

MUSIC INSTITUTE of CHICAGO

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Prepared by Gilda Barston

**“Practice does *not* make perfect. Practice makes permanent.
Perfect practice makes perfect!”**

1. Set goals

What do you expect to accomplish?

One-point focus

Small steps

Isolating problems

2. What to practice - be sure to check your notebook for your teacher's instructions!

Warm-up

Tonalization

Scales, arpeggios

Review

Incorporate new techniques into scale practice and review practice

Incorporate the “focus” of your practice here, as well

Exercises and Etudes

Include “previews” of new repertoire

Work on current piece

Play through a section (or the whole piece, if appropriate)

Identify the strengths and weaknesses

Notice and enjoy the things that you are doing well

Notice and enjoy the things that have improved

Find the problem spots

Decide how to work on these places

DO NOT repeat them over and over without a strategy. This does not usually solve problems, but reinforces what you are doing which is not working.

Remember, “Practice does *not* make perfect. Practice makes permanent.

Perfect practice makes perfect!”

3. How to practice (some ideas)

Check your notebook and music for your teacher's instructions!

Use the music for reference.

Check for practice spots that your teacher has identified. (Boxes, brackets, circles, etc.)

Set a *reasonable and attainable* goal.

Work in small steps.

Playing a short passage with a perfect bow hold, memorizing 2 measures, or perfecting a very small section, perhaps a scale or arpeggio, for example, would be a good goal. You can always add additional goals as you achieve each one. You will feel good and be encouraged by your small successes, and each small success will lead to bigger successes.

Slow, careful practice is good, but remember that you also need to practice playing in real time. Different practice techniques are useful in different situations.

Practice slowly and carefully to listen to your tone and intonation.

Check that all notes, rhythms, fingerings and bowings are correct.

Check bow contact point and distribution.

Check for correct hand position.

Practice sustaining notes for full tone and ringing intonation.

This practice may be "out" of rhythm, but here your goal is to listen to the quality of each note, not to play the piece. This is also effective practice for vibrato.

Practice connecting bow changes smoothly.

Practice sustaining vibrato.

Try finishing a bow and keeping the vibrato going. You may be surprised to find that your vibrato ends when your bow stops!

Practice in front of a mirror to check posture, etc.

When repeating, always stop and reset your left hand, bow, and *brain* before each repetition. Take a deep breath!

Try "wipe-out" when you do repeated practice to keep your concentration.

Use a tape recorder or video recorder regularly.

Always remember that some things take time to gel. You should not expect instant results.

Memorizing music

Listen, listen, listen!

Understand the structure of the music.

Form: a-b-a, etc.

Find all the parts that are the same.

Find all the parts that are similar, but different.

Set reasonable, attainable goals.

Memorize in small "bites." Be sure each section is secure before continuing. Check all notes, rhythms, fingerings and bowings carefully, with the music. Include articulations, dynamic and all phrasing while you memorize each section.

Practicing fast passages:

Practice slowly to check notes, fingerings, bowings, intonation, etc.

Break the passage into smaller passages. Be sure you understand the rhythmical groupings and fingering patterns.

Practice slurred passages with separate bows and vice versa.

Practice repeating each note 4, 3 and 2 times each. You will be doing the bowing articulation quickly, but will be able to think and prepare each fingering change. This also works wonders for coordination.

Do ribbets and double ribbets.

Practice in dotted rhythms.

Practice with misplaced accents.

Practice in prolongations.

Practice using "add-a-note".

Practice scale and arpeggio passages in both directions. If the scale goes up, also practice it in reverse. This is very good for understanding where all the shifts and fingering patterns lie.

Practicing shifts:

Find the target note.

Be sure that your hand is balanced and that your bow is placed correctly for optimal tone.

Reset the note, left hand and bow. Start away from the fingerboard and find the target.

Repeat this several times.

Place left hand on the note before the shift. (Do not play it.) Anticipate the balance for the new note. Reset the left hand and bow on the target note. Repeat this several times. Use "helper" notes when possible.

Play the preceding note. Notice where the bow ends. Set the target note, using "helper" notes if possible, checking left hand and bow balance. Try to anticipate the new balance on the "old" note. Repeat this several times.

Practice connecting the shift in rhythms. Bottom note should be quick, to the top note, which should be sustained. Play the "helper" note in rhythms, and then silently.

Practice the shift in context.

Repeat this practice every day. Secure shifts require many repetitions.