

How to get the most out of each clarinet lesson.

A guide for students and their parents
from the Liz Leehey Clarinet Studio.

The more you bring to your lesson, the more you will get out of it.

The obvious - “Practice” - is the first thing that comes to mind. Certainly, the more time you spend working on your own during the week, the further we will be able to progress in your lesson.

However, there are other things to consider in having a great lesson - whether you have practiced a lot or just a little.

Reeds.

Make sure you have several reeds in your case at all times - used reeds and also *new* reeds. If you have time before your lesson, test out a few reeds to find one that is responding well. If your reed is not working well, I will help you - but you need to have a supply of reeds with you at your lesson.

Playing on a “good” reed is an aesthetic experience that will develop your concept of sound, embouchure, air control, phrasing, etc.

Keep tabs on your reed inventory. Order more reeds *before* you are down to your last one. I regularly check in with students about this, and parents are encouraged to do the same at home.

Tell me how your week has been. When I ask you “how’s it going?” I really want to know. At the beginning of your lesson, please tell me about anything that has happened that has affected your practicing during the week: braces, illness, lots of homework, etc. I’ll adjust your lesson accordingly.

Ask questions.

If I say something that you don’t understand, please ask me to explain. Come to your lesson with questions - as you are practicing during the week, mark passages in your music that you have questions on.

Offer your opinion.

I really want to know what you think - even if you disagree with me.

Learn to be OK with making mistakes.

You are taking lessons to learn, not to be perfect. Often I will ask my students to “make mistakes” on purpose. “Mistakes” give us information to learn from - information to your embouchure, breathing, fingers, or your ears.

Be rested and well fed.

You need your brain and body to play clarinet. If you are tired or hungry, your brain and body are not going to work well. Consider this when scheduling your lessons.

It's best NOT to practice right before your lesson.

You can warm up a little to test out your reeds, but I usually tell my students not to practice the day of their lesson. If you do, you risk tiring your embouchure and not having enough endurance for the lesson. Cramming for a lesson doesn't work anyway.

Review the things that we covered during your lesson soon after your lesson.

After your lesson, take 5 minutes (maybe on the ride home) to mentally review the material covered in your lesson. This will help you retain more of what you just learned and keep it fresh in your mind for your next practice session at home.

Record your lesson.

Recording your lesson, or even part of it, can be very helpful for your practice at home. Also consider recording yourself practicing. You'll be amazed at what you hear!

Teach others what you have learned.

You'll find that you understand things better when you try to explain it to others. Get together with your friends who play instruments and play for each other.

Listen to professional recordings of your pieces.

This is easy to do since there is so much available on line now. Knowing the accompaniment part to your piece is essential to really learning and understanding the music.

Regular weekly attendance at lessons is very important.

Consistency is key for all students - children and adults. Consider this when scheduling your lesson day and time.