

Practice Strategies

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METRONOME

- I. Vary the rhythmic level of the click
 - A. Subdivision level: at a slow tempo, set the metronome to the smallest subdivision level (e.g. 16th notes in 4/4 or 6/8)
 - B. Division level: in a compound or simple meter, set the metronome to the division level (e.g. 8th notes in 4/4 or 6/8)
 - C. Beat level: in a compound or simple meter, set the metronome to the beat level (e.g. quarter notes in 4/4 or dotted quarters in 6/8)
 - D. Macro beat: in a compound or simple meter, set the metronome to the next largest rhythmic level (e.g. half notes in 4/4 or dotted half notes in 6/8 or 12/8)
 - E. Full measure and beyond: to test timing on a thoroughly prepared passage or orchestral excerpt, set the metronome to click only once per measure or every two measures (e.g. $J=30$ for a piece in 4/4 marked $J=120$)
- II. Shifting the pulse to different partials of the beat
 - A. Upbeat: In a simple meter, instead of playing with the click on downbeats, switch to thinking of the click as a series of upbeats
 - B. Tertiary divisions: in a compound meter or $\frac{3}{8}$, set the click to the second or third eighth
 - C. Fourth partial: In a simple meter, set the click to the fourth subdivision of the beat (e.g. the last 16th of each quarter note beat)
 - D. Second partial: In a simple meter, set the click to the second subdivision of the beat (e.g. the second 16th of each quarter note beat)
 - E. In a simple meter put the click on 1 and 3 only
 - F. In a simple meter, put the click on 2 and 4 only
- III. Additional strategies
 - A. Ostinato patterns: for pieces with an ostinato or a recurring rhythmic motive, program that pattern to practice with using PolyNome
 - B. Consider competing rhythmic figures in the accompaniment (duple vs. triple, three against four, different groupings of odd meters)

MELODIC VARIATION

- I. Perform with full subdivision to internalize subdivisions
 - A. This strategy may be used to improve timing and shaping through musical lines
- II. Alter the rhythm of technical passages to find inconsistencies, gain speed on individual intervals, and maintain mental engagement through repetitions
 - A. For running 16ths in simple meter: Long short; short long; triplet + 8th; 8th + triplet; two 16ths + 8th starting on first, second, third and fourth 16th
 - B. Change duple to triple or vice versa
- III. Rebeaming
 - A. Perform a passage of running 16ths as written, then rebeam in groups from the second 16th, 3rd, etc.
- IV. Isolating Registers

- A. In passages that leaps between registers, play all of the notes in one register to gain stability and homogeneity
 - B. For a technical passage with only one note in a different register, substitute that note for a neighboring note in the same register for optimal note connection, then play as written
- V. Single note air pattern
 - A. The most fundamental aspect of our tone production, technique, and expression is our air. Only using one note, play the phrase mapping out what your air will do.
 1. Is the note stable throughout in tone and intonation?
 2. Is the phrase shape clear?
- VI. Removing Articulation
 - A. For all technical passages and melodies, begin by slurring to ensure the air is maintaining support throughout and that the technique is accurate.
 - B. For passages with staccato, begin slurred, then legato, and finally staccato
 1. As you play shorter, do not compromise on tone quality
- VII. Filling in large intervals
 - A. For large intervals, practice first by filling in the interval with diatonic or “white” notes to feel voicing and connection, gradually remove pitches until the interval is clear and secure
- VIII. Dynamic Extremes
 - A. Practice passages at forte or fortissimo and piano or pianissimo--this will expose weaknesses in voicing and/or note connection.
- IX. Cadenzas
 - A. With a cadenza, the goal is flexible, organic expression that sounds improvised. As such, we cannot get all the way to performance ready practicing a cadenza with a metronome.
 1. First learn the notes and rhythms using a metronome and a combination of the strategies above.
 2. Next, sing the cadenza the way you would like to play it and record that. (Your pitch doesn't need to be accurate, it's the pacing and gesture that's important).
 3. Work to reproduce on your instrument what you sang.
 4. Record your performance and compare it to the sung version.
 5. Are there hiccups due to technical limitations? Go back to the metronome work until it sounds effortless.

MIND AND BODY

- I. Remember that your mind and your body may not learn at the same speed. A passage you understand clearly may take numerous repetitions to feel comfortable physically (or vice-versa).
 - A. Our senses are hardwired to notice change and tune out to repetition. To keep our minds engaged during repetitions that our body needs for learning, create a new goal, or alter an element for each repetition.
- II. How do we train to achieve our best when it counts?
 - A. Pick a set of passages to rotate between (3-5 short passages that require 5 repetitions).
 1. First play them each one time in order: 1-2-3
 2. Do not go back and correct any mistakes! Instead, think about what you want to change.
 3. Play them again in a different order: 3-1-2
 4. Do not go back and correct, again think through what you want to change

5. Continue to rotate the order playing each one time for repetitions 3-4
 6. Record your performance of the 5th repetition.
 7. Listen back, evaluate, and take notes
 - B. This strategy teaches you to mentally prepare before playing which helps you to achieve your best when it counts.
- III. Before you begin a practice session, set clear goals and expectations. Track your progress in a practice journal. Remember that your body must be relaxed and your mind must be focused for learning to stick, so you may need to do some breathing exercises and stretching without your instrument to get relaxed and focused. Practice time is a sacred time for you to unplug from the chaos and distractions of the world.
- IV. Build speed gradually. Think of your passage work/development of a piece as a pyramid--your slow practice and variations will be the base, you will spend less time at each level as you increase speed.
 - A. Once you have gradually worked all the way up to tempo, continue to make $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ tempo repetitions part of your practice. $\frac{1}{2}$ tempo work the day before a performance can make for a more relaxed, secure, nuanced performance.
- V. Practice, Play, Performance
 - A. Practice: Structured, focused, goal-oriented, involves intensive focus on the smallest details broken into small segments or phrases, continually evaluating performance and problem-solving to get closer to a mental ideal
 - B. Play: Unstructured exploration, may be solo or in groups, recreational music-making
 - C. Performance: Performing larger sections or complete pieces for another person or recording device, simulating as many performance conditions as possible, staying present in the moment WITHOUT evaluation