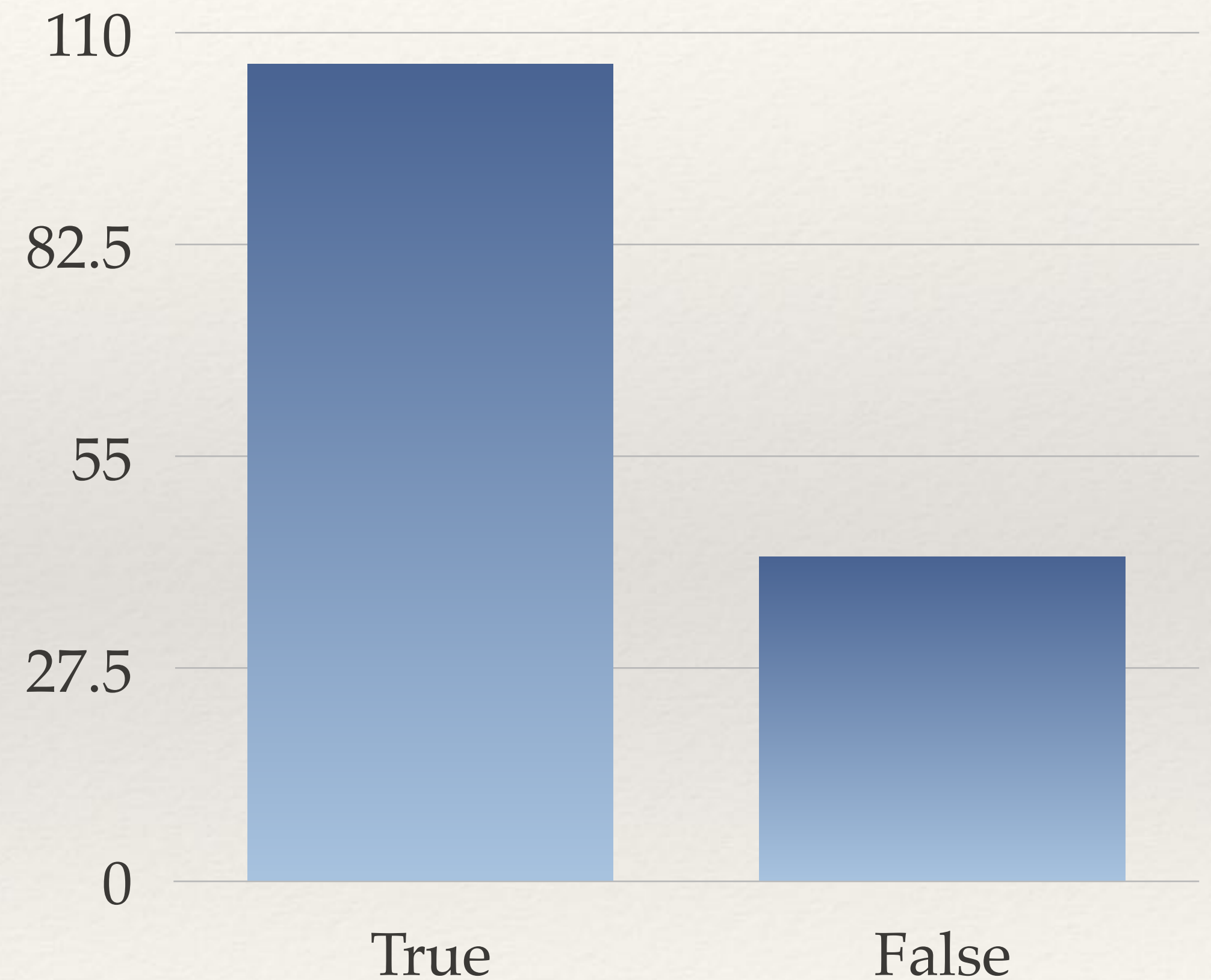


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# Student Practice Habits Survey

