

# MOLLY ALICIA BARTH

## FLUTIST

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**TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS:** With diligence and persistence, you can learn to accomplish all that you set out to accomplish each day! Follow these guidelines:

1. **Create a written schedule each morning.** Allow yourself to be flexible within this stated schedule. My schedules never end up as they were originally planned....things always take longer than expected. Allow yourself 1 hour of catch-up time at the end of the day (and if you have managed to stay on schedule, you will have a magical hour at the end of your day- hooray!) Know your limits and your pace. **PRIORITIZE:** Most important tasks first (for me, this is practicing my flute- email/phone calls etc. can wait until afternoon!) Include in your daily plan: practice time, class time, study time, something fun, exercise, hobby. Schedule the first hour of practicing your flute as early in the day as possible, so that you are able to have longer breaks between each practice session. Perhaps most importantly, schedule carefully prepared and healthy meals. Poor eating habits hurt efficiency, creativity, productivity, and overall physical and emotional health.

2. **Make Lists. Have a notebook handy at all times. Include:**

- a. **Short-term goals:** weekly assignments, lesson goals, daily fundamentals plan.
- b. **Mid-range plans:** semester exams, paper due dates, recitals, auditions, festivals, competitions, website updates, entrepreneurial efforts.
- c. **Big picture/life aspirations:** next degree or job, creative projects, personal aims, academic pursuits, other musical/artistic interests, dream vacations, ideal locations to settle down, goals involved with raising a family and sharing life with a spouse/partner.
- d. **Be realistic** about the demands you place upon yourself. Learn the difference between what is essential and what is expendable. I create a number system to compare all possible opportunities in my future: "1" are high priorities, "2" are good but not essential to achieve my goals, and "3" fit in only if there isn't much on my "1" and "2" lists. Learn to say "no" to opportunities if you are feeling overwhelmed.
- e. **Work backwards** from big goals to schedule what is necessary to meet them. If I am working to memorize a piece, I write in my calendar specific dates by which each segment of the piece (about 1 page per segment) should be learned. Again, work in wiggle-room, because if you are human, you most likely will get backlogged. For example, I aim to memorize a piece (and to perform it for students or colleagues) two weeks prior to a public performance, so that any train wrecks can be fixed with ample time.

## **PRACTICE SESSION STRATEGIES**

### **1. Prepare your body for your practice session- loosen up/stretch:**

- a. Standing up, reach arms/upper body toward the floor, dangle there for 20 seconds or so. Wrap your arms around your lower legs to increase the stretch.
- b. Standing tall, tilt your head from side to side to aid your neck.
- c. Roll neck forward/side-to-side. Massage your forehead.
- d. Consciously relax jaw muscles- open and close your mouth, massage jaw hinge, let your mouth fall open (as if in awe of something).
- e. Interlock hands in front of you, with arms outstretched. Pull your hands as far forward as possible, feeling the stretch in your upper back.

### **2. Focus- Learn to get maximum results within a concise practice session:**

- a. Breathing exercise- 4/6/8 counts in/out, with arms as guide.
- b. Select conducive practice space (good temperature, good light, as sound proof/quiet of a space as possible, dry as opposed to boomy acoustics) Create an environment that makes you want to be there for long periods of time and to focus on the flute and on nothing else.
- c. Have at your disposal: pencil, metronome, tuner, mirror, stand, all of the music that you intend to play during the session, recording device when it might be useful.
- d. Put in a far-away location: cell/home phone, computer, TV (anything that might taunt you...). If possible, find a space away from children/family.

### **3. Use your body in a comfortable, natural way:**

- a. If you feel pain, assess the situation. Are you trying out a new hand position, or a new instrument? Are you slouching? Is your flute rolled inwards too far? Take a break if you feel pain, and then play short subsequent sessions, thinking of nothing other than optimal use of your body. Think of your entire body...sometimes, tension in your leg can manifest itself as pain in your arm, for example.
- b. Take breaks. My rule is to separate each hour by at least ½ hour of another activity.
- c. Take days off occasionally...One day off each week or two is a good way to clear the brain and to aid the muscles.
- d. Consider delving into yoga, tai chi, Alexander Technique, Acupuncture, and the like to keep your body strong and your muscles relaxed.

### **4. How to use your powerful brain:**

- a. Trust yourself- you have had solid training (or you would not be here today!). You know your strengths and weaknesses, and you can be honest with yourself.
- b. Be sure that you are making music in every note that you play (scales, etudes, pieces, long-tones). Develop a personal connection to everything that you play.

c. Constantly strive for perfection during your practice sessions. Be aware always of good and poor playing within a session, and work to make your playing as wonderful as it can be. If you really do this, once you get on stage to perform, you should feel confident that you have over-turned every rock; there will be no chance for evil voices to appear, and lots of opportunity for unexpected emotional heights.

d. Lose those inhibitions- improvise that cadenza in the privacy of your practice room! Ornament the heck out of that Bach Sonata! Take a break from your solo piece and just play whatever notes and rhythms feel right at that moment, while no one is listening. These are excellent ways to have fun and to learn to trust your own musical instincts.

e. Whenever possible, follow your interests and desires. Play repertoire that interests you, with people that will stretch your boundaries.

f. Delving into the nitty-gritty of a practice session: identify if your practice glitch relates to physical, emotional, or cognitive issues (or a combination thereof). Think of solutions that have worked in the past for you, or look for new solutions through peers, professors, the internet, books, CDs.

g. Know when to squelch the repetition of bad habits.

h. Be sure to regularly pat yourself on the back for small and big things that you accomplish within each session.

i. Reward yourself, if incentives are your modus-operandi (say, if you practice 1 hour without taking any phone calls, you can call your best friend afterwards)

j. Listen: use a recording device when you reach the point in a piece that you are ready to play it through “intact”...with all breaths, phrasing, dynamics, and musical decisions worked out. Be a fly on the wall of your own practice room. When you listen to the recording, be critical: Are breaths loud? Subdivide the beat in your head. Are you perfectly in rhythm? Is vibrato being used effectively/consistently? Are you communicating the desired emotion of the passage?

k. Be comfortable enough with the notes in your piece: be able to sing what you are playing. A well-focused, resonant tone derives directly from your vocal chords being in tune with your instrumental note.

l. Occasionally refer to recordings of yourself and others performing your repertoire. However, develop your own interpretation- copying a recording of a piece displays itself in your performance. Music is best when it comes straight from your own heart.

m. Make notes in your music: develop a personal shorthand for the notation of breaths, dynamics, use of B flat key, groupings of notes.

n. Study the score- know the other parts as well as your own- write them into your part

o. Study the melodic and harmonic analysis of your piece (or if it is a contemporary piece lacking these structural points, find any structure you can-motives, extended techniques as points of division within a work, etc)

p. Enjoy the physical sense of playing your instrument. When your flute is truly resonating, the metal will vibrate. When you breath deeply, your vocal chords will cause your voice to lower its tone, and your notes to increase their warmth and depth.

Congratulations: You are now as efficient and productive as is humanly possible!