FIRST YEAR STUDENT CONVOCATION
PLAY HARD.

PRACTICE HARDER.

ANYONE CAN HAVE THE WILL TO WIN
BUT NOT MANY HAVE THE WILL TO PREPARE TO WIN.
MAYB
PLAY
LIKE A CHAMPION
PRACTICE
LIKE YOU WANT TO BE ONE
CURIOUSITY
DISCIPLINE
1. Budget your time for reading, listening, research so that you do not require long sessions in which you try to learn more than you can remember.

2. Pop quiz yourself on what you have learned frequently.

3. Use your time walking between classes or buildings to review what you already know.
4. Long term memory works only after you have prompted it over and over with short-term memory trials (pop quizzes).

5. Take careful class notes. The more detail you take down during class, the easier it will be to remember later. Take notes you could use 5, 10, 20 years from now.
Three essential rules for succeeding in college

Fall is in the air and across the nation thousands of students are getting ready to begin their first year of college. If you’re one of them or know someone who is, let me give you three simple rules to guarantee success in the classroom.

1. Go to class.
   
   Ever since your first day of kindergarten, when your mom tearfully sent you off with a kiss and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, everyone has been telling you that you have to go to school. But in college, no one will make you go to class. The college president will not call your parents nor will most professors bother to track you down. But your professors will notice. Even in large lecture courses, your absence will become evident by your poor test scores if not by your empty seat. In smaller courses and seminars, skipping class is like wearing a flashing red sign on your head that says: Please give me a bad grade.

2. Read the books.
   
   You can’t do well in college without reading the books. And I don’t mean just skimming a textbook like you would a magazine article, but really working through material in an organized and productive way. Whether you’re doing calculus or Shakespeare, you have to put your heart into it. College professors will actually expect you to have read the assigned material for a course. It could be that you’ll work through 50 pages of dull material and none of it will be on the exam or that last-minute handout that you stuffed in your backpack may be the focus of the whole test. You never really know, so always do the assignments.

3. Talk to your professors.
   
   During my first year of college, I was terrified of speaking with my professors. What would I say to someone with a Ph.D. from Harvard? But most college teachers genuinely enjoy talking with students and are glad to help you with any problems you might be having in their classes. Professors can also be valuable guides in your college career if you let them and provide crucial references when you apply for jobs, internships or graduate schools. You are spending way too much money on your education to be afraid of your professors, so give us a chance to help you. After all, we used to be students too.

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6. Listen to materials to be covered in class at least once BEFORE that class. Then when the professor discusses that piece it will have an initial familiarity for you.

7. **People learn most when they are curious about something.** Find ways to be curious about your subjects. Often the easiest and most obvious way to do this is to do a little extra research over what the instructor requires.

8. Studying and practice are your JOB right now until you find a paying job in your field. Allot adequate time to do your job well. Do not relegate your job to “after hours” last minute work.
1. Practice one thing at a time.

2. Practice everything you do (from repertoire to scales) so that your performance will ultimately move a listener.

3. Return to “quiz” yourself on passages you have already practiced earlier in the session. Ask, “Can I play this correctly and beautifully the first time I try?” If you can, over five different “pop quizzes” then you may be acquiring ownership of that passage. If you cannot, then that passage needs more practice.
4. In every attempt at every passage, pay attention to your tone, intonation, tempo, style, rhythmic steadiness, artistic expression, force of your musical conviction.

5. Musical conviction becomes artistic and consistent only through a combination of constant work and inspiration (discipline and curiosity). BOTH must be present for ultimate success.

6. Practice to pull the most possible sound (in both piano and forte) out of your instrument at all times. Wimpy playing is of no use to anyone. Make every particle of air inside your instrument vibrate. Get to know your instrument as intimately as you know your family. It is your first “relationship” on a day-to-day basis.
1. Practice at your best time of day: when you are physically and emotionally at your peak.

2. Allow more than 15 minutes for most practice sessions. A good session begins with a warm-up of several minutes followed by technical practice and practice on artistic aspects or musicianship.
3. Practice is for the following purposes: to ensure that the ONE TIME you have to perform a piece publicly EVERYTHING goes as you intend. CONSISTENCY is key in both technical and musical terms. The most efficient way to be consistent is to practice small sections over and over until your mind remembers how to achieve success and your muscles remember what to do when your brain gives them a direction.

4. Most practice time should NOT be spent playing or singing through a piece. This is not efficient practice unless one is near a recital/performance, when one should practice run-throughs to see how they go.
5. Do not skip days if at all possible. If practice is all about training your mind to remember a specific thought process and about training your muscles to follow those specific brain commands, then if you practice for 1 hour and do not repeat those commands again for 24-48 hours, your brain and muscles have too much time to forget what you worked on the last session. Thus, the best practice is careful, thoughtful, frequent, designed to achieve specific goals and to remember them.

