

The Four Keys to Perfect Practice

Most people (including most instrumental teachers) think very little about how to structure a practice session for maximum benefit. They seem to expect their students magically to alight upon an efficient and effective way to use their time, then wonder why their students' progress is haphazard.

There is a better way!

In this brief report, we'll outline the four cornerstones of developing an effective practice routine, so that you can make the maximum progress in whatever time you have available.

Key 1: Small Chunks

When you begin to learn a new piece, a new scale, a new arpeggio, or any new technique, it's tempting to "bash through it" at something like the speed you expect to perform it. Resist that temptation!

Start with a small chunk: a few notes of the scale, a few notes of the piece or a few notes of the technique.

Key 2: Slow Practice

What do we mean by "slow"? Quite simply, the speed at which you can play your chosen phrase perfectly. By "perfectly", we mean the following:

- Exactly the right notes
- Exactly the right fingering, in both hands
- Precisely in rhythm, at your chosen tempo
- Each note sounding clearly, with no extraneous sounds

Key 3: Systematic Repetition

Once you've identified the speed at which you can play the phrase perfectly, repeat the phrase multiple times. Depending on the length of your chosen chunk, we recommend somewhere between five and twenty repetitions. Aim to spend no more than 4 minutes on a single phrase.

Key 4: Switching

It turns out that the brain assimilates new techniques most effectively if you switch between multiple techniques each time you practise. For example, if you're going to practise for 30 minutes and work on 3 techniques, don't break your thirty minutes into three blocks of ten minutes. Instead, break it into blocks of 2-4 minutes, so that you end up switching from technique A to technique B to technique C several times during the session.

Good luck, and happy practising!