



Thoughts On Practicing

Practicing an instrument is the key to increasing your skill. What are good practice habits? How do we structure this time?

To practice an instrument is to program your mind and your body. Think of the acronym “**PIER**”.
Positive, **I**nquisitive, **E**xcited, **R**elaxed.

- **Positive** - Whether you believe you *can* or you *can't* accomplish your goal, *you are correct*. Smile! You can do this! You have talent!
- **Inquisitive** - This helps you understand and extrapolate information, and it can lead to breakthroughs. Ask yourself questions like, “Could I play this better if I adjusted my elbow or wrist?”, or maybe “Can I play this somewhere else on the fretboard, or in a different key?”.
- **Excited** – You are following your dreams and learning to express yourself in a powerful way! Listen to how amazing your instrument sounds! Be grateful that you are able to play music.
- **Relaxed** – If you relax when you are practicing, you will be able to relax when you are performing later. You can be excited in your mind without tensing up your body. Take big, relaxed breaths.

Another important aspect of good practice is to avoid mistakes. “Practice makes perfect” really means “**Perfect practice makes perfect**”. You can play PERFECTLY if you play SLOW enough.

Here's a good practice routine for players of any level:

1. Tune up your instrument. Stringed instruments like guitars, violins, ukuleles, banjos, mandolins, and basses go out of tune all the time.
2. Warm up your hands and your mind. Play some music, scales, or exercises that are not too challenging in order to get into a good mindset.
3. Play the most challenging, newest stuff you are learning. This should be the bulk of your time. Take care to play things perfectly, even if that means you have to play slow. Every time you play perfectly, you are teaching yourself to play perfectly. Every time you make a mistake, you are teaching yourself to make a mistake. If you make a mistake, don't get discouraged.
MISTAKES ARE MOTHER NATURE TELLING YOU TO PLAY SLOWER.
4. Play whatever you can play the best. Play something you really enjoy. When you end your practice session, you should set your instrument down feeling good about yourself. This will help encourage you to practice again soon.

Don't spend too much time on steps 1, 2, or 4. You can spend as much time as you want playing things you already know (you've earned it!), but that doesn't really count as practice.

As you progress, you will get better at your instrument, and you will get better at practicing! You will learn more and more pieces of music, and learn new music faster and faster. The more things you can play, the more you will want to practice.