

Not Wanting to Come to Lessons Because You Haven't Practiced

by Dennis Winge

Let's be clear right up front: I am a guitar teacher. So when I offer advice that students should come to lessons even when they haven't practiced, it's going to seem biased. In order to offer a bit more perspective, let me tell you that I am also a student. I have been taking guitar lessons on and off my entire life, and even though I love my guitar lessons, there are plenty of times when I think the same thoughts that my students do when they haven't practiced. It's just that I have the benefit of having been on both sides of the fence for 2 decades at the time of this writing.

I'm not going to write, "If you don't practice, you should still come to lessons because it'll still benefit you" because that would be a drastic understatement. A better statement would be, "If you haven't practiced, coming to a lesson is the absolute best decision you could make."

It may seem contradictory. You may think, "Aren't I going to be wasting the teacher's time, and wasting money because we'll be going over the same thing(s) we did last time?" Not only is this a common misconception, but in a past era, teachers of a certain inclination (which was prevalent), would make the student feel as guilty as possible and find ways to punish them in the lesson following a week of no or little practice. Fortunately, teachers globally are realizing that not only is this strategy generally unpleasant for both teacher and student, but it can often backfire as an attempt to enhance a student's motivation.

When you come to a lesson when you haven't practiced, you are not wasting the teacher's time, because, if that teacher is any good, he or she will see the big picture: You are learning and progressing, and that learning and progressing is not always in a straight line. Just like children, there are growth spurts. There are seasons in which new learning is rapid, and there are others in which lots of review is in order.

Perhaps more importantly, a good teacher recognizes that music is, ultimately, not all that important. This statement was first spoken to my ears by Kenny Werner, author of *Effortless Mastery*. Music is not as important as food, clothing, shelter, and that includes financial well-being, relationship stability, and many other things that must come first in life.

So, coming to a lesson when you haven't practiced shows that you have things in the right perspective, not the wrong one. The implication is that by your coming, you show that you recognize you still want to play and progress on your instrument, and that despite life 'getting in the way' perhaps more than you wanted it to, you're not going to give up just because of a week (or several weeks) of slow progress, or even a temporary regression.

Coming to a lesson when you're out of physical or mental shape isn't a waste of money either. Do you what is definitely a waste of money? If you haven't practiced and you don't go. What happens then is one of 3 things:

1. You don't look at the material at all because you stop making it priority in your life, therefore the lesson in which you originally got the material was a total waste.
2. You don't look at the material for a long time, and you don't really remember how to practice it, which is the equivalent of the above scenario. Alternatively, you practice it incorrectly, which leads to compounding problems that you must untangle later and be plagued by until you do.
3. Your overall momentum in learning is slower, so you only do a little with the new material, nowhere the amount of integration and implementation you would get if you had come to a lesson.

So next time you are feeling uncomfortable about coming to a lesson, remember not to feel guilty and come to your lesson proudly! And, if you have a teacher who tries to intimidate you, make you feel guilty, or punish you in any way, dump that teacher immediately and find someone who is a understanding & compassionate, but also who sees the value in holding you accountable when appropriate. By showing up, you weather the storm of your slow-down in progress and forge ahead to bigger and better musical adventures!