The Four-Step Practice Method

The following method is how I structure my practice routine, and how I recommend you go about building a routine for yourself. Structure will make it easier to start practicing, and diligence will make it easier to get results.

Step One: The Warm-Up
+ Start with some stretching and breathing exercises
+ Mouthpiece buzzing: slurs, scales, little songs
+ On the instrument: start in the middle of your range, go as low as you can go.
+ Back to the middle of your range, then go as high as you can go. Remember the three strike rule: if you miss a note three times, stop and move on.
+ Finish with something lyrical. Rest for a couple minutes.

Step Two: Technical Practice
+ Major scales: play as many as you are able. They only take a couple seconds each.
+ Minor scales: same deal here. All together, scales won't take more than a few minutes.
+ Lip slurs: Pick one or two patters and play it on all fingerings/positions.
+ Single tongue: using exercises your teacher provides, or your own; for example, playing a major scale with four sixteenth notes on every pitch.
+ Multiple tongue: for slightly older students, practice your double and eventually triple tonguing similar to your single tonguing.
+ Rest for at least ten minutes when you're done.

Step Three: "Due Dates"
+ Think about what you have coming up: rehearsals, concerts, playing tests
+ Play your music in order of priority: what's your next rehearsal or concert? Start with the closest one, and go from there.
+ Remember that SLOW practice will be more beneficial than rushed practice.
+ Find the hard parts, isolate them, practice them separately, and THEN put them back in the piece as a whole.

Step Four: Making Music for Fun
+ This is what we're all here for!
+ Playing your solo repertoire
+ Finding new music on the internet or in music books
+ Playing along with recordings
+ Improvising?
+ Writing songs even??
+ Let your creativity flow freely!

Your Practice Room Checklist

These are the things that everyone should have ready to go in their practice space:

☑ **You!**
Well-rested, comfortable, not too hungry or thirsty. Stretch and do breathing exercises if you need to.

☑ **Your Instrument**
Make sure your instrument is in good working order: tuned, oiled, all the moving parts accounted for.

☑ **Music Stand**
Putting music on a table or chair is bad for your posture, and will lead to bad habits. Use a proper music stand whenever possible.

☑ **Pencils**
A pencil is the most important tool a musician can have. Keep several in your case. Remember, every musician makes mistakes, but a good musician with a pencil only makes mistakes once.

☑ **Tuner**
A tuner tells us if we're on the right track as we train our ear. Just because your concert B-flat is in tune, doesn't mean every note will be. Either physical tuners or smartphone apps work just fine.

☑ **Metronome**
Just as a tuner is used to develop your ear, your metronome is used to develop your inner pulse. It's amazing how much time you'll realize you add or take away. Again, both physical metronomes and smartphone apps work great, but physical metronomes are often easier to hear over your instrument.

☑ **Drone**
Playing with a tuner is great, but playing with a drone will help you develop your relative pitch even better. Some physical tuners and metronomes have drones built in, otherwise you can find them on YouTube or Spotify.

☑ **Recordings**
When you're learning a new piece of music, find a recording of it, whether on YouTube, iTunes, or elsewhere. It will help you learn the pitches and rhythms, and give you a frame of reference.

☑ **Recorder**
Don't just listen to other people, record yourself and listen to yourself! Your smartphone camera works wonders here. When you're playing, you're using your brain to play and won't notice everything that happens, but when you're listening to a recording of yourself playing, you can focus 100% of your brain on listening.

☑ **Water**
Playing brass takes more physical effort than most instruments. Keep yourself hydrated!