

# How to Practice (better)

Philosophy and Strategy

# What are you trying to accomplish?


Accurate reproduction of composer's writing

Aesthetically pleasing sound

Tell a story (emote)



# Competency: what does it mean for you?

- Read in all keys with accuracy
  - Hand position that makes playing most effortless
  - Air support that produces right sound and technical fluidity
  - Ease of articulation
  - Knowledge of style
  - Technical fluidity: fingers go where you need/want them to go
  - Proper execution of page markings
  - No delay between brain and fingers
  - Produce the sound you hear in your head
  - Recover QUICKLY from mistakes
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# What is practice?

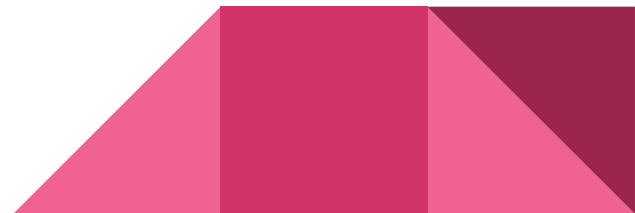
Objective error detection and mindful correction

Minimizing margin of error through thoughtful and focused repetition.

Increased consistency of execution.

Develop a greater sense of EASE with the instrument

Preparation for performance



# Components of a good practice regimen

Scales and patterns - pure technique

Melodic or technical etudes

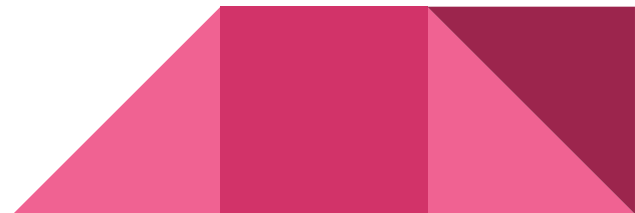
Repertoire you like!

Fast pieces (velocity building)

Slow pieces (tone and nuance building)

Mental practice/Listening to recordings

Record yourself



# Gentle Practice (sustainable long-term)

Ethic of care

Listen, notice, direct your attention

Judgement-free observations

Smoothing out rough edges

Noticing and releasing tension in the body

Aspiring towards effortless mastery through fluency

Process over Product (you are always evolving and growing, it is a fluid process)



# Philosophy

Gentle / Mindfulness

Compassionate, forgiveness for error and how much time it takes (respect the slow pace of progress)

Growth Mindset, Process over Product, Sculpture

Experimental

Personal growth

Desirable Difficulty (embrace it, stretch yourself in order to grow)



# Ways to Practice

**Integrated:** work on everything at once (or as many as possible)

**Itemized:** broken down into its constituent parts





# Itemized Practice

**Reverse engineer** what you want:

A good performance has:

Right notes

Accurate intonation

Accurate rhythm

Accurate and clean articulation

Supported and beautiful tone

Played in the appropriate Style

Sense of Phrase, Direction

Carefully placed breaths

Intentional and well-paced rubato



# Begin with choosing your Mindset

I intend to be kind to myself, objective and solution-focused

Present-moment focus

Mind-body awareness (proprioception)

Self-reflection

Self-assessment

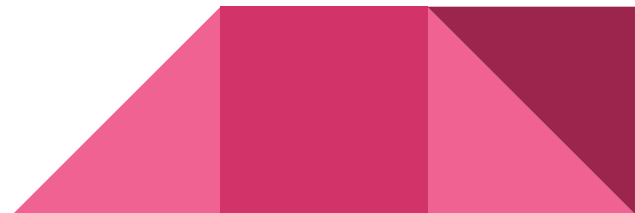
Diagnosis

Documentation



# Improving finger technique

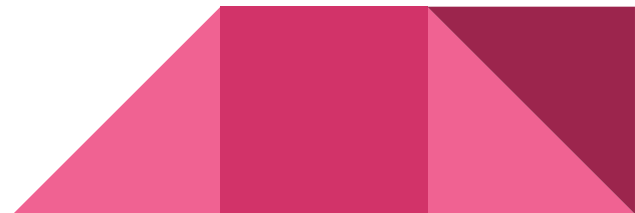
- Name the notes while fingering (in rhythm)
- Talk to the hand
- Rhythmic variations
- Add-a-note
- Chunking
- Skeletonizing
- Speak rhythms
- Play it backwards
- Start at the end and add-on
- Stop on different notes