6. Be willing to change your practice habits from those you found successful earlier in life.
7. Set goals for yourself while practicing, but setting unrealistic goals geared towards quantity rather than quality may leave you unhappy after your lessons.

8. **Over-learn** your materials

9. Learn how to manage your time properly with respect to academics.

10. Learn **not** to procrastinate.

11. Use your instructors as resources and trust their opinion until you develop your own opinions based upon your own research and development.
How to Maximize Learning from a Lesson

1) Warm up your mind immediately prior to the lesson.

2) Warm up your fingers and muscles immediately prior to the lesson.

3) Relate all specific suggestions by the professor both to the specific passage and also to your musicianship in general. As the violinist Joseph Silverstein said on more than one occasion, “One should learn repertoire not merely to be able to play that particular piece, but to improve one’s ability to play the instrument through learning the piece.”
5) Ask questions of the professor and of yourself during lessons. Every action or decision *can* involve the question, “Why?” While it may not always be appropriate to ask, “Why?” to *every* suggestion, students who blindly accept all their professor offers and practice it on no stronger foundation than a rote command, usually progress more slowly than students who understand the background to their development. Students who know why a modification of technique will improve their playing are more able to transfer the technique to other applications in future repertoire.

6) Consider lessons to be trial performances as you approach performance dates. Students who coast through a practice week without *actively thinking* about their learning process during their practice hours usually repeat previous bad habits, forcing the professor to repeat again and again the correct way to play. Such lessons waste time and ultimately frustrate both professor and student.
7) Be creative and be bold enough to take some risks. Students need to practice the sense of risky abandonment that creates the magic ingredient of involvement, beginning in the practice room as they “play to the walls,” and then also in the studio. As they “stretch their artistic wings” in the lesson, the professor can provide feedback that helps the students refine their artistry, cutting back on the places that are overplayed and adding more to the weaker sections.
The closer you move toward professional playing, the faster you will be required to learn music. Professionals in major orchestras frequently play as many as 60 pages of music per week. How does one learn music quickly?

a) **When you receive a new piece of music, look over the entire piece before trying to play any of it.** Find the difficult spots on the pages and make a note to work on them first. (The longer spent on the difficult passages, the more likely they will be successful. Easier passages need less time.)
b) Look at the tempo that begins the piece and establish a pulse for the piece by snapping your fingers or conducting. Look for written tempo fluctuations (other tempos or ritardandos/rallentandos/accelerandos, etc.). If there are none, set your expectations to play the entire piece/movement with one basic pulse. (You should NOT have tried to play the piece yet!)
c) **Sing as much of the piece as possible.** Begin to get the piece in your ear. Successful performing combines quick reading of notes with a strong sense of how a piece should sound. If you learn the sound of the piece incorrectly, then you will always practice it incorrectly.
d) **Find rhythms that may need to be subdivided, especially in slow movements.** Is the movement counted in quarter notes or eighth notes? Are there very fast notes written (such as 32nd or 64th notes)? If so, how will you subdivide those beats to place the small note values **exactly** where they should go? By practicing these portions of the piece in advance of trying the passages on the instrument, you will increase your likelihood of playing them correctly on the first or second try on the instrument. That will speed your learning since you will not have to spend time unlearning an incorrect set of rhythms.
e) Remember that *rhythm* is the most important part of music. Without rhythm, a piece has no structure or backbone, and in fact can be completely unrecognizable. Get the rhythms correct first, and then the pitches, techniques (bowings) will follow.

f) **Now** take out your instrument and play through a section of the piece. If necessary play under tempo, but keep the rhythms accurate. See if your performed version matches your sung version. Are you hearing what is written down correctly?
g) From the beginning of your contact with the piece, **write in the part** (if you own it!). Add fingerings, bowings, performance suggestions, eyeglasses, marks to attract attention to a particularly difficult note or passage. Music with no markings has little performance value. The human mind cannot remember enough of what it has learned to recreate a consistent performance without extra marks to assist it.

h) **Double check everything you do** early on. Doubt your ability to play a piece correctly until you are absolutely sure that you have tested each passage to eliminate any errors of reading or technique.
i) Change your markings as you learn the piece. Markings that first appealed to you may not be musical or logical by the time of the performance. Markings must feel comfortable and must make musical sense. Listen to hear if your fingerings disrupt the musical line or if they cause you to err because they are too difficult for your present proficiency.
j) **Play all music slowly at first.** Give your brain a chance to grasp what you will expect it to command your muscles to do. You are learning a piece, but it will not be learned until your brain can repeatedly, on cue, send commands to your muscles to accomplish the tasks needed to control your instrument and bow and achieve the piece. Increase speed only when you can control the instrument and the piece at a slower tempo. This way you will never be out of control.
If you follow the above guidelines, it is possible to learn an entire concert in a few days. You must remember what you learn from practice session to practice session, and must *never* exceed the speed at which your brain can learn and then command your muscles.