



CELLO

Cello Resolutions

by Teresa Richardson

I have always loved January. Cold weather aside, I appreciate how it is a quieter, more relaxed month. The hubbub of the holidays is over, and life returns to normal. With the simple change of a calendar number, people around the planet are inspired to start anew. How can we be better, do better, and feel better?

A favorite annual tradition in my studio has been making Cello Resolutions. Over the years, I have compiled a list of possible topics for cello resolutions. I send the list via email to all my students' families at the end of December.

At the first January lesson, the student, parent, and teacher have a ten-to-twenty-minute conference. I strongly encourage even the parents of high school students to attend. First, we locate the previous year's goals in our notebooks, celebrate successes, and identify goals that still need work. Afterward, we look at a list of choices together and create a list of three to five specific goals for the New Year. A key component to bringing the goals to fruition is accountability. At the beginning of every lesson in January and February, we take two minutes to ensure that the student is making progress toward the new goals.

Possible Topics for Cello Resolutions

Listening

- At minimum, listen to the next piece and current piece
- Frequency of listening (daily? 5x/week while on the school bus?)
- How/where/when to listen (car, phone, tablet, before bed, mealtime, practice time)
- Recording self to work on objective listening
- Listening to the teacher while keeping hands still in lessons
- Attending performances and concerts

Review

- Review system (pieces related to current piece, review chart, one a day, etc.)
- When to review (as warm-up or

reward?)

- Opportunities to perform review pieces
- Review to focus on a technical goal

Practice

- Having a regular time and place to practice
- Can you safely keep the cello out of the case at home, maybe in a cello stand?
- How many days of practice per week? Aim for short, daily sessions rather than longer, fewer sessions.
- Is all the lesson material covered in home practice?
- Depending on the student's age: independence from the parent in lesson and during practice
- Are lesson assignments understood and clearly written/recorded? Are the lesson notes utilized at home?

Performing

- More performances (school, church, family/relatives, nursing home, Face-Time, etc.)
- Performing the recital piece several times in preparation for studio recital to build confidence
- Solo recital or book recital

Materials

- Remembering to bring all materials to the lesson
- One consistent notebook or source for taking lesson notes
- Maintenance of cello and bow, i.e., not leaving cello in car, using rosin enough, using rosin rag, loosening bow every time, tuning the cello
- Cello size check, string age check, bridge check
- Arriving on time to the lesson

Ensembles, Summer, Achievement

Opportunities

- Participation and preparation regarding MYS, GTCYS, cello group class, chamber music, All-State

- Suzuki Institute, summer camps
- Competitions, Suzuki Association of MN Annual Graduation

Technique and Reading

- Vibrato, bow hold, curved fingers, left elbow, using more bow, lower contact point, more weight into bow, thumb position, extensions, etc.
- Sight-reading, ledger lines, tenor or treble clef, scales, arpeggios, key signatures

Here are two sample lists of Cello Resolutions. Below each resolution in italics is the first week's assignment.

Student #1

- 1) Practice daily. *This week: Keep the cello out and the books open on the stand. Aim for at least five minutes a day. Check off the day in the chart in the notebook when you finish.*
- 2) Lower the bow's contact point on the string to produce a bigger sound. *This week: Warm up with French Folk Song, looking at the bow in the mirror, keeping it in lane 3, midway between fingerboard and bridge.*
- 3) Listen to the current piece and next piece 5x/week on the tablet during breakfast. *This week: Is the music already in iTunes? Work on having the tablet near the table first thing in the morning on school days.*
- 4) Audition for MYS String Orchestra. *This week: Make key signature flashcards for scales. Practice C and G major two octave scales with the bow in lane 3.*

Student #2

- 1) As a practice tool, record yourself playing at least once a week using your phone. *This week: Record the exposition of Haydn C major Concerto first movement.*
- 2) Audition for Artaria Chamber Music School. *This week: Look up requirements and send an email to ACMS.*
- 3) Focus on varying the vibrato speed

by warming up with a slow scale or review piece. *This week: Play a very slow, two-octave C major scale with a hairpin on each note, accelerating the vibrato during the crescendo and slowing the vibrato during the diminuendo.*

4) Keep a consistent lesson notebook.

This week: Purchase a new spiral notebook from Target.

Taking the time to put the instruments aside and talk can seem tangential. The student who is itching to play may feel antsy, the parent may feel eager for the student to return to routine after winter break, and the teacher may have to fight the temptation to dive right in and get to work (guilty!). But I have found the discussions surrounding Cello Resolutions to be invaluable and

essential to the success of my students.

Keeping an open line of communication within the student-parent-teacher (Suzuki) triangle is vital to the relationship. Having a conference gives all three parties a chance to be heard in a setting that an ordinary lesson may not provide. Struggles, feelings, and confessions can bubble to the surface. I especially enjoy reconnecting with parents I do not often see who have high school children who drive themselves to lessons.

Our January conference time is about celebrating progress just as much as it is about deciding what needs improvement. It is satisfying for everyone to realize that, a year later, a student's fingers are consistently curved, they are prompt to lessons and remember to bring all their music books,

and they have developed greater confidence with sight-reading. Celebrating these successes is acknowledging how the student is grasping the learning process itself. And that at least deserves some Ben & Jerry's, don't you think?

Happy New Year!

Teresa Richardson, cellist, is Assistant Principal of the Minnesota Opera and teaches at North Star Cello Academy. She previously taught at MacPhail Center for Music, St. Joseph's School of Music, University of St. Thomas, and University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Teresa earned Master of Music and Bachelor of Music degrees in cello performance from Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, where she graduated with high distinction. †