



VIOLIN

Seventeen Steps to More Productive Practice

adapted by Sally O'Reilly

I adapted this for strings from a list by pianist Olga Samaroff (Leopold Stokowski's wife) who taught William Kapell. I hope that it will help students and teachers organize practice habits.

1. Examine the score away from your instrument.
2. Form a musical and imaginative interpretative concept of the goal toward which you will work.
3. In order to save time, instead of reading through the work, take the first eight or twelve measures. Examine carefully for phrasing, type of bow stroke(s) to be used, accents, fingering, and individual problems of left and right hands.
4. Select a metronome tempo at which you can play this portion *perfectly*. It doesn't matter how slow that might be. If it is perfect, it has a future! Now, play this section slowly *at least twenty-five times*, with all the issues above included, plus total concentration. You may increase the speed in small increments as you progress. If you start to make mistakes, slow the speed back down.
5. Practice fast passages slowly with vibrato to preserve vitality of sound. Practice melodic passages non-vibrato for accuracy, then with vibrato on every note.
6. Practice the entire piece in small sections in this manner. Every time you stumble, examine whether the mistake was caused by a special technical difficulty or whether your concentration lapsed.
7. If you find a special difficulty within a passage, determine whether the problem lies in the left hand or right arm, or both! Isolate it for even more intense work. Never try to solve two problems simultaneously. If you do, each one is only getting 50% of your attention. Master the special difficulty *before* going back to practice the section as a whole.
8. *Never let repetition become mechanical. If you are tired, stop for fifteen minutes or so.*
9. Every time you begin practicing any section, go over it for accuracy first at a slow speed.
10. Work with the metronome to increase speed *gradually*. Never leaving a speed until it is perfect.
11. Be willing to practice difficult right arm passages on open strings. Practice slurred passages in separate bows, and fast detache passages slurred.
12. Remember that the object and inevitable result of practice is the establishment of the habit of playing a certain thing in a certain way.
13. Do not establish the wrong habit.
14. Even when working slowly and carefully, keep in mind the elements of mood and feeling.
15. The playing of music is a very complex function, including spiritual, intellectual, emotional, imaginative, and physical powers of the player. This complexity must be practiced.
16. Budget time and work on a schedule.
17. *Never* practice more than two hours at a stretch. Ivan Galamian insisted on 50 minutes of practice followed by a 10-minute break.

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