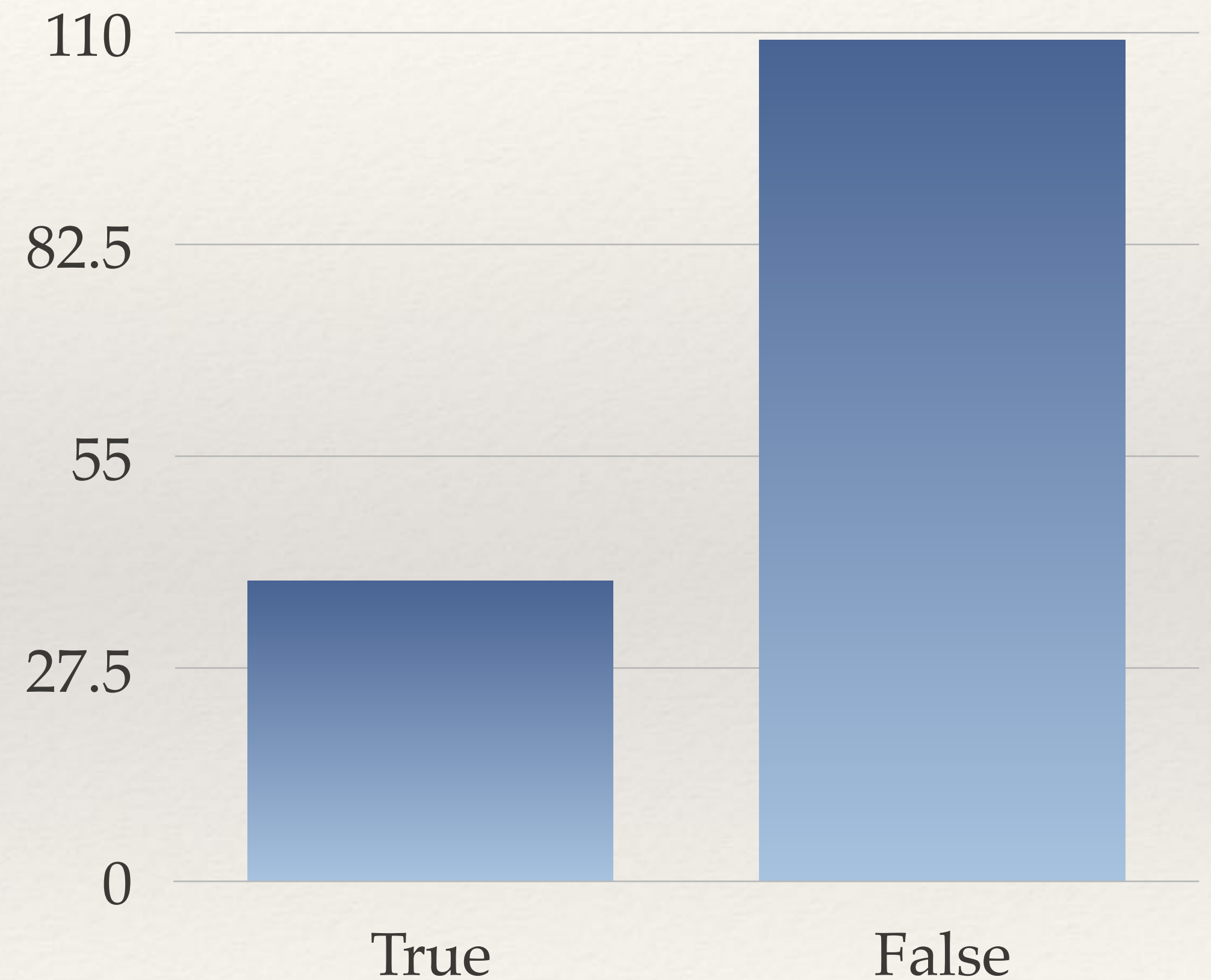
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- ❖ I use specific strategies to solve musical and technical problems.



# Student Practice Habits Survey

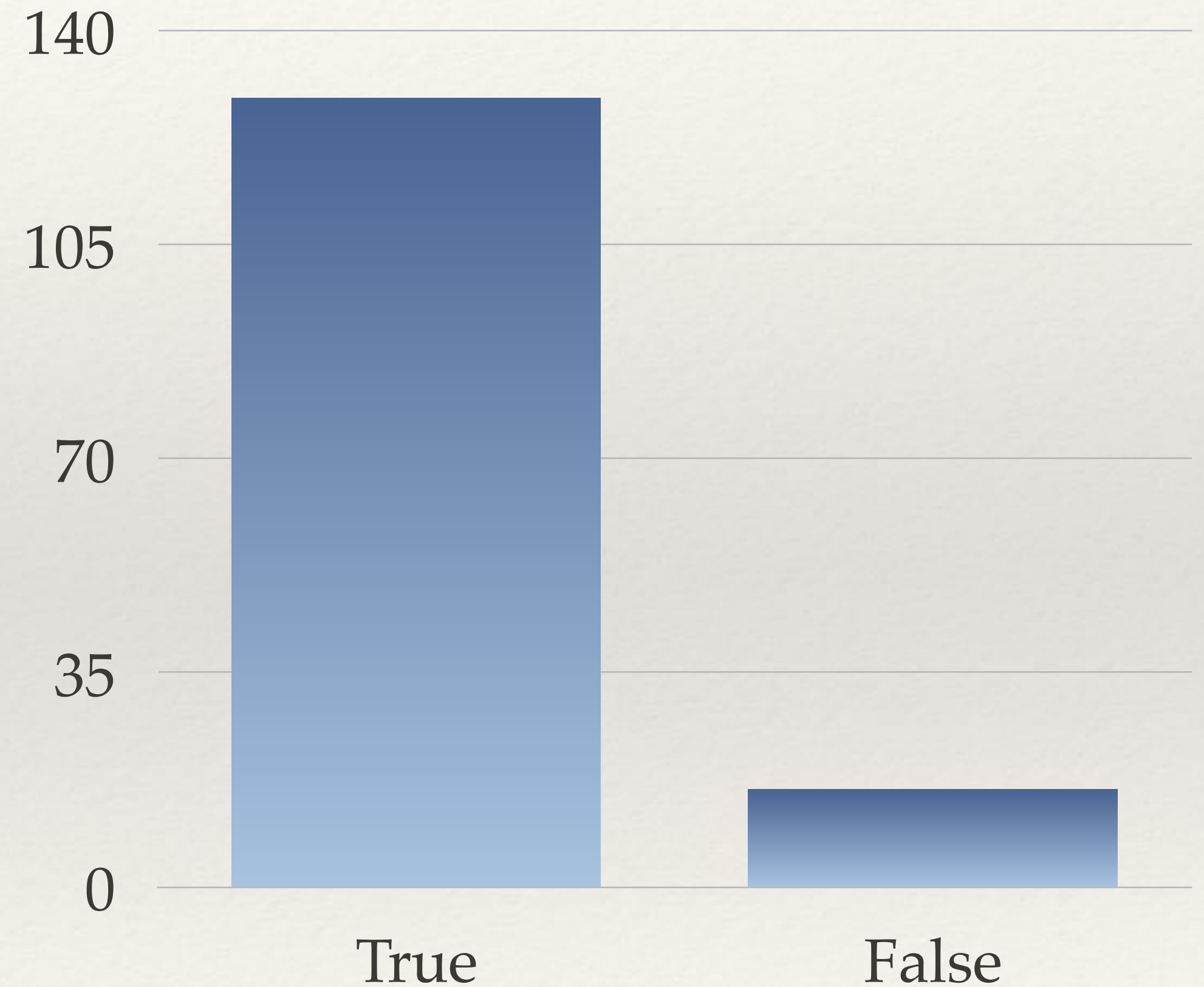
❖ I routinely practice sight-reading.





