

Checklist for Practicing

Francesca Arnone, Leonard Garrison, and Katherine Borst Jones
National Flute Association Convention, Chicago, IL, August 7, 2014

Check each box if you:

- Reserve enough time in your schedule to practice sufficiently and regularly.
- Find a quiet, comfortable, private (if possible) room with good light, and the best acoustics possible. Make sure your music stand is high enough. Have a proper chair, and even an exercise ball of the right height for you.
- Establish a practice routine including warmups.
- Practice in numerous short sessions (as short as five minutes!) rather than one huge block.
- Practice the most difficult passages in spaced repetition (repeat every so often throughout the day instead of in one concentrated session).
- Practice at a time when you are energized and alert.
- Keep a positive attitude. Assess your playing objectively without a crushed ego. Encourage yourself, take a break if you get frustrated, and spend some time sight-reading or playing for enjoyment.
- Attribute success in music to hard work, not “talent.” In other words, you can do it if you try!
- Devote your whole attention to the music (as opposed to Facebook, E-mail, etc.); practice thoughtfully.
- Research the composer and style period and know the meaning of all terms and notation used in the music and the background of the piece.
- Understand the structure of your pieces, both on a micro and macro level (What elements such as scales and arpeggios generate the pitch material? Where do phrases begin and end? What is the form of the piece, and where do sections start and end?). Plan breaths and mark them in your music. PERFECT THE PHRASE.
- Set specific, realistic goals and strategies for each practice session; relate these to your long-term goals.
- Vary your practice strategies and choose strategies that are relevant to your goals.
- Practice your music in priority order (most to least difficult passages and upcoming performances or assignments followed by longer term projects).
- Vary the order of passages within a particular piece (in other words, don't always practice from beginning to end).
- YOU ARE WHAT YOU PRACTICE. Devote time to musical as well as technical issues. Always practice expressively (don't save musical expression for “later”). Understand and convey the character of the music by associating it with a story or set of emotions.
- Isolate one aspect of the music at a time; don't try to accomplish multiple goals all at once.
- Use appropriate tools (metronome, tuner, recording equipment, mirror, pencil).
- Are aware of your body while playing and make appropriate adjustments.
- Alternate standing (for solos, warmups, etc.) and sitting (for ensemble music).
- Practice slowly enough that you don't make mistakes.
- Correct mistakes immediately, and make sure to perform correctly many more times than incorrectly. Make appropriate markings in your music. Persist in working on problems until they are fixed.
- Practice according to your learning curve; in other words, have a long-term plan for increasing the tempo to the performance tempo, and as you approach your performance, you practice larger sections with fewer stops.
- Employ a mixture of “physical” and “mental” practice.
- Evaluate your own performance and plan for future progress.
- Improve during your practice session.

Note: rehearsing and performing, though valuable experiences, don't count as practicing!

A Few Thoughts on Practicing

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National Flute Association

42nd Annual Convention – Chicago, IL

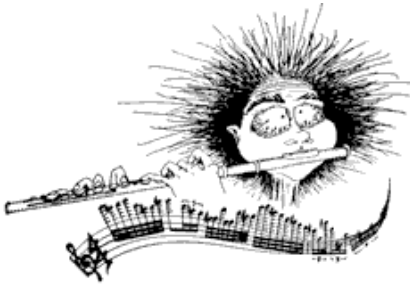
August 7, 2014

General Advice and Goals:

- Sharpen your powers of observation; seek ways to develop your critical listening
- Secure a “practice buddy” to help develop “active ears”
- Be fully engaged in all practicing activities while releasing tension in the body
- Develop deeper powers of concentration
- Alternatively, explore selective inattention
- Create a lesson plan for the day/week/month/performance goal, maintaining a balanced “diet” of tone/technique/musical nourishment. Work backwards on a timeline.
- Know your strengths, and know what’s working
- Seek inspiration: recordings, videos, books, blogs, your journaling
- Investigate the powers of reflection

Practicing Techniques:

- Understand the double-edged sword of repetition
- Displace the beat
- Translate to a physical gesture
- Image the isolated trouble spot
- Audiate regularly
- Use technology weekly
- Have a list of “go-to” techniques that help you personally iron things out
- Identify the skeleton/touchstone notes = shape the phrase or gesture, always



PRACTICE Thoughts FOR FLUTISTS

Katherine Borst Jones

Practice because you want to. Set goals. Find your voice. Float the sound. Keep it spinning. Move the air. Practice what you don't know how to do. Make up your own exercises. Explore. Be a detective. Try new things. Play without music. Practice what you can't do, not what you can do. Make music always.

