

“Practice Smarter, Not Harder!”

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The Basic Routine:

Objective: to attain and then maintain top playing condition on our instrument, having the physical strength, finesse and dexterity to produce our best musical results.

Method: develop a fundamental practice routine of exercises, appropriate to our playing level that addresses all of the technical attributes required in our day-to-day playing needs, and apply this routine on a daily basis.

There are many published examples of routines available for every instrument. Basic areas that must be covered every day in “your” routine are as follows, not in any specific order:

- I. Attacks/Long Tones
- II. Flexibility
- III. Articulation
- IV. High Range
- V. Low Range

The Practice Techniques:

The most important aspect of practice is knowing how to practice. –Philip Farkas

- I. **Practice extremes-** Loud, Soft, High, Low, etc.
- II. **Chunking-** The technique of practicing small chunks, a couple of notes or a short passage instead of always playing through an entire piece. Very often it will be only small parts of a music work that make it seem difficult: an awkward slur, an odd interval, a quick rhythm, etc. Identify and fix those little chunks first, and you will learn the piece much faster.
- III. **Backwards and Forwards-** Play the passage backwards, upside down, then back to forward.
- IV. **Articulate** the subdivision and or micropulsing.
- V. **The Metronome Game-** Working on a fast passage that always sounds sloppy when you play it up to tempo? Play the Metronome Game! Here’s the rules:
 1. Turn in the metronome at a tempo that is somewhat slower than where you think you can play the passage easily and perfect.
 2. Play the passage with the metronome.
 3. Ask yourself the question: “Was that exactly the way I want it to be?” That is: did you play all the right notes with the right fingerings, dynamics, rhythms, etc. in every regard exactly the way you want to perform it, albeit slower?
 4. If “yes,” then move the metronome up one number and repeat steps 2 through 4. If “no,” then give yourself another attempt at the passage. If you get two “no’s” in a row, move the metronome down one number and repeat steps 2 through 6

You will be amazed at how effective The Metronome Game can be in working up pieces that seem almost impossible when you first attempt them. But don't cheat at this game. You may fool yourself and think you can get away with it, but you won't fool your audience.

- VI. **Drone Practice**- Practice with a drone from an electric piano, computer, tuner/metronome, even tuning CD's!
- VII. **One Note Practice**- When you play a passage with inconsistencies like missed notes or different sounding attacks on each note, try One Note Practice. Here are the rules:
 1. Play the first note of the passage ten times in a row.
 2. Each time you play it, ask yourself the questions. "Was that exactly the way I want it to be?" That is: did you play all the right notes with the right fingerings, dynamics, articulation, etc. in every regard exactly the way you want to perform it? Count the "yeses".
 3. Repeat until you have achieved ten "yeses" in a row, resting briefly after each set of ten.
- VIII. **Flutter Tongue**- flutter the phrase or passage and connect the music with air. Blow through!
- IX. **All Slurred**- Slur the entire phrase or passage and connect with air, again, blow through!
- X. **All Tongued**- If it's a slurred passage, play the entire passage articulated for targeting and centering notes.
- XI. **Mouthpiece practice**- Buzz the phrase or passage on the mouthpiece, be careful not to over blow! Aim for a good healthy thick buzz with a good core to the sound and lot's of resonance.
 1. **The "Drunken Buzz"**- buzz the mouthpiece without the use of the tongue and slide/gliss between notes, center the notes of the passage with a feeling of no center in-between the notes.
 2. **The "Free Buzz"**- buzzes without the mouthpiece, again, go for a good clear sound.
- XII. **Record yourself**- record on either computer with Audacity, or other software, or with a recording device, digital voice recorders are not very expensive and can be purchased at many stores.
- XIII. **Smart Music**- Software to practice with, this is a subject for another masterclass!
- XIV. **Play with recordings**- find the music if possible and practice with it, or find the midi file and or mp3 and play with it.
- XV. **Distorted Rhythm**- This technique is especially useful when confronted by awkward passages of steady eighth notes or sixteenth notes. Try playing the passage at a much slower tempo, but with a very snappy dotted (almost double dotted) rhythm. The reverse the dotted rhythm
- XVI. **Take it to the Easy Place**- If there is a passage, or a whole piece, that you play over and over, each time realizing that it is not what you want, but it just doesn't get better... Take it to the Easy Place! For example, up the octave, down the octave, up a fourth, etc., slower, faster, smaller, longer, etc. Use Chunking or the Metronome Game!

Concluding Thoughts:

- Practice makes perfect. But if you practice sloppy, you will perfect the art of sloppy performance. Only if you practice greatness will you perform great.
- Things take time. Patience is essential in achieving great practice.
- Approach each practice session with a specific goal and a plan how to achieve it.

- It's okay to say "no". In fact, it is essential if you want to achieve great practice habits. Say "no" whenever you hear something in your practice that is not exactly what you want it to be, then figure out how to turn it into a "yes". Remember, you are your best teacher!
- Frustration can become your ally, if not your friend. Saying "no" to yourself frequently, as you must in honest practice, can be very frustrating. Acknowledge this and accept it. Even embrace frustration as a great motivator, but never allow it to push you into dishonest and sloppy practice. Frustration can only be an observer, sitting in the chair next to you. There is no room for it inside of you.
- Learn how to use the metronome to achieve even greater discipline and focus in your practice.
- Learn how to combine different practice techniques to achieve maximum results in minimum time.
- Great practice habits take years of practice to develop.
- Practice is a lifelong adventure that should be constantly evolving.
- Practice the art of practicing.
- If you're not practicing, someone else is!

Portions of the above information and ideas were obtained from the following teachers: Thomas Bacon, Philip Farkas, Barry Tuckwell, Lowell Greer, Charles Snead, and others.

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