

Practicing: Self-Guided Mastery
By Dr. Todd Wilkinson

The Practice ‘Triumvirate:’

Mental Conception – Body Response – Judgment of the Ear

I. The Mind – Mental Conception/Vision and Maintaining Focus

A. Staying Calm – Avoiding and Managing Frustration

1. Meditative
2. Repetitive
3. Frustration as a Misinterpretation

B. Using the Mind First

1. Mental Vision - Seeing with the Mind’s Eye
2. Awareness as the Ear or Body overtake the mental management
3. Focus is Achieved Without Hurry and Sustained Without Anxiety
 - a. Slow
 - b. Patient
 - c. Accepting
 - d. Release Expectations of Achievement

**II. The Body – the Physical State and Ability to Respond to the Mental Impulse –
Managing Muscle Tension in an Aerobic Performance**

A. Physical Relaxation

1. Balanced/Natural
 - a. Natural Curvature of the hands
 - b. Balanced Stance
 - c. Relaxed Shoulders
 - d. Relaxed Embouchure

B. Breathing Support

2. Keeping Tension in the Abdominals from spreading
3. Ergonomic and Efficient Use of the Air Supply

C. Feedback Devices

1. Mirror
2. Playing Close to a Wall
3. Recordings
4. Peer Review
5. Live Performance

III. Hearing – Mental Understanding and Approval: The Feedback Loop

- A. Does the Result Satisfy the Intent?
- B. Is the Hearing Interpretation Correct?
- C. Let the Ear and Body Run the Show, after the Mind is Satisfied.

A Method for Learning to Play Printed Music:

Count It – Say It – Finger It - Play It

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1. Count It

Using the beats, divisions of the beat, and subdivisions thereof, count out the rhythms (aloud) in very slow time, at a tempo where you achieve 100% rhythmic success. Make sure to whisper the rests and include them in your counting. This isolates the horizontal, temporal, left-to-right motion of the music on the staff.

2. Say It

Say (aloud) the note names, with and without accidentals out of time. This isolates the vertical up and down motion on the staff. Then go back and say the note names in time, at a slow tempo that allows you to achieve 100% success.

3. Finger It (and Count It and Say It)

Finger the appropriate finger on the instrument as you first and Count the Rhythm aloud again. Then secondly, Say the Note Names aloud. This helps with Hand/Eye Coordination, incorporating the horizontal, the vertical, and the physical.

4. Play It

Now play the music at a tempo where you can achieve 100% success. Make sure to use all of the correct articulations, making decisions regarding breaths, phrasing, and style. Play the dynamics, and then add expressive qualities (ie vibrato, tone, accents, scoops, etc.) This combines the Eye/Hand/Body, and incorporates the Ear, which judges your success.

Other Methods for Mastering the Tough Technical Licks:

1. Find the tempo of 100% success. You can never practice too slowly, but you can easily practice too fast. Don't let your desire to play fast trump your control.

2. Add-a-Note Method.

One note at a time; add another note and repeat until 3xs perfect. Then add the next note in the selection. This can also be done in reverse, by beginning with the last note of the selection.

3. Long-Short/Short-Long Rhythms.

Impose the Dotted Quarter/Eighth and Eighth/Dotted Quarter Rhythms over the selection

4. Duple/Triple

Impose groups of three notes and then four notes over the selection, changing the emphasis of individual notes in the selection.

5. Wait to move. Don't begin playing until you can see three notes ahead, then play them, but don't continue until you register the next three in your mind. Once you can do this, then repeat the process with four, five, six, notes, etc.

6. Temporary Memorization.

Turn away from the music and play the selection from memory. Several times. This takes the eye out of the process and allows you to internalize your focus.

7. Use the metronome. Change the pulse. Start with the smallest consistently used note length as your pulse, then expand: 16th, 8th, quarter, half, and whole notes. Vary the placement of the metronome pulse, strong beats, weak beats, differing single beats of the measure, off-beats.

