

Bands Shouldn't Practice. They Should Rehearse

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Perhaps the biggest impact on your live performance is how you approach practices and rehearsals. Many artists use the two terms interchangeably even though there are some differences.

Practice is usually what is done individually, it is the work that is prepares someone for a rehearsal. It's used to improve your technique, musicianship skills, and ability to perform certain pieces of music. Practising is generally better done as an individual because parts can be isolated and carefully examined without being drowned out by the band. In a plan, practice would often be considered a tactical activity.

On the other hand, a **rehearsal** is usually what occurs in a group setting – for the band to improve tonal balance, timing with each other, and learn the material in an ensemble setting. Rehearsals are usually strategic in nature because of the wider effects. In other words, it is not the place for a band member to get their individual practising done.

To make band rehearsals more effective, each band member should be practising for the rehearsal. That way, more time is spent focusing on improving the overall live experience rather than learning individual parts that should already be known.

Bands often ask how often they should rehearse. The answer will vary depending on the group, especially since most people have varying schedules and responsibilities. Most bands aim to rehearse 1-2 times per week for 3-4 hours at a time. No matter what though, band members should practice at least five days per week on their own.

My band rehearses 5-6 times per year for about 3 hours at a time. While we'd like to increase that, we're busy with 100+ live appearances throughout the year as well as our individual pursuits (not to mention the fact that we live across three cities and two states). But we do just fine because of how we approach practicing and rehearsing.

Here are 3 things to make your rehearsal more effective:

1. Plan Your Next Rehearsal

As you schedule or plan your next band rehearsal, be sure to do the following:

- **Set Goals:** Have a specific set list or list of materials to be learned. If it is a new song or cover, send the file to band members in advance so they have time to learn their parts. Remember, this time is for rehearsing, not practising.

- **Send a Schedule:** Send a schedule and reminder to the band. If you want time set aside for writing, auditioning a new member testing equipment, or whatever else, put it in the schedule so people know exactly what to expect.

2. Rehearse Like a Live Show

In almost every professional arts organisation, the rehearsal leading up to a performance is known as the dress rehearsal. It's a full-scale production that is supposed to replicate the live performance. It is a full run through, with as much of the set design as possible, to identify and address potential problems, to help reduce nerves, and to test the material.

For a band getting ready to tour or perform, a dress rehearsal would include:

- **Playing a specific set list,** start to finish, with planned breaks for talking and tuning instruments. Other those planned moments, there should be no stopping between songs. Band members should have the set list memorized, know when to start/stop, and know how long their set is.
- **Setting up like your stage plot.** Most bands rehearse facing each other, allowing band members to hear/see each other. However, that's a different experience than being on stage, where everyone faces the crowd instead, and the monitor mix may change each night. Practise performing in that kind of arrangement.
- **Performing like there is an audience.** Musicians should practice moving around comfortably with their instrument, replicating positions or moves on stage. Knowing where people are going to be during key moments (guitar solo, crescendo, break, sing-along chorus, etc.) can bring dynamics to the song without stumbling around.

3. Set Rules for Band Rehearsal

Expectations for rehearsal should be outlined in some form. You might set up some basic rules to make rehearsals go much more smoothly.

Here are some recommendations for band rehearsal rules:

- **Show Up on Time:** Respect each other's time by showing up on the agreed time. If someone takes longer to set up, show up early.

- **Come Prepared:** Everyone should show up with the material practised and memorised ahead of time.
- **Communication:** When someone is talking, don't be playing guitar or drums – it makes it hard to hear.
- **No Distractions:** Treat rehearsal like a job – leave distractions at home.
- **Feedback:** Find ways to deliver constructive criticism.

You might have other rules more appropriate to your situation, band members, or equipment. Whatever you decide to do, be sure that it is in writing and something that each person in the group can understand and follow.

Remember: don't just practise, rehearse.