# Student Practice Habits Survey

- ❖ I feel like I understand how to practice so that I can perform confidently.







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# Essential Items Every Student Needs

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- ❖ Adequate space
- ❖ Privacy
- ❖ Adequate lighting
- ❖ An uninterrupted, quiet environment
- ❖ Chair
- ❖ Music Stand
- ❖ Pencil
- ❖ Tuner & Metronome (free apps!)

## Highly encouraged:

- Instrument stand or wall-mounted instrument hanger
- Mirror



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# Why do we need to think about HOW to practice?

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- ❖ Students are usually only concerned with the outcome, not the process
- ❖ Students don't naturally know how to practice
  - ❖ Students generally practice incorrectly and can develop bad habits



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# What do students do? (Bad habits)

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- ❖ Start a new piece near the performance tempo
- ❖ Slop through getting half of the notes correct
- ❖ Go back to the hard spots, slowing only a little
- ❖ Repeat mistakes in the hard spots, developing bad habits. The brain “learns” mistakes and the psyche allows mistakes to happen.

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# Klickstein's Five Practice "Zones"

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- ❖ New Material
- ❖ Developing Material
- ❖ Performance Material
- ❖ Technique
- ❖ Musicianship

From *The Musician's Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, and Wellness* by Gerald Klickstein



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# Planning Practice

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- ❖ New Material
- ❖ Divide into sections
- ❖ Establish a plan
- ❖ Slow Down!

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# Developing Material

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- ❖ Refine interpretation
- ❖ Increase tempo
- ❖ Memorize, if possible



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# Performance material

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- ❖ Practice “performing”
- ❖ Maintenance of learned material
- ❖ Renew and innovate

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# Technique

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- ❖ Scales
- ❖ Arpeggios
- ❖ Vibrato



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# Musicianship

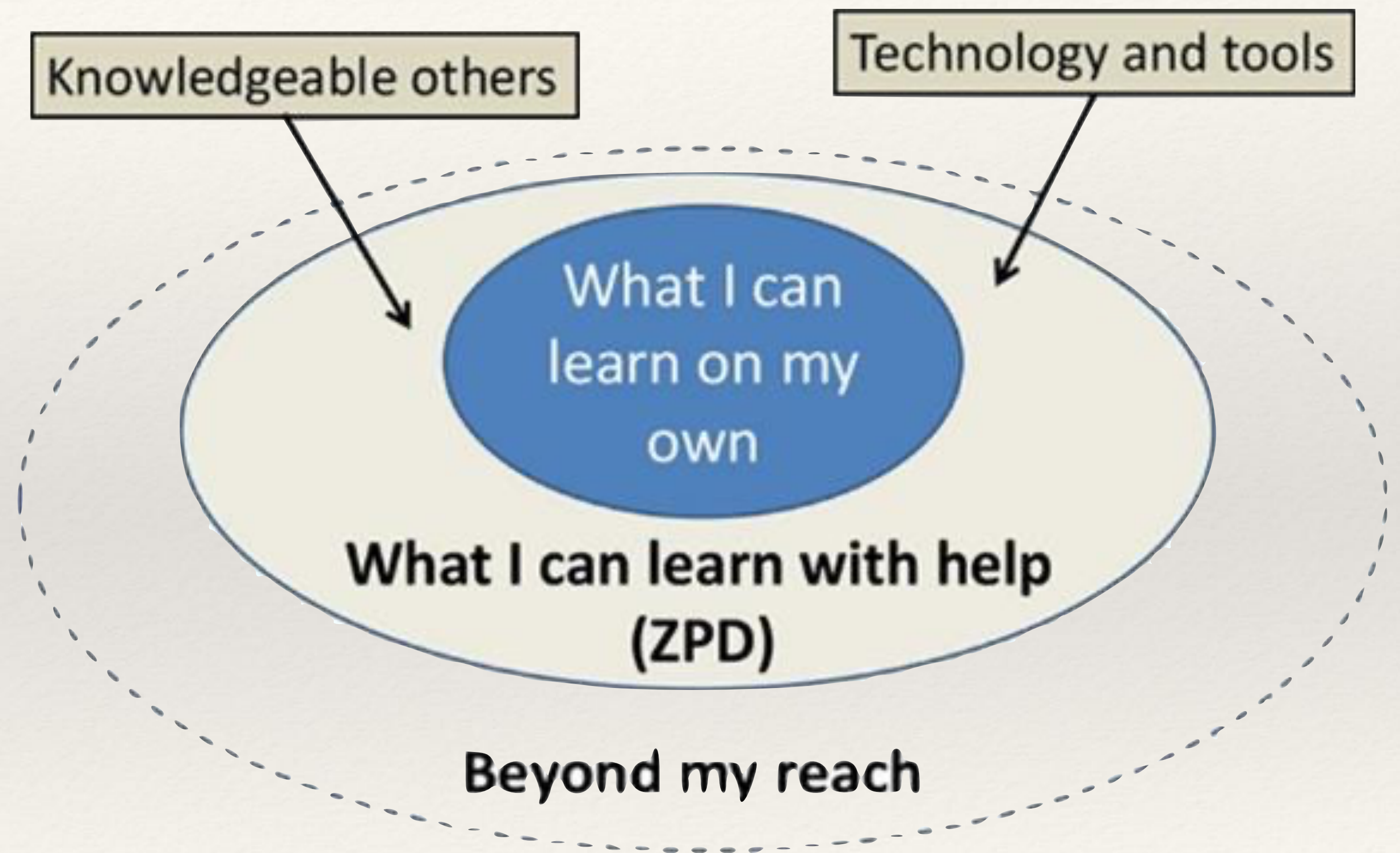
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- ❖ Listening - create YouTube playlists for each class
  - ❖ Students need a MODEL!
- ❖ Sight-reading
- ❖ Theory
- ❖ Ear Training
- ❖ Improvisation



