



11 PRACTICE TIPS + BONUS PLANNER

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Introduction

Practice routines are always a challenge for musicians. If you don't know how to make the most of your practice time, you can easily end up frustrated, bored, or wondering how you'll ever make solid progress.

By learning the key practice principles we'll share below, however, this can completely turn around for you! Before you know it, you'll have a routine that leads directly to more confidence as a musician.

Here are eleven practice tips and a bonus practice planner to help you plan for more focused, efficient practice, and refine the habits necessary to achieve your musical goals!

01 Find Your Motivation 💪

Some days, **motivation to practice can be hard to come by**. During these times, some helpful things to consider are: 1) remember *why* you play your instrument, 2) identify some short-term and long-term goals, and 3) listen to pieces or performers that inspire you to play! Sometimes this is all that is needed to get you off the couch and in front of your music.

02 Have a Plan! ✅

Knowing what you are going to focus on during a practice session is a great way to practice effectively. Dedicate specific amounts of time to each technique, exercise, or piece. Need help getting started? Print out and follow the **bonus practice planner** found in this PDF!

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03 Warm Up 🔥

As eager as we all are to jump headfirst into repertoire, **starting with a warm up routine can lend itself to many benefits**, such as starting off a practice session with a good mindset, preventing injuries, improving technique, building flexibility, and much more! Do not be afraid to get creative and transform the passage in a piece that always gives you trouble into an exercise.

04 Perfect Practice Makes Perfect 🙌

When practicing, slowing things down and focusing on reducing mistakes is important. This gives you the necessary time to **focus on ideas like dynamics, tone, and technique**.

Take Control

Every time you play, there should be no mistakes to make sure all the info getting to your brain is correct. **It's easier to get the right information into your brain from the start than to fix 'corrupted' data.** In other words, you'll spend less time learning something carefully right away than learning it too fast and having to go back and correct it. This will make it easier to play cleanly without making too many mistakes later on. Repeat the mantra: *"Repetition of perfection. Repetition of perfection. Repetition of perfection..."*

05 Focus on Difficult Areas 🔍

Save time by starting with the trouble areas of a piece. Always practicing a piece by playing from the beginning can make your first page better than your last page.

06 Practice As Much As You Can

Practicing two hours very focused is better than practicing six hours while watching TV. But on the other hand, practicing six hours very focused is better than practicing two hours very focused.

Practice as much as you can each day without hurting yourself. There are unfortunately no shortcuts.

07 Take Breaks!

There is no secret to improving other than hard work. However, there needs to be a balance of work and rest. Straight practice for long hours can lead to overuse injuries. **Breaking up your practice time is a great injury prevention strategy.** Also, taking short breaks is a great way to make sure your time at the instrument is focused!

08 Practice With a Metronome

There are a few main benefits to using a metronome:

1. **Quantifying** your practice by setting and reaching clear numerical tempo goals.
2. **Practicing** repertoire that is meant to be groovy

Even pieces that are meant to be played freely and with more rubato can benefit from occasional metronome work! You need to know and understand the rhythm in order to alter it!

09 Fingerings 🖐️

Slow practice is good, but many people make the mistake of determining their fingerings at this tempo. This wastes time because it runs the risk of having to reevaluate the fingerings as you get closer to full tempo. It is best to **start learning the piece `a tempo` to decide on the fingerings that will work right away at the full tempo.**

Once that is established, then the slow practice can begin. **You want the fingerings to make sense musically and to feel comfortable.** If you think some of your fingerings are a bit too hard but are musically ideal you have two choices: 1) you can decide to spend more time practicing that fingering and see if another week of work will help, or 2) you can adapt the fingering and find an easier way to play that passage, whilst making sure the music doesn't suffer from it. The choice is up to you!

10 Chunking ✂️

The American psychologist George Armitage Miller proved that our brains can only process a certain amount of information at once. Knowing this, it is important to **break down difficult passages** into “chunks” of about 7 items. An item is anything you need to think about — notes, shifts, special techniques, specific movements, etc.

11 Persist 🏔️

“Nothing is impossible.” **Do not get discouraged** if a difficult passage takes some extra time to learn. If you hear and know exactly how you want the music to sound, the fingers can find a way.

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