



Keeping It Fun

By: Amy VanWagenen

Amy is a member of the Iowa State Dance Team. She is majoring in elementary education and hopes to dance professionally and then bring her passion for dance and education into her future classroom. Amy has been on UDA Staff for four years.

Practice. It can either be a nightmare for your dancers or one of the best times of their day. Practice is a lot more productive when your dancers are enjoying themselves. It's obviously not a time to be completely unstructured, but having a little fun carefree time to refresh and refocus your dancers is always a good thing. Here are a few ideas you can use in your practices or use as a jumping off point to think of some fun practice ideas.

As dancers, music can really put us in a good mood. Letting your dancers play "fun" music while warming up and stretching will start your practice out on a good note every time. They can listen to some current music that they all like or they can put together a playlist of cheesy songs and sing them while they're getting ready for practice to start.

When things are getting a little stressful and unfocused in practice, the best thing to do is take a little break and come back fresh. This will ensure that there is 100% effort into the time you ARE actually dancing. Another fun idea would be to have an impromptu dance party. You could play a song and just have your dancers dance silly for a couple minutes. If your dancers have had a very rough practice so far, it might just be more beneficial to take a 3 minute break and let them sit, chat and relax for a little bit. These things will hopefully help them to stay as focused as possible during practice time.

Personally, I think one of the best ways to keep a practice fun is to have your dancers be close outside of practice. This can be accomplished by having your seniors or captains (or you!) plan activities. You can determine the frequency of these team activities. They can be weekly, bi-weekly, monthly etc. It's very hard to find times when EVERYONE is available, especially if you want your dancers to get together weekly, so making the activities optional will increase the probability of these activities happening. This can be as simple as going out for a smoothie after practice to as complex as a team sleepover watching old dance team videos.

The last piece of advice to give about keeping practice fun is *always* to end practice on a good note and to start on a good note next practice. Whatever happens during practice, shake it off, or deal with it later, but always let your dancers leave feeling good about what they accomplished during practice. You could end with an inspiring quote at the end of practice or have a team chant you say throughout the year. You can talk about what went well and what needs to be improved for next time. Anyway you do it, try to make sure your dancers leave practice happy and excited to come back the next time.