# Improving sound and air support

- “SHH” + Fingers only
- “HEE” attacks
- Closed-bell exercise
- Play without the register key
- Pitch bends
- Hold long tone and imagine playing the whole phrase

***Time for Tone***, by Eva Wasserman Margolis



# Articulation

Proper Support

Proper/flexible tongue position

Closeness of tongue to reed

Surface area of tongue on reed

Direction of contact on reed

Tonguing bursts



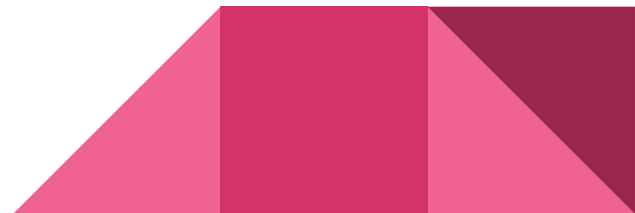
# Cultivate Style

Excerpts

Polatschek etudes

Kovacs Hommages

Listen to recordings



# Plan your phrases

Tabuteau numbering system

Identify the beginning and end as well as climax of the phrase

Identify areas of harmonic tension and release



# Dealing with Distraction

## **Smart Phones:**

Airplane mode - still use tuner/metronome

App blockers

Set a practice and break timer - your break is your reward for 45 mins of focus

Nosy Neighbours - diplomatically tell them you're on a mission and have limited practice time, or better yet, put a DND sign on your door!





# Optimizing your energy cycles


## **Oscillation** and **intermittent, STRATEGIC Recovery**

You know what HIIT is...?

Plan to practice when you have the most amount of energy during the day (before a work-out) Keep a journal of your energy levels for a few days

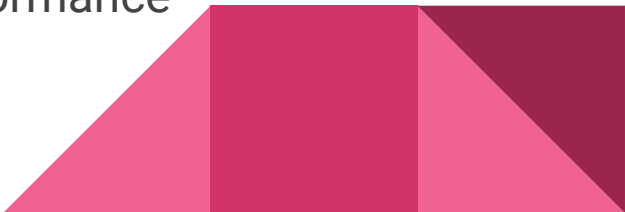
Take breaks **BEFORE** you feel tired (mentally and physically)

When you take a break, make sure you actually rest! Lay down on a yoga mat, close your eyes, put on soothing music etc.



# Mental practice

When you are fatigued, or in an environment where you can't make noise, mental practice can be a way to add more repetitions to your day without exerting much physical effort

- speak/think note names while doing fingers only
  - Come up with cue words, intentions for each section
  - Tactile practice
  - Listen to recordings
  - Sing (in your head) what you want to execute in performance
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# Interleaving your repertoire

3 minute intervals, ABC ABC ABC

- Avoid habituation
- Prevent boredom and frustration
- Cultivate performance flexibility
- Context switching (muscle confusion)



# Treasure your 'failures'

Every mistake is a gold nugget of information telling you where you need to put more attention.

Stay emotionally detached, focus on the problem and logical solutions

Ask for help, don't keep spinning your wheels



# Accountability

## Body Doubling

Recruit your friends for “practice appointments”

Plan ahead to account for your personal tendencies around energy levels and attention span

Set goals, and ask a friend to catch you when you break your promises to yourself

Do a written reflection after each session, noting whether you accomplished your goals and what may have prevented you from being more successful if you didn't

