

Alisa R. Gukasian
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My goal as a teacher is to help students learn how to teach themselves. I begin by asking what they hope to gain from studying music. Some want to enter competitions or pursue advanced performance opportunities; others want to thrive in their school orchestra, strengthen their technique, or enjoy playing an instrument. Understanding these goals helps me shape instruction that is both purposeful and responsive to the individual.

Teaching students how to practice is central to my approach. When a student struggles, I ask them to walk me through how they practiced at home. Often, they have put in effort but lack the tools to make that effort productive. They may repeat a passage without identifying why it is difficult, unintentionally reinforce a mistake, or try to address too many things at once. By examining their process together, we can identify the problem and develop a strategy they understand and can use independently.

In lessons, I model how to break challenges into manageable steps, listen closely, and evaluate whether a practice strategy is helping. I connect scales and études to the technical and musical demands of repertoire so that students understand the purpose of their assignments. Rather than relying only on my corrections, I ask students what they hear, what they want to change, and how they might approach it. As their understanding grows, I gradually step back and give them more responsibility for their practice and musical decisions.

I believe thoughtful, consistent work matters more than an early impression of talent. Students develop at different rates, and a difficulty today does not define their potential. My responsibility is to maintain clear expectations while helping them recognize progress, work honestly, and respond constructively to setbacks. With younger students, communication with families supports realistic goals and productive practice habits. With adult learners, I consider their interests, responsibilities, and available practice time when developing an approach we can sustain.

I also want students to understand that music involves responsibility to other people. Preparing for an ensemble rehearsal, listening to a partner, accepting feedback, and following through on commitments are musical skills with significance beyond the lesson. Through teaching and ensemble work, I encourage students to become attentive collaborators who respect both their own contributions and those of others.

Performance requires a different kind of courage: the willingness to be vulnerable and share something personal. I want students to develop their own musical voices and feel able to express them. At the same time, I encourage them to consider their listeners, what they hope to communicate, and how their preparation serves that connection. Whether they are playing in a studio recital, a school orchestra, or a competition, their performance is an opportunity to offer something meaningful to an audience.

To me, successful teaching means students trust their ears, understand how they learn, and know how to approach challenges independently. I gradually step back as they gain confidence, remaining a guide toward their goals while helping them grow as musicians and thoughtful people.