Managing Practice Time
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I. Stay Healthy

- A. Eat a Healthy Diet
- B. Get Plenty of Rest
- C. Exercise
- D. Read, Work, and Study
- E. Be Social
- F. Play Games alone and in Company
- G. Regularly Visit the Doctor, Dentist, and Other Meaningful Healers
 - 1. In Sickness Prioritize Healing
- H. Refrain from Risk

II. Planning a Routine in Advance

- A. Establish Priorities and Goals – Saves Times and Energy
- B. Organize the Practice Session
 - 1. Tone Studies
 - a. Long Tones
 - b. Overtone Studies
 - c. Embouchure Studies
 - 2. Scales/ Chordal /Articulation Studies
(1 and 2 are the Initial Relaxation Zone of the Routine)
 - 3. Break
 - 4. Etudes and Tune Memorization
 - 5. Break
 - 6. Solo Works
 - 7. Break
 - 8. Ensemble Music
 - 9. Dessert – Something you enjoy and sound good playing
- C. Practice the Same Time of Day.
- D. Keep a Journal of Work
- E. Take a Regular Day Off

III. Diagnostics: Diagnose a Problem and Prescribe a Solution

- A. Home in on the Exact Point of the Trouble
 - 1. When first approaching a piece, the places where you are forced to stop and ‘double-check’ will continue to be areas of trouble. Circle these points and begin with these in future practice sessions.
- B. Create a Prescriptive Drill (repetition with a specific purpose)
 - 1. When you have run the drill 3xs perfectly, move on or increase the tempo.
 - 2. Place the Drill into the larger context.
- C. Eliminate Corrected Material from the Routine
 - 1. If it sounds good, kick it out of the routine or save it for ‘dessert.’

IV. Choose a Method for Learning

- (See Above)
- A. Maximize Your Down Time
 - 1. Listen constantly to the music and style to which you aspire
 - 2. Sing and Count when you are walking
 - 3. Read Everything Related to You Endeavors
 - 4. Surround Yourself with Similar Company
 - 5. Compose / Double on Another Instrument
- B. Visualize / Meditate / Think Positive / Imitate / Model

V. Monitoring Tension and Frustration

- A. Stay detached emotionally in practice and rehearsals.
 - 1. Humbly accept your abilities.
 - a. When you make a mistake learn to interpret it as the signal of an opportunity to learn.
 - b. When you misinterpret your mistakes, your ego is at work.
 - c. Silence you inner critics, both the Little Devil and the Little Angel.
 - 2. Focus on the Journey not the Destination.
 - a. You cannot play like the performer you want to be, only as the performer you currently are.
 - b. Be patient and consistent. Just as in any workout routine.
 - c. Be in the moment: Practice like you would when you are using a broom or a shovel
- B. Don't let technical limitations affect your emotions. If you do then the music is playing you!
 - 1. If you are anxious about a deadline, slow down even more!
 - 2. Don't wrap your self-worth in your abilities only
 - 3. Comparing your abilities to those of others in unfair and futile
 - 4. Use constructive criticism at all times
- C. Monitor Body Tension.
 - 1. Use a mirror
 - 2. Close Your Eyes and Take a Physical Inventory
 - 3. Sigh and Smile for an Antidote
 - 4. Never 'Hurry' to the Instrument – move slowly even before you begin to play

VI. Use the Metronome

- A. The Metronome Insure That You Don't Play Too Fast, Too Soon
- B. Metronome Techniques
 - 1. Find a BPM that Allows for 100% Success
 - a. Not possible top begin too slowly
 - b. Always possible to play too quickly
 - 2. Strive always to transfer slow mastery too the faster tempo.
 - a. Increase tempo in 4s not 1s
 - 3. Click Placement
 - a. All Beats
 - b. Strong Beats only
 - i. 1 & 3 in 4/4
 - ii. 1 in 3/4
 - iii. 1&2 in 6/8
 - iv. 1st beat of measure only
 - v. Etc.
 - c. Weak Beats
 - i. 2&4 in 4/4 (Swing Feel)
 - ii. 2, 3, and 2&3 in $\frac{3}{4}$
 - iii. 2&5 in 6/8
 - iv. 1 weak beat of each bar
 - v. Etc.
 - d. Division and Subdivision of Beat
 - i. Duple
 - ii. Triple
 - e. Off-beats or Up-beats