# Avoiding over programming and finding the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

- ❖ Is your music too difficult? If so your students may feel as if the end goal is unattainable.
- ❖ We must provide students with experience that will be positive. Attainable goals are very important. We want to have our student reach, but there is a limit.





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# Time is the enemy; progress is the goal

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- ❖ Students are crunched for time more than ever.
- ❖ Students need to be able to make good use of their time. Most of the time, this must be TAUGHT.
- ❖ “If you are practicing and sound really good, you are practicing the wrong parts”
- ❖ “Are you SPENDING TIME with your instrument or PRACTICING your instrument?”

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# Playing vs Practice

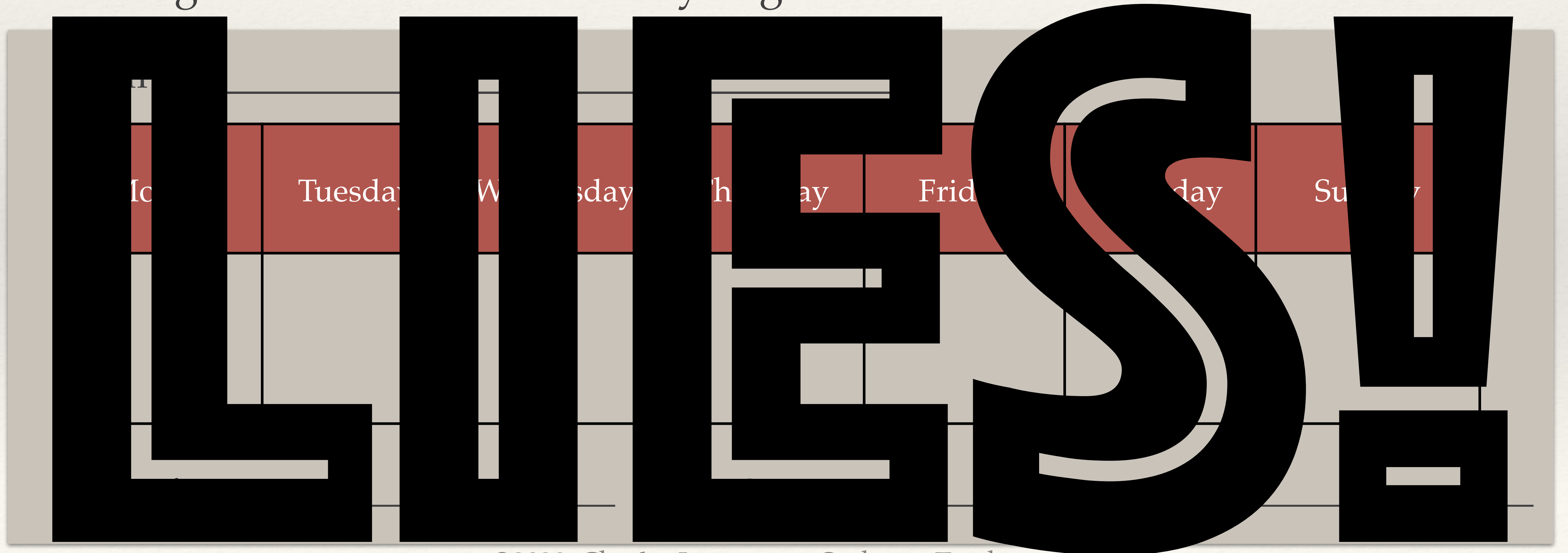
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- ❖ Attitude is important.
- ❖ Playing is great, but that's not practicing.
- ❖ Turn a portion of a rehearsal into a mini-practice session (for everyone).



# Practice Logs/Assignments

- ❖ Logging of minutes doesn't promote healthy practice
- ❖ Forcing "minutes" can have many negative effects



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# Building good habits

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- ❖ Building good takes time and breaking bad takes time.
- ❖ The Power of Habit: 1. Cue, 2. Routine, 3. Reward
- ❖ Cue starts the habit, Reward motivates to continue
- ❖ One study states that building a good habit of everyday behaviors took an average of 66 days.
- ❖ Practicing must be scheduled. Are you a morning person? Night owl?



Practice Strategies...

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# “Slower is Faster” strategy

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- ❖ We all play too fast!
- ❖ Start with a tempo that will allow near perfection on the **first** try.
- ❖ The first play through can be compared to the first sled run on freshly fallen snow. On subsequent runs, you will follow that original path.
- ❖ Going slower is actually the faster way to learn!!



