

Practice Tips

It's all about timing

No matter if you play drums, piano, guitar, or any other musical instrument, timing has an enormous affect on how good you sound. Impeccable timing will make even the poorest melodic idea shine, while weak timing will make a fantastic melody lose its appeal. Just like other aspects of musicality, timing is a skill that can be learned and improved. I would like to share with you a few concepts and exercises that will help you to develop a better understanding and control of timing.

In order to improve your timing, it is important to understand that every beat can be played in three different ways: before the beat, right on the beat, after the beat.

Let's take four beats and visualize them as four poles placed exactly one foot from one another. If you walked from the first pole at the exact speed of 60 feet per minute you would hit pole 2 after a second, pole 3 after another second and pole four after another second. The whole trip from pole one to pole 4 will take you 3 seconds. You could spend the same 3 seconds walking the same distance but not hitting the other poles on seconds 2 and 3. For example, maybe you were late getting to pole 2 and compensated it by arriving too early to pole 3. The same rule applies to playing music. Each note you play relates to the beat. If you had the ability to recognize exactly where you are hitting the notes in regards to the beat you would then be able to improve your timing tremendously.

This following simple exercise will help you recognize your timing pattern. It is very simple, yet very effective. It was shown to me by Kenwood Dennard, a fantastic drummer, teacher and friend. If you want to get the most out of this exercise, you should record yourself and analyze the results.

1. Set your metronome to 60 BPM
2. Pick up your musical instrument
3. Play 60 short notes, try to hit each note exactly on the beat
4. Play back the recording and mark how many beats you hit exactly on the beat, how many before the beat and how many after the beat.

You will soon notice your tendencies. Some musicians tend to rush, when others tend to drag. The more you will focus on this simple exercise the better awareness to timing you will have and it will naturally be reflected in your playing. I recommend spending 5-10 minutes every day practicing this exercise.

Article by [Yotam Rosenbaum](#)

How to practice music

No matter which instrument you are trying to master, there are some basic considerations you may want to keep in mind.

RHYTHM

In order to be able to play with others, you have to play rhythms accurately. This will ensure that you are keeping the pace with other musicians and fitting in the musical context properly. Use the metronome to avoid or correct any inaccuracies. Here are a few tips:

1. Understand rhythmic notation fully.
2. Practice difficult passages slowly at first (see “Technique” below) to avoid/correct inaccuracies.
3. Subdivide beats if necessary. Here are a few examples: if the beat is in quarter notes and you need eighth notes, multiply the BPM by 2 (quarter=60 is same as eighth=120). If you need triplets, multiply the quarter beat by 3 (quarter=60, triplets=180).

TECHNIQUE

If you cannot play a fast passage flawlessly, SLOW it down and practice it with a metronome. Your mistakes and struggles will be heard by your peers and by the audience alike. Find a tempo at which you can play every note correctly (pitch, duration, tone quality), no matter how slow. If you can play the passage without mistakes five times in a row, you can speed up (about 2-4 clicks on the metronome). Gradually increase the tempo until you reach the tempo required.

NOTE ACCURACY/TUNING

Make sure you can play every note with the correct fingering. Do not ignore sharps or flats (or double sharps and double flats). Moreover, ensure that you are in tune at all times. Playing in tune *with yourself* is the first step toward becoming a good ensemble musician.

TONE

Always strive for an even and pleasing tone quality in all the registers of your instrument. Do not compromise your sound due to technically challenging passages.

Article by [Boglarka Kiss](#)