Find a quiet, comfortable, private (if possible) room with good light, and the best acoustics possible. Provide yourself with a music stand, a chair, a metronome, a tuner, a pencil, a recording device, a dictionary of musical terms and a practice notebook/planner. Make a practice plan.

Warm-up your body with stretching and breathing exercises. Begin playing easily by improvising beautiful notes, or ugly notes, or red sounds, or purple or yellow sounds. Make up tunes. Then practice long tones, intervals, trills, harmonics, whistle tones, scales and technique exercises, etudes, ensemble music, solos and sight-reading. Play by ear tunes you love. Sing and play, try multiphonics, spit tonguing. Sing the music, then play it. Study the full score. Listen to recordings.

Practice for 20-25 minutes, then take a break. Stay in the moment. Be attentive. Observe and notice your body. Practice without tension. Listen carefully. Feel, hear, see, think. Plan for the next session. Come back often. "It is a question of time, patience and intelligent work." Trevor Wye

Use practice techniques , including:

Slowly ("if you never make a mistake, you never make a mistake)

Chunking (3 to 7 notes at a time, repeating 3 to 7 times).

Backwards, the last two notes, last three, etc.

Circles (find the pivot note; do three notes, five etc.)

Changing the beat (move the bar line so each note gets to be first.

Play the rhythm on one note. Sizzle the rhythms.

Change the rhythms. (dotted, triplets etc.)

Change the meter.

Finger - Play (finger the note, then play it, on the beat, off the beat)

Tongue slurred sections, slur tongued sections. Use other articulations.

Displace the octave for passages with large intervals.

Use the metronome at different speeds. Up two notches, down one, OR

Practice a passage slowly, then with every imaginable rhythm. Wait 5-6 hours,(8AM, 2PM, 8PM repeat the process again, sleep. Do this for four days. You will know the passage. (From Crunelle at the Paris Conservatory (Michel Debost's teacher)

Favorite technique books:

Taffanel and Gaubert: 17 Grand Daily Exercises

Marcel Moyse: Daily Exercises

Trevor Wye: Practice Books

Reichert: Opus 5 Seven Daily Studies



WHAT to do with a NEW PIECE

Consider ALL the markings on the music, the title, composer; key signature, the meter, the dynamics, style and metronome marking. Be a detective. What did the composer mean by that marking?

Who is the composer? From what time period are they? What is the style? Look through the piece and observe the overall form. Note tempo changes and difficult passages. Study the complete score. Play it on the piano. Sing the piece while conducting it.

As a flutist you must consider the natural tendencies of the flute. They are: long notes are louder than short notes; high notes are louder than low notes; and slurred notes are louder than tongued notes. Also pay attention to pitch issues. As we ascend, the pitch goes higher; as we descend the pitch goes lower. The more fingers are down, the lower the pitch; the fewer fingers down, the higher the pitch.

Now, play through it slowly. Find cadence points. Map out phrases and breathing places. Identify high points of phrases as you work to pace the piece as a whole. Work out the most difficult passages using many different practice techniques. Listen to recordings of other pieces by the same composer. Work every day. Once the piece is “under your fingers”, perform it. Record it and listen back. Is the performance convincing?

PHRASING TIPS:

“Make me love it, make me hate it, but don’t bore me”

Sing the line to find its shape.

A motive (a word), a phrase (a sentence); a movement (a chapter),

Look for tension/release. Contrast lyrical with rhythmical.

Follow the energy of the meter and individual rhythms.

Follow the shape of the line; play rainbows.

Find the skeleton of the melodic line, (often one note per measure!)

Vibrate on the most important notes of the phrase, not just on the last note, or longest notes.

Lean on the first note of a slurred passage. Appoggiaturas must be slurred to its softer resolution.

A two note slur implies an decrescendo.

Find dissonance. Bring it out.

Move across the bar line, 2341 (11234, 2345, 3456, 4567, 5678, 6789, 78910)

Imagination Make up a story or a dance. Compile a list of mood words. Apply one per phrase.



etc.

Innovative Practice Techniques

Leonard Garrison, The University of Idaho

National Flute Association Convention, Chicago, IL, August 7, 2014

- Mental practice first time, than physical practice second.
- Sing or speak then play.
- As many times as you want half tempo, then ONCE full tempo.
- Record yourself playing at full tempo, then listen to playback at half speed.
- Metronome torture: record yourself playing with a metronome at full tempo, then listen to playback at half speed
- Flexible tempo.
- Stop on the note that ails you.
- Stop on successive notes.
- Expand the circle.
- Touch the metal.
- Watch your fingers (compare to guitarists): especially for learning new fingerings.
- Hear your fingers (hold flute up to flute).
- Hands separate.
- Practice 1,2,3,4,5,6 per beat (beginning of Daphnis).

The Current State of Practicing – Bibliography

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