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# Identify

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- ❖ Identify problem areas prior to practicing.
- ❖ Write in music, bracket problem areas.
- ❖ Loop learned problem areas.
- ❖ Brain and muscles need consistency and repetition for success

# Backwards practice

- ❖ This strategy is perfect for descending passages, generally harder to grasp technically, and hearing descending intervallic relationships.





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# Find repetitive sections

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- ❖ Save time!
- ❖ Identify repetitive areas and don't re-practice them
- ❖ Can help students understand certain forms.
  - ❖ Sonata-Allegro Form - Exposition, Development, Recapitulation
  - ❖ Rondo Form - A, B, A, C, A, D, A, E, etc.

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# Eyes Close & Play Softer

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- ❖ Close your eyes. Play small passage with sheet music in view, then play it without it.
- ❖ Repeat
- ❖ Also, playing softer can help students relax and shift focus more to memorizing and internalizing.



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# Audio Recording

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- ❖ Self assessment
- ❖ Address: tone, intonation, rhythm, articulations, adherence to set tempo, phrasing
- ❖ Listening to recordings helps students better understand how they really sound.
- ❖ “Microphones don’t lie!”

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# Record Video

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- ❖ Check posture, bowing technique (bow hold, bow angles, etc.), left-hand technique (position, shifting, vibrato, etc.)
- ❖ Video can be slowed down and analyzed.
- ❖ Use the slow-motion features of your phone



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# Write it down!

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- ❖ Pencil on stand at start of each rehearsal or practice session.
- ❖ Students should mark:
  - ❖ Tempo markings for practice and performance
  - ❖ Key signature changes / mistakes
  - ❖ Fingerings / shifts, etc.
  - ❖ Phrasing (length, climaxes, etc.)
- ❖ Stop and mark music immediately. Don't wait!
- ❖ Mark music BEFORE practicing (phrasing, etc.)



# Rhythmic Variation

- ❖ Change rhythms to create short “bursts of speed” and place the “faster” parts between different notes

From *Practicing with Purpose*  
by David Kish

The image displays three musical staves, each showing a variation of a rhythmic exercise in 4/4 time. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The exercise consists of a sequence of notes: G2, A2, Bb2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, Bb3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, Bb5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6, A6, Bb6, C7, D7, E7, F7, G7, A7, Bb7, C8, D8, E8, F8, G8, A8, Bb8, C9, D9, E9, F9, G9, A9, Bb9, C10, D10, E10, F10, G10, A10, Bb10, C11, D11, E11, F11, G11, A11, Bb11, C12, D12, E12, F12, G12, A12, Bb12, C13, D13, E13, F13, G13, A13, Bb13, C14, D14, E14, F14, G14, A14, Bb14, C15, D15, E15, F15, G15, A15, Bb15, C16, D16, E16, F16, G16, A16, Bb16, C17, D17, E17, F17, G17, A17, Bb17, C18, D18, E18, F18, G18, A18, Bb18, C19, D19, E19, F19, G19, A19, Bb19, C20, D20, E20, F20, G20, A20, Bb20, C21, D21, E21, F21, G21, A21, Bb21, C22, D22, E22, F22, G22, A22, Bb22, C23, D23, E23, F23, G23, A23, Bb23, C24, D24, E24, F24, G24, A24, Bb24, C25, D25, E25, F25, G25, A25, Bb25, C26, D26, E26, F26, G26, A26, Bb26, C27, D27, E27, F27, G27, A27, Bb27, C28, D28, E28, F28, G28, A28, Bb28, C29, D29, E29, F29, G29, A29, Bb29, C30, D30, E30, F30, G30, A30, Bb30, C31, D31, E31, F31, G31, A31, Bb31, C32, D32, E32, F32, G32, A32, Bb32, C33, D33, E33, F33, G33, A33, Bb33, C34, D34, E34, F34, G34, A34, Bb34, C35, D35, E35, F35, G35, A35, Bb35, C36, D36, E36, F36, G36, A36, Bb36, C37, D37, E37, F37, G37, A37, Bb37, C38, D38, E38, F38, G38, A38, Bb38, C39, D39, E39, F39, G39, A39, Bb39, C40, D40, E40, F40, G40, A40, Bb40, C41, D41, E41, F41, G41, A41, Bb41, C42, D42, E42, F42, G42, A42, Bb42, C43, D43, E43, F43, G43, A43, Bb43, C44, D44, E44, F44, G44, A44, Bb44, C45, D45, E45, F45, G45, A45, Bb45, C46, D46, E46, F46, G46, A46, Bb46, C47, D47, E47, F47, G47, A47, Bb47, C48, D48, E48, F48, G48, A48, Bb48, C49, D49, E49, F49, G49, A49, Bb49, C50, D50, E50, F50, G50, A50, Bb50, C51, D51, E51, F51, G51, A51, Bb51, C52, D52, E52, F52, G52, A52, Bb52, C53, D53, E53, F53, G53, A53, Bb53, C54, D54, E54, F54, G54, A54, Bb54, C55, D55, E55, F55, G55, A55, Bb55, C56, D56, E56, F56, G56, A56, Bb56, C57, D57, E57, F57, G57, A57, Bb57, C58, 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# Use your voice

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- ❖ You don't have to have a good voice!
- ❖ Internalize pitch, rhythm
- ❖ Inflection / Phrasing
- ❖ Articulations
- ❖ If you start kids singing early, they won't think it is a big deal.

