

From Beginning to End: Tips for More Effective Practice and Performance

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“Our World of Music”

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1. **Introductory Phase (Prepare)**

- listen, listen, listen
- study the origin of the piece, life of the composer
- prepare score (fingering, form, sections or phrases, and analysis)

Goal: when you are acquainted with all aspects of the piece (history, composer, analysis, etc.), you are ready to begin the learning phase.

2. **Developmental Phase (Learn)**

- sight read the score first
- then work on fingering, rhythm, notes, dynamics, articulation, tempo, sound, phrasing, balance, pedaling, ornamentation, style, interpretation, expression
- hands alone, hands together
- small sections, groups of sections (2 or more sections), large sections

Goal: when you can perform the entire piece from beginning to end accurately, slowly and easily, you can move to the next phase

3. **Proficiency Phase (Perfect)**

- work on fingering, rhythm, notes, dynamics, articulation, tempo, sound, phrasing, balance, pedaling, ornamentation, style, interpretation, expression
- hands alone, hands together
- small sections, groups of sections (2 or more sections), large sections

Goal: when you can perform the entire piece from beginning to end accurately, at a moderate to fast performance tempo, you can move to the next phase

4. **Mastery Phase, short-term memory (Memorize)**

- work on fingering, rhythm, notes, dynamics, articulation, tempo, sound, phrasing, balance, pedaling, ornamentation, style, interpretation, expression
- hands alone, hands together
- small sections, groups of sections (2 or more sections), large sections

Goal: when you can perform the entire piece from beginning to end accurately, from memory at performance tempo, you can move to the next phase

5. **Review Phase, long-term memory (Review)**

- work on fingering, rhythm, notes, dynamics, articulation, tempo, sound, phrasing, balance, pedaling, ornamentation, style, interpretation, expression
- hand alone, hands together
- small sections, groups of sections (2 or more sections), large sections

Goal: when you can perform the entire piece at any time (for any person), and have performed it multiple times (at least 3 times), you now have it in your long-term memory!

Practice Tips and Variety in Practice

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1. Tempos – slow, medium, fast
2. Staccato and legato
3. Loud and soft
4. Rhythmic variety
<http://jeffreychappell.com/pianist/articles/methods-for-practicing/>
5. Backward practice
6. Hands alone and hands together
7. Sections – small, medium, large
8. Tunnel A or Tunnel B (from Lezlee Bishop) – identical passages with slight differences
9. Different sections on different days, and different pieces on different days.
10. Practice Plan
11. Touch and Play
12. Slow down the tempo to achieve complete accuracy! Then increase the tempo!

Practice Plan

1. Perform
2. Practice spots
3. Sections (small, medium, large)
4. Perform

Favorite Quotes about Practicing – compiled by Dr. Nancy Allred

“One must practice slowly, then more slowly, and finally slowly!” – Camille Saint-Saens

“Slow practice is the key to rapid technical progress. The cerebellum is a non-judgement part of the brain it assumes that any repetitive activity ... is being repeated because the conscious mind is trying to make it automatic. The cerebellum will be just as efficient an automatizer of incorrect sequences of timing as of those that are correct. When practicing takes place at a pace too fast for accurate playing there is very little chance for the material to be mastered and reliable confident performance simply will not occur. On the other hand, it is probably true that practice for speed is seldom necessary. The cerebellum can supply all the speed wanted if patterning is correct during practice.” – by Frank R. Wilson, M.D.

“If you practice it fast, and you miss a few notes, you are only practicing your mistakes.”

“The single most important method for the quickest advancement is practicing slowly.” – Bonnie Romkey

“Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect.” – Vince Lombardi

“Practice makes permanent.”

“When you first learn a piece, be meticulous not to make any mistakes either in notes or rhythm. Then you will not have to go back and fix your mistakes.” – Nancy Allred

“A martial arts teacher once told me that it took 100 correct repetitions to embed a new movement...but well over 700 repetitions to undo and re-learn the same movement if learned incorrectly the first time. This is why you see martial arts students performing their practice routines with such slow, careful precision. It is the same with violin.” - Bonnie Romkey

“A very fast technical passage should be worked out slowly, with ever increasing speed. I find a metronome very valuable for this. The metronome is set at a speed slow enough to enable the player to negotiate the passage easily. Set it slow that everything – dynamics, articulations, intonation and rhythm – can all be observed and played, leaving only the correct tempo to be achieved. The speed is then advanced one notch each time the passage is played successfully, until the speed is more than the proper tempo.” – Philip Farkas, *The Art of Brass Playing*

“You cannot achieve speed by speedy practice. The only way to get fast is to be deep, wide awake, and slow. When you habitually zip through your music, your ears are crystallizing sloppiness. Pray for the patience of a stonecutter. Pray to understand that speed is one of those things you have to give up – like love – before it comes flying to you through the back window.” – W.A. Mathieu, *The Listening Book*

“It is important to practice at the speed of no mistakes.” — Lucinda Mackworth-Young

“Repetition was never designed to fix problems – it takes what you are doing – good or bad and locks it in.” — Philip Johnston

“The most efficient way to memorize a piece is to use the one which proceeds in an error free manner.” — Sergei Rachmaninoff

Is Slow Practice Really Necessary? – by Noa Kageyama, Ph.D

<https://bulletproofmusician.com/is-slow-practice-really-necessary/>

Struggling to Get a Tricky Passage up to Tempo? Why "Perfect" Practice May Actually Be the Problem – by Noa Kageyama, Ph.D

<https://bulletproofmusician.com/struggling-to-get-a-tricky-passage-up-to-tempo-try-this-clever-practice-technique/>

Mind, Muscle and Music

***Physiological Clues to Better Teaching* – by Frank R. Wilson, M.D.**

<https://www.bandworld.org/pdfs/SPRINGMindMuscleandMusic.pdf>

Increasing the Tempo of a Passage

#1 – Slow to fast – up/down in steps

- Start at a slow tempo.
- Play until you can do it ***accurately and easily***.
- Move the metronome up a notch and repeat the above process.
- Keep repeating the process until you reach the performance tempo.
- If you can't play it ***accurately and easily***, move the metronome a notch or two slower.
- If you still can't play it ***accurately and easily***, keep moving the metronome a notch or two slower, until you find this accurate slow tempo, and then work up to the performance tempo, one notch at a time.

Example:

80 no mistakes
84 no mistakes
88 a mistake
84 no mistakes
88 no mistakes
92 a mistake
88 no mistakes
92 no mistakes
96 no mistakes
100 a mistake
96 no mistakes
100 no mistakes

#2 – Sudden leaps to performance tempo

Practice as in the above process (up/down in steps), but after completing each step, just try the section at your performance tempo.

Example:

80 no mistakes
84 no mistakes
100 terrible
88 a mistake
84 no mistakes
100 not quite so terrible
88 no mistakes
100 getting there
92 no mistakes
100 a bit better
96 no mistakes
100 WOW!