

## Guide to Practicing and Technique

**Practicing** The most important thing you can do to insure your success is learning how to practice effectively. Here are some practice tips:

a. Develop an effective practice routine. Always try to practice with the same concentration you use when you perform, playing as beautifully and musically as you can regardless of the tempo.

b. Prepare your score. Divide it into practice sections starting with sections of approximately 8 measures. As the piece becomes secure, increase the size of the sections slowly. Write in all fingering that is necessary. Never guess at the fingering. **Always play with perfect fingering. Perfect finger leads to perfect performance.** Number the larger sections of your piece so that you have starting places should you have a memory slip. Think of each of these sections as a separate piece.

c. Practice in small sections hands alone. Always check your hand and finger position. All of the joints and knuckles should be pointing out. The first joint is particularly important. Make sure it doesn't collapse, but is always flexed outward. Know and use the

wrist and arm movements needed for each passage. Keep wrists and arms relaxed. Always rotate wrists. Elbows ONLY follow the movement of the wrist and never initiate any movement.

d. **Slow repetition is your key to success.** Practice each section of your piece slowly, always with the metronome. Repeat each section twenty-five times to master the music and technique, and memorize it as quickly as possible. Never practice faster than you can play without error. **Don't be tempted to "taste the cake before it's baked."**

Use the *NERF* method. The *NERF* method means you always practice your music slow enough to have perfect *Notes*, *Expression*, *Rhythm* and *Fingering*. Strive to have perfect, relaxed control of every note. When you can play a passage perfectly 3 times in a row, increase the metronome speed one or two notches. Be careful that your practicing doesn't become drill work that sacrifices concentration and beautiful playing.

e. **Truly effective practice doesn't begin until after memorization.** Don't wait until a piece is learned to begin memorization. Discipline yourself to begin memorizing immediately and make memorization a continual part of your daily practice routine. **Memorize each section hands alone.** I would suggest that during your 25 repetitions, you begin forcing yourself to play by memory after the tenth repetition. When each section can be played at a moderate tempo by memory, begin practicing hands together.

f. Practice performing your piece. Your performance tempo is the metronome speed at which you can play your piece perfectly. If you can play your piece perfectly 5 times in row, increase the metronome speed. This is your new performance tempo.

As you practice performing: **Do not stop for mistakes.** Keep going. Jump to the next section if you have to. At the end, make a note of where the errors were and try to determine why they happened. Then, devise a remedy to eliminate it. I can help you if you need some practice strategies. Correctly fixing errors will cause weak areas to become the strongest.

g. Once the piece reaches the final performance tempo goal, the majority of your practice should be at a slow to moderate tempo to maintain perfection of playing and control. Practice performing your pieces in performance class and other settings. These practice performances should not be with friends and family where you will feel comfortable, but where you will feel some performance pressure. Try to have ten practice performances of each work. This will work out the kinks and greatly increase your confidence.

## 10. Technique

Practice technique 25 to 35 minutes a day. Make a chart and set metronome goals for each week. Practice scales every day and rotate the other exercise groups during the week. Always work

with a metronome. Strive to maintain relaxed wrists, arms and hands. **Do not overwork or strain.** Let me know if you experience any pain. All techniques must be practiced with perfect fingering. Check off each item as you reach the goal.

### **What Good Practicing Sounds Like**

\*With the metronome at a tempo that is not too fast

\*Learning in 2-4 measure phrases  
Practicing in small sections

\*Hands separate

\*Playing something and fixing the mistakes

\*Mistakes are drilled until they are learned (5x in a row perfectly)

\*Many repetitions

\*Eighth- and sixteenth-note passages are practiced with high, loud fingers

\*Eighth- and sixteenth-note passages are practiced in rhythms

\*Eighth- and sixteenth-note passages are practiced with accents on different notes

\*Forte and staccato practicing

\*Musically perfect  
(all musical markings observed)

### **What Bad Practicing Sounds Like**

\*No metronome  
Metronome that is too fast

\*Playing the whole piece through

\*Always hands together

\*Making mistakes and keeping going without fixing the mistakes

\*Mistakes are drilled until they are right only once

\*Playing something once or twice

\*No practicing on eighth- and sixteenth-note passages

\*Mezzo-forte practicing

\*Unmusical, no dynamics, no expression, no voicing, no rubato