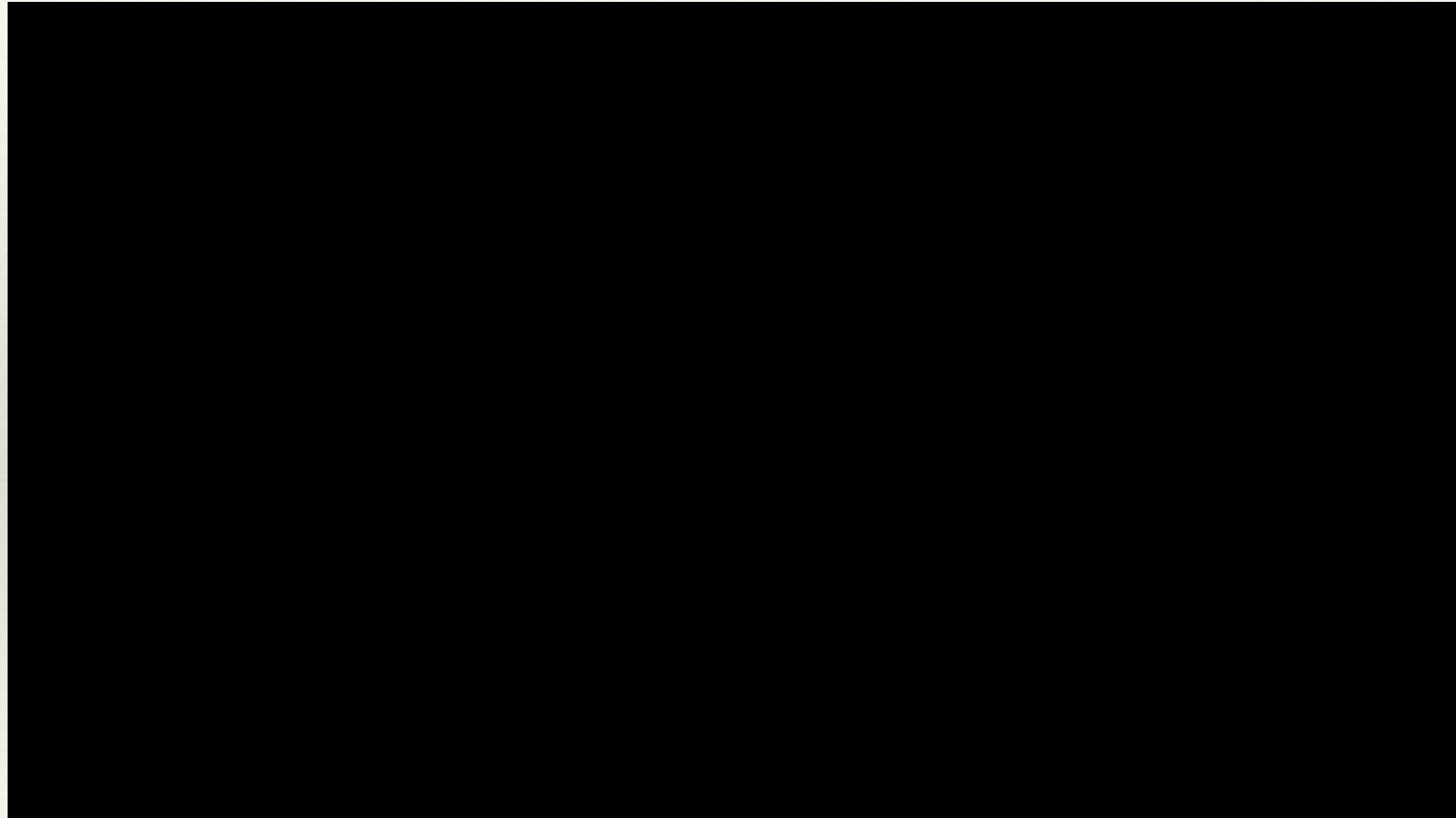


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# Shadow Bow / Air Bow

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- ❖ Isolate skills
- ❖ Eliminate left hand
- ❖ Sing through while bowing





# Find a Model

- ❖ Have students search and find a great model to follow.
- ❖ Find on social media, YouTube, etc.
- ❖ Become obsessed with that person and their music-making
- ❖ Or compare two or more models and have students determine what they like better in terms of sound, vibrato, etc.



