

Practice Tips for the Advancing Musician

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The following tips are designed to increase productivity and efficiency in instrumental practicing. All of these should be used as often as possible.

1. **Practice every day!** The more often you practice, the faster you will see progress. Every day that you practice, you will improve. Each day that you skip practicing, your skill level will actually decrease, which could negate some of your practicing. *It is much better to practice a little every day than to practice a lot a couple of times a week!*
2. **Start with long tones or rudiments.** The key to playing an instrument well is having a good, well-defined tone in all registers. To accomplish this, you have to practice it! Percussionists need to develop good tone also, especially on rolls and other rudiments. *Tone, on any instrument, is the most important element of music!*
3. **Practice efficiently.** Only practice exercises or selections of pieces that you cannot play perfectly. Don't "waste time" practicing music that you already know well, unless there is a specific reason for doing so. When practicing longer pieces, practice difficult sections first. The worst way to practice is to start at the beginning and play to the end of an entire piece or exercise. Isolate problem spots and work on those spots. Only practice entire exercises/pieces when all components can be played perfectly. *Practicing rests of longer than one measure is a waste of time!*
4. **Use a metronome.** A metronome will give you a constant beat that will make your rhythms more consistent. Also, it will allow you to check your progress on technical exercises. When learning technical exercises, scales, performance music, etudes, long tones, etc. metronomes are *very important* to monitor progress! *Metronomes are essential to practicing rhythms!*
5. **Use a tuner.** Using a tuner when practicing long tones will allow you to see the intonation tendencies of your instrument. Tuners are especially beneficial when practicing slow interval exercises, or slow pieces of music. You can also use them to "spot check" sections of music to see where you are. *Tuners are virtually useless in large group settings!*
6. **Start slowly.** When working on technical passages or etudes, start by playing them at a speed at which they are played flawlessly. This might be very slow! Then, gradually (using a metronome to monitor progress) speed up. Don't speed up too fast...or too slow. Always monitor and keep a record of your progress. (I mark my comfortable tempo each day either in a notebook or on the music/exercise itself.) Don't be discouraged if it seems like you are not making progress as sometimes it takes a few days to "settle in". *Most importantly, remember that every time you play a wrong note, you are practicing the wrong note!*

7. **Develop a “Practice Routine”.** Design a daily practice schedule that will allow you to cover everything. Always start with some sort of warmup (long tones, lip slurs, etc.). Make sure you don’t spend too much time on any given area...unless there is a specific reason to do so. *See sample practice routines below:*

Sample Practice Routine – Woodwinds

1. Long Tones
2. Scales and “Scale-Related” Exercises
3. Technical Etudes (from etude book)
4. Solo Piece (if applicable)
5. Other Music...

Sample Practice Routine – Brass

1. Lip Slurs/Mouthpiece Buzzing
2. Long Tones
3. Scales and “Scale-Related” Exercises
4. Technical Etudes (from etude book)
5. Solo Piece (if applicable)
6. Other Music...

Sample Practice Routine – Strings

1. Scales and “Scale-Related” Exercises
2. Bowing Technique/Intonation Exercises
3. Technical Etudes (from etude book)
4. Solo Piece (if applicable)
5. Other Music...

Sample Practice Routine – Percussion

1. Rudiments – Snare Drum
2. Scales and “Scale-Related” Exercises - Mallets
3. Technical Etudes (from etude book) – Snare/Mallets
4. Solo Piece (if applicable)
5. Other Music...

**All sample routines are very general guidelines. Many musicians have modified this to suit their schedule & goals, but all good practice routines should cover these basic elements.*

8. **Practice!** *Practice is the single most important component of being a successful musician!*