

# Brownie Points 101

How to earn them with your teacher

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We've all heard the phrase "earn brownie points", but do we know what it means? Doing a search on Google brought up this definition: to get praise or approval for something. My Merriam-Webster defines brownie as: a legendary cheerful elf that performs good deeds at night, and the more common known Girl Scout and cake. So, how can we earn brownie points with our teacher?

As a student and teacher, I have to say the sure-fire way to a big score of points is by practicing. Practicing is like a love/hate relationship. We love it because with it we can accomplish our harp goals; we hate it because, well, you fill in the blank. Let me share some tips on how to "get 'er done" (a common phrase in my neck of the woods meaning to finish the project, or hurry up).

1. "Fitting it into your schedule" verses "Planning it into your schedule". When I try to just "fit it in", my practice time is low on my priority list. I might get around to it, but I won't have much time. When I don't have ample practice time, it's a lot harder to accomplish my assignments and goals. I can try to justify the lack of practicing with endless excuses, but that doesn't go far for brownie points when I get the same assignment next week. Planning practice time into your schedule means sitting down with your schedule/calendar and marking out ample practice time for that day. You're benefit from the easy; 5 min planning will be so much that it will be worth the effort in gold. The hard part is sticking to that schedule. I understand that we all have different priorities, and the harp cannot always be the top. I do not put my "harp life" higher than my family, but I do work to keep it high enough to accomplish my assignments.

2. Practice time does not need to be done in one sitting. If your schedule doesn't have a slot long enough for the suggested practice time from your teacher, that doesn't mean you can skip a day or days. Break it up into multiple sessions. During those mini sessions work on one assignment rather than rush through everything and get nowhere.

3. "Practice makes perfect." I've come to learn this is true-in two ways. "Practice makes perfect"-when practiced correctly. While practicing, move on to the next working point only when progress has been made, and is easily repeated the right way. "Practice makes perfect-mistakes" would be when we play through each song once or twice and call it good for the day. My favorite "practice motto" is from my dad: Practice makes PERMANENT.

Other ideas that come to mind on how to earn brownie points:

- Be on time to your lesson. While it's a nice bonus to the student before you to have a few extra minutes with your teacher, it's quite rude to be late. You've paid for the time slot; don't you want to get the most for your money? Teachers can get annoyed with students who are perpetually late, to the point that when combined with other factors

such as not practicing, they will politely tell you to find a new teacher. Unless you hate your teacher, and want to move on, fulfill your end of the bargain.

- Be kind and respectful. While we don't know everything, we still have ideas, tricks, and tips to pass along to you. Try them and see if they help, usually they do. Maybe you have an idea on a section of a song-that's great! Why don't you try stating it to your teacher in kind and respectful ways... believe me, you'll get more understanding and respect from them. We don't necessarily enjoy being told what to do either.
- Ask questions when you don't understand. Teachers sometimes don't make a whole lot of sense when they try to explain an idea. When I'm confused about a passage or an assignment, I don't want to practice it the new way, which means I get nowhere. A good way to make sure you're both on the same page is to say something like: "You mean I should play it like this?"
- Bring a still warm and gooey brownie as a gift, not bribe, to your teacher.

I know these are pretty basic tips, but it helps to have a reminder every once in a while. Cowboy/girl up! (Meaning: toughen up and get back on your horse, step up to the plate, or buck up.)