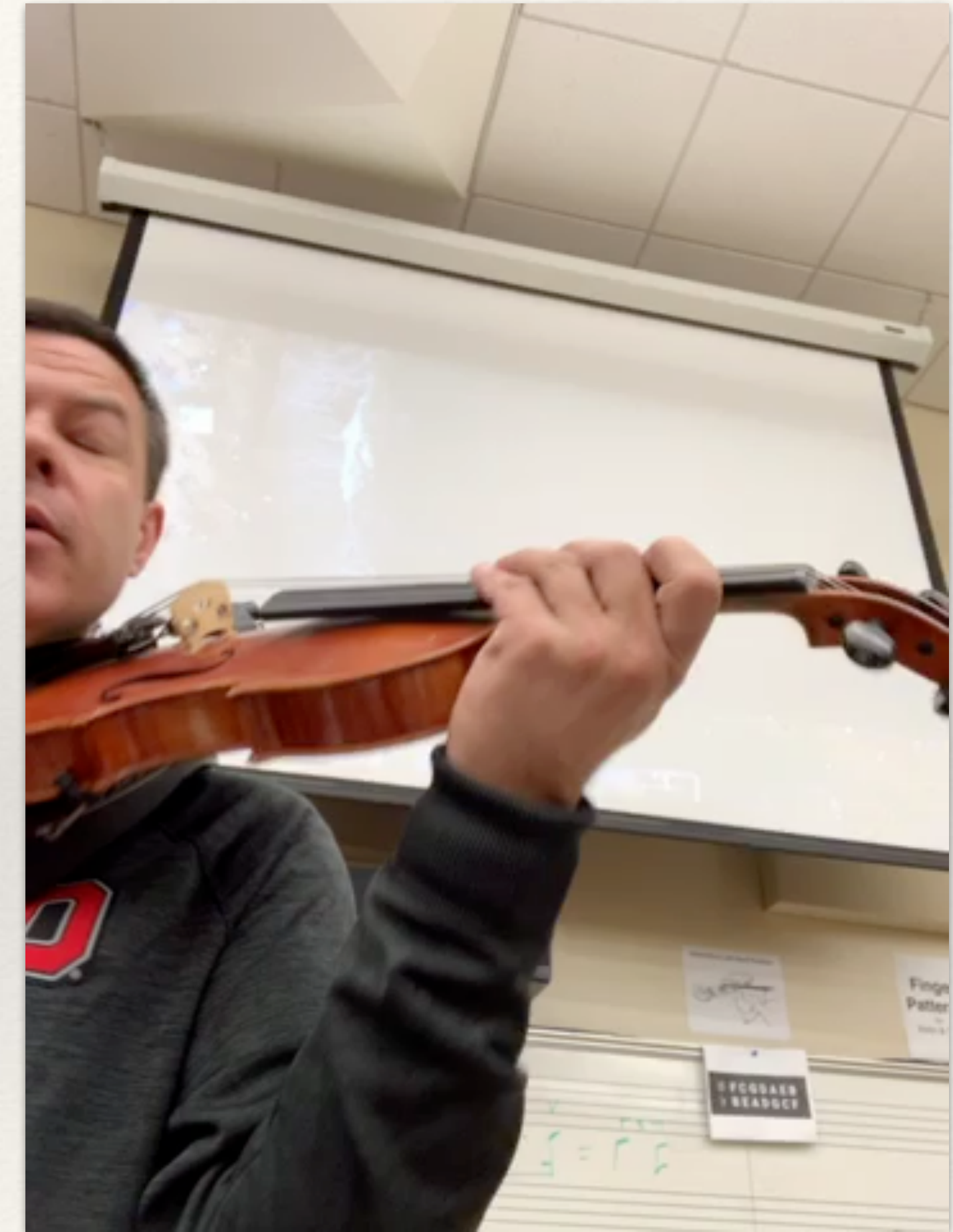


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# Model for your students

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- ❖ Teacher provides a live model for students
- ❖ Teacher record video of excerpts and post for students to use during home practice
- ❖ Post to YouTube or Google Classroom
- ❖ Handy when students are absent



**Demonstration of finger patterns for violin/viola**



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# Back to basics

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- ❖ Remove all markings from music and play, then slowly add back in
  - ❖ Slurs
  - ❖ Ties
  - ❖ Articulations

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# Attack of the Drones!

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- ❖ Use drones during scales & arpeggios and other warm-ups
- ❖ Encourage students to use drones to tune passages
- ❖ Have all sections play a drone or teach them various chord changes to play while another section tunes
  
- ❖ Students need a frame of reference of what to listen for!
- ❖ Develops relative pitch and listening for overtones



# “Pizzi-arco”

- ❖ Have students play difficult arco sections as pizzicato and vice versa
- ❖ Have students isolate bowings, string crossings, whatever is problematic with RH
- ❖ Can help with rhythm, ensemble timing / attacks.





# “Target Notes”

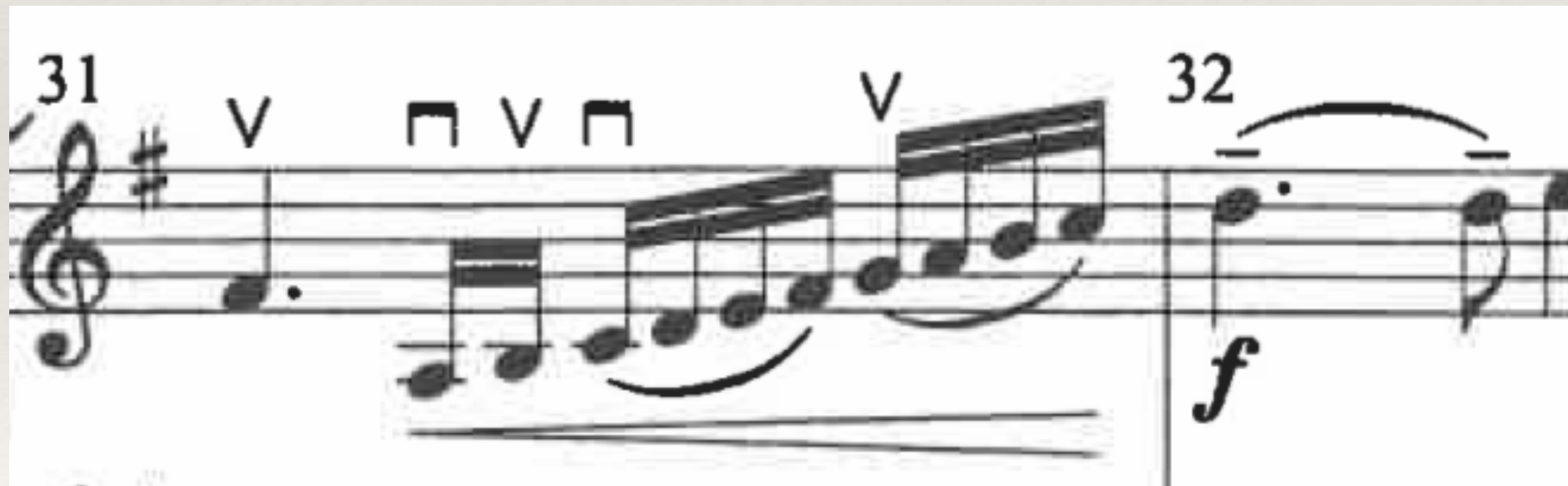
- ❖ Help student organize confusing passages by hitting “target notes” at certain points within it.





