

PRACTICING 101
Rodland Organ Studio

I. Setting some good habits

- Try to practice every day. It's much better to do a small amount each day than it is to cram in several hours over a weekend. Even 15 minutes is better than 6 hours one day and nothing the next.
- Plan your practice time! If you know you've signed up for some time in the practice room you will be more likely to show up!
- Plan your practice. Start with some general goals and know which pieces you need to cover. Your plan can change a little as you go, but if you have a general idea of what you need to accomplish you'll be more accountable.
- Don't play from the beginning. Start with the harder passages. Avoid the "self-congratulatory play through" unless you are close to a performance.
- Take notes. What went well? What do you need to work on? Often this a good starting point for sharing with your teacher in a lesson. I may actually ask you to keep a log so that together we can see if there are changes we can make to your routine. Also it helps us both see if the hours you think you are practicing are actually enough or even too much.
- Use several different practice techniques (listed below) to keep your practicing engaging. Do not just set the metronome on and practice slowly.
- If something isn't working well or you get frustrated switch up practice techniques or move to a new piece and come back.
- Make sure you schedule breaks in your practice. Know how much you can handle before you start thinking about lunch or even worse start to experience pain from repetition or other issues.

2. The "nitty gritty" - practicing techniques

- isolating voices
This is obvious I hope. RH/Pd, LH/Pd. I often find that mistakes happen when the pedal is not confident. Be sure you have your pedallings marked if there is any doubt. This also goes for fingerings. No need to write in every single fingering – but whenever there's doubt or difficulty a confident fingering is necessary.

- slow cell practice
Practicing slowly – but beat to beat. Take a small portion of a measure (usually 1-2 beats) and practice from beat to beat. Always start and stop on a strong beat and link “cells” together gradually. I also like to gradually speed up the cells (see gradual metronome practice below)
- additive rhythms – many different varieties
Not just dotted rhythms – but elongating any of the pitches under the groups. So many varieties! Be sure not to go too fast and be very accurate with your rhythms and make sure everything always lines up.
- chordal ghost practice (also works for manual changes)
play a chord – move quickly over the next chord without actually playing the notes. Sets up advance movement and preparation efficiently.
- gradual metronome practice (how to speed up tempo)
This seems obvious – but not always done consistently. Take a short passage of music and start the metronome off quite slowly – gradually increase. Works very well in 4-8 measure segments.
- super slow section runs for focus
when you find yourself thinking about food or your homework be sure to pull yourself back into the music. Where are you in the form? What is the harmony? Which part is difficult?
- different stop combinations for focus
this can be anything. A 2/3 versus a 16 foot reed.
- silent manuals for isolating voices
especially helpful in trio type settings. Good for listening to articulation in inner voices.
- metronome on offbeats or in jazz rhythms
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3. Practicing for Baroque articulation

- try playing passages with single finger – then repeat with your fingering. It will help your ear with the subtlety of the articulation
- Hesitation practice. Lift out of the keys before each beat (or strong beat). Feel your fingers (and feet) release and attack exactly together. Enjoy the silence!

4. **Memory**

- divide pieces into starting spots or memory posts
- practice starting at any one of these spots
- analyze form
- sing individual lines while playing others
- repeat super slow practice for focus

5. **Sources for great practice.**

The mind/body connection and how to bring your practice forward to the performance.

Noa Kageyama

<https://bulletproofmusician.com/>

This website has fabulous practice techniques and a course for dealing with all kinds of performance anxiety. All of the practicing in the world sometimes doesn't help if you cannot work on some of the performance anxiety issues. That being said – careful practicing so that you are always prepared and always feel confident physically can take you a long way. Trust yourself!

Molly Gebrian, violist and neurologist.

<https://mollygebrian.com/music-and-the-brain/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p09gq03q>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3ct1pqb> (11.40)

All kinds of great articles about music and the brain and how it relates to healthy practicing.

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