

PRACTICE TIPS

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GOAL SETTING

- Set goals for yourself and write them down in a dedicated practice journal..
 - Short term goals are things you want to accomplish on a daily basis.
 - Medium term goals are things you want to accomplish over a period of weeks or months.
 - Long term goals are things you want to accomplish over a year or more.
- Revisit your goals often. Check in with yourself by reading your journals or notes from weeks, months, or years ago.
- If you're not inspired, go listen to the greats. If they don't inspire you, listen to music that makes you FEEL something.

MAKE A PLAN AND DO THE WORK

- Write down the steps needed to achieve your goals.
- Define your goals for each practice session.
- Change up your practices every now and then
- Humans are extremely programmable, just do the work.

HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR PRACTICE SESSION

Everybody is different so find what works for YOU. If you are stuck or need some direction, try this:

- Spend 15 solid minutes on one idea. If you exhibit strong focus for 15 minutes and drill whatever idea you are working on, over and over, with sufficient repetition and variation, you will have given your brain enough to synthesize for one day.
- The important part is that you re-visit the idea every day for a period of one to two weeks, and those 15 minute sessions add up to hours. Consistency is key!
- Do not burn yourself out by practicing the same thing for hours on end in one day. Your brain can reach a saturation point, and eventually you will yield diminishing returns on your practice time.
- Try alternating small practice chunks with chores.
- Drink plenty of water. Practicing and performing music burns a surprising amount of energy.

PRACTICE SLOW

- Slowing things down helps a lot because it allows you to think and play things cleaner.
- Play it only as fast as you can do it cleanly. If you practice fast but make mistakes, you are practicing messing up!
- Use a metronome!
 - When practicing a specific exercises make sure it grooves hard at a specific tempo.
 - Vary the tempos you use. Variation helps the brain adapt to different contexts.
 - Instead of clicking on every beat, cut the BPMs in half and place the click on beats 2 and 4.
 - Divide the BPMs by four and place the click on just beat one of the measure.
 - Place this one-click-per-measure on an upbeat or a subdivision of any beat for a more challenging practice.

PLAYING WITH TONE

- Always practice with good, supported tone.
- It's okay to focus on tone while you also focus on rhythm or a melody. "Kill two birds with one stone."

TRANSPOSING

- Transpose whatever musical passage you are working on to all keys! Yes, all 12 keys, even the hard ones. Try not to write every key out; transpose in your head. Doing so will help you internalize the interval structure every possible way.
- If transposing a new scale or musical phrase is hard for you (and it is for most people!) take your time. During one practice session, play your phrase in only three keys: the original key, a fourth up, and a fourth down (ie. C, F, and G). Once you get comfortable with that, try a couple new keys.
- It might be beneficial to devote slightly more of your practice time to the keys that are most called for in your musical experience. Most woodwind and brass instruments resonate better and are therefore played more often in flat keys like concert F, Bb, Eb, Ab, and Db. Guitar-driven music is often composed in sharp keys like concert E, A, D, G, and B. Definitely practice all keys, but keep in mind it is acceptable to focus on the keys you use most.

BROKEN RHYTHMS

- Apply a variety of rhythms to any exercise or musical passage you are learning. Doing so will help you play cleaner and faster.
- Examples of how to "break" a full bar of even 8th notes:

Start with this ->



Then make the notes long, short, long, short...



Then short, long, short, long...



Then long, short, short, short...



Then short, short, short, long...



Then long, short, short...



- This technique makes you play faster notes without speeding up the overall tempo.

VARIATIONS

- Come up with your own variations! Every musician has different experiences and aesthetics that inform how they decide to interpret a given scale or exercise. Your unique variation will be more fun, more easily remembered, and will sound more like your inner voice.

- What is a variation?

There are infinite musical variations! Sound, Melody, Harmony, Rhythm, Growth are the main types:

Sound: articulation, timbral shift (growl, mute, etc), displaced octave, dynamics

Melodic: ornaments (trill, turn, etc), expand or contract intervals, retrograde, inversion

Harmonic: change key or mode, superimpose 2 chords, chord progressions

Rhythmic: augmenting and diminishing time, syncopation, repetition,

Growth: repetition, space, fragmenting, change in any above elements

ON EXPERIENCE

- Ability and musicality in general boil down to one thing: Experience. The more time you put in, the more musical experience you create for yourself. Feel like you're not at the level you want to be? Just put in consistent work every day (remember 15 minutes a day of intentional practice goes a very long way), and that time you spent with your instrument, getting to know it, connecting it to your subconscious, listening to music you want to be able to play, will absolutely add up to measurable differences in your playing. In other words... keep practicing!
- Practice your weaknesses. In other words, if you only practice what you can already play, you will never improve.
- Play with other people. A lot of bands are really nice about letting people sit in.
- Surround yourself with musicians who are better than you, and you will climb with more strength up the mountain.



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