# “Add A Note”

- ❖ Show students how learn a difficult passage by building and get timing out a difficult passage.



Richard Meyer: “Spring Breezes”, Violin I





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# Favorite Practice Tools/Apps

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- ❖ **Tempo** - Metronome with LOTS of features and subdivisions
- ❖ **Tonal Energy Tuner** - Tuner / Audio Analysis, will play with pure intonation
- ❖ **Anytune Pro** - Slows down audio for analysis, exports slowed down audio
  
- ❖ **“Cello Drones for Tuning and Improvisation”** - Musician’s Practice Partner  
(Available on Spotify / Apple Music)



# *AnyTune Demo*

# Practice Journal Examples:

Practice Journal	
Date: _____	
<b>Goals for practice session</b>	<b>Performance Material</b> <i>list material and practice method</i>
<b>Fundamentals and Technique Development</b>	<b>Ensemble Material</b> <i>list material and practice method</i>
<b>New and Developing Material</b> <i>list material and practice method</i>	<b>Reflection</b> <i>list "todo" items for next session</i>

- ❖ Goals
- ❖ Performance Material
- ❖ Fundamentals & Technique
- ❖ Ensemble Material
- ❖ New & Developing Material
- ❖ Reflection

From *Practicing with Purpose* by David Kish



# Practice Journal Examples:

- ❖ Goals
- ❖ Performance Material
- ❖ Fundamentals & Technique
- ❖ Ensemble Material
- ❖ New & Developing Material
- ❖ Reflection

From *Practicing with Purpose* by David Kish

Practice Journal	
Date: Tuesday, September 12	
<b>Goals for practice session</b> <i>list material and practice method</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Increase tempo of major scales</li><li>2. Learn new etude for lesson next week</li><li>3. Work on solo</li><li>4. Get ready for rehearsals today</li></ol>	<b>Performance Material</b> <i>list material and practice method</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Work on last mvt of solo; "Phrase it"</li><li>2. Begin to memorize Solo, "Blindfold" on first two lines</li></ol>
<b>Fundamentals and Technique Development</b> <i>list material and practice method</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Warmup Routine</li><li>2. All Major Scales, "Stair-Stepper" begin at quarter=88</li></ol>	<b>Ensemble Material</b> <i>list material and practice method</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Work m. 36-48 in Symphony No. 1, "TSP"</li><li>2. Work m. 92-112 in Divertimntao, "3x Perfect"</li></ol>
<b>New and Developing Material</b> <i>list material and practice method</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Read through Etude No. 23, "Slower is Faster"</li><li>2. Etude No. 23, "Chunk It" and "Loop the Chunk" as needed</li></ol>	<b>Reflection</b> <i>list "todo" items for next session</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Scales improved, begin at 90 tomorrow</li><li>2. Etude was good, revisit "chunks" and try "Drone"</li><li>3. More work on solo memorization, maybe "Power Practice"</li></ol>



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# Make Practice Meaningful

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1. Schedule times / days to practice
2. Develop a practice plan integrating specific practice strategies
3. Practice
4. Reflect



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# What to do...

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- ❖ Don't require students to practice for a specified amount of time
- ❖ Use class time to discuss practice techniques and strategies. Students won't just figure it out.
  - ❖ Allow them to learn the material on their own after you guide them on some ways to learn it.
- ❖ Provide students with sample practice plans

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# What to do...

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- ❖ Demonstrate practice strategies during class time in rehearsal. Ask students to use it in home practice.
- ❖ Assign students to complete a journal or log and use that as the basis for grades (instead of practice minutes)
- ❖ Assign students the task of creating their own weekly practice plan on their own and use that for a grade (instead of practice minutes)



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# References - Books

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- ❖ *Practicing with Purpose* by David Kish (Meridith Music, distributed by Hal Leonard)
- ❖ *The Musician's Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, and Wellness* by Gerald Klickstein (Oxford University Press)
  - ❖ Also see companion website at: <https://www.musiciansway.com>
- ❖ *Perfect Practice* by Dan Heath



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# References - Articles

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- ❖ *Duke, R. A., Simmons, A. L., & Cash, C. D. (2009). It's Not How Much; It's How: Characteristics of Practice Behavior and Retention of Performance Skills. Journal of Research in Music Education, 56(4), 310–321. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429408328851>*
- ❖ *Henley, P. T. (2001). Effects of Modeling and Tempo Patterns as Practice Techniques on the Performance of High School Instrumentalists. Journal of Research in Music Education, 49(2), 169–180. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3345868>*
- ❖ *Miksza, P. (2005). The Effect of Mental Practice on the Performance Achievement of High School Trombonists. Contributions to Music Education, 32(1), 75-93. Retrieved January 23, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/24127237](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24127237)*



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# References - Website

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- ❖ <https://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2013/09/03/216906386/10-easy-ways-to-optimize-your-music-practice>
- ❖ <https://bulletproofmusician.com/research-tested-practice-strategies-that-will-help-you-learn-new-pieces-faster/>



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# Special Thanks

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# Contact Me!



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**@TheOrchestraTeacher**



Slides and more available at:

**[www.OrchestraTeacher.net](http://www.OrchestraTeacher.net)**