

The Practice Plan

Nobody ever sat down and just played: it *always* takes work to grow - the view from the mountain is only for those who make the climb. But no matter how high the mountain, that climb is nothing more than a bunch of small steps, one after another and you only get stronger by pushing upward.

Divide every practice into small doable steps so you can say 'done' and move on. Organize your music into three groups so you can work through a Practice Plan that moves songs through *new* to *developing* and then to *performance* phases ...

New Material:

1. **Divide the music into *logical* sections:** is it 8-bar segments? what scales, what arpeggios or classic rhythms? Look for patterns and *chunk* them into workable bits.
2. **Establish a plan:** play it through to find where you stumble and then work on the hurdles until you can laugh at them. It is an adventure waiting to be discovered, go discover it, find out what you don't know!
3. **Play at a steady but SLOW tempo:** slow down until you can get it right, and learn the music, not your mistakes (the metronome is your patient friend!)

once you can do all that, then that piece of music moves into ...

Developing Material:

1. **Find the phrases and flow,** the breathing of the melody and rhythm
2. **Increase the tempo** bit by bit to proper speed but only as fast as you can actually *play*
3. **Memorize!**

once you can do that, you're ready to move that piece into ...

Performance Material:

1. **Practice performing,** the whole piece, start to finish, as if it was a show, be aware of how you sit, *sit like you are standing*, look at yourself in the mirror, *are you looking like a show?*
2. **Get 'off book'!** Memorize the dynamics and tempo marks; with band pieces, pay attention to where the other players are and listen for cues and landmarks
3. **Play with it,** look for new ways to play it, fit it together differently, stretch the time, play with the melody, experiment with trills and slides, try new tempos, new rhythms, classic rhythms, change the tone, change the mood, make it YOURS

Now you can play it, but you could do better. you can always do better, even if you play for 50 years, and so every practice needs some attention to ...

Technique:

1. **Scales**, all sorts, major, minor, diminished, half-diminished, there are thousands of scales
2. **Arpeggios**, like scales, are the LEGO blocks of our music, and our music is full of them. learn to play arpeggios for all the chords, and learn to recognize them
3. **Diction**, the way you hit, hold and release each note, the way you change how you hit the notes to give rhythm and clarity to your playing! The rise and fall of the line, the 'punctuation' of each musical statement. *Think like a singer!*
4. **Instrument-work** - every instrument is a Universe to be explored. every instrument has special things it can do; explore techniques with valves/harmonics, multiphonics, cross-fingering, flutter tongue, growling, humming, paradiddles, press-rolls, cross-picking/finger-picking(guitar), playing octave doubling (keyboard)... YouTube has video instructions for all kinds of crazy things.

and lastly, give some daily attention to the basics of ...

Musicianship!

1. **Sight-reading**: Play something you *don't* know! There's a ton of sheet music, grab some.
2. **Theory and ear-training**: there are ear-training mp3s on the computer, learn to tell major from minor, 6ths from 4ths, 7ths from 7ths ;) Experiment on the piano, then try a test.
3. **Composition and improvisation**: pick a chord/scale, hum it, sing it, make up melodies with it, make up songs with A-A-B-A or A-B-C-A structure. Learn about chord tones, leading tones and chord substitutions. Watch Aebersold's video on Improvising
4. **Listening**, really closely listening to music on Grooveshark or Youtube, listen for the harmonies, scales and the rhythms they use, listen to the diction, watch their embouchure and technique. You should spend at least as much time carefully listening as you do practicing and playing; music is a language, listen to how people speak it & copy them!

This practice plan is our music room's adaptation of the plan given in Gerald Klickstein's wonderful book, "[The Musician's Way](#)", a comprehensive manual for becoming a musician.