

# Smart Practice!

*By Anne Marie Patterson*

- Have specific goals for your practice. Every session should result in progress.
- You can do more in 10 minutes of focused practice than an hour of sloppy playing!
- Only practice what you have trouble with, don't waste time "playing." (In rehearsals, put a star by anything you need to work on later.)
- Good practice is not pretty! It's OK if it sounds nothing like the actual piece.
- By the third time you make the same mistake, you've created a habit. Your goal is to not make the same mistake more than twice.
- Have a pencil, use it well! Write (clearly!) whatever you need to correct the problem: fingering, arrows, bowing, slash marks, or at the very least, circle it!
- The problem is often between two notes. Play those two notes obsessively.
- Students tend to practice a half page, 2-3 times. Grad students tend to practice a line 5-10 times. Professionals tend to practice 3-4 notes until it will never be wrong again!! (136 times!) Practice like the pros!
- Once the "problem" is fixed, back up a few measures and play through it. If it doesn't work, go back to fixing the problem.
- Getting something right is just the first step. Do thoughtful repetitions until you can't get it wrong!

## Rhythm

- If there's a rhythm problem, PUT THE INSTRUMENT DOWN! Make your brain tell your hands what to do, not the other way around.
- Write in slashes to show beats, say the rhythm with a steady pulse.
- METRONOME! Always listen to at least 2-3 beats before playing to synchronize.
- Say, clap or tap the rhythm first, then play it.
- Subdivide: fill in larger note values with smaller ones to know exactly where to place an 8th, 16th, etc.

## Speed

- Practice runs in rhythms, essentially putting pauses in different places while still making some notes fast. (Dotted, reverse dotted, triplets, pause on string changes, shifts, etc.)
- Add a bead' method: play 2 notes, 3 notes, etc. always holding the last note.
- Look for patterns, don't always play note-note-note.
- Do 4,3,2 repetitions of each note. (Double bows, etc.)
- Use metronome, gradually increasing tempo. (Note where you fall apart!)

## Intonation

- String players' position is critical! Be sure yours is right!
- Use a tuner, but not on autopilot! Engage your ears, pay attention to how the note sounds when it's in tune. If possible, use a tonic drone.
- Use a piano if at all possible.
- String players, check every A, D, G and E/C with open strings, or at least listen for the resonance.
- Know what interval you're playing, especially whole vs. half steps. Poor intonation is usually a result of incorrect relationships between notes.
- String players: keep fingers down. Practice double stops, learn the spacing.
- Be your own best teacher!
- Practice as though the pickiest teacher was standing next to you.
- If you're trying to change a technique, check yourself *before* you play, *while* you play, and *after* you play. Grade yourself on how you just did. If you're not sure, do it again.
- If someone has told you to change something in your playing, do it every time you play. Don't just do it when they remind you!
- Video yourself. Video doesn't lie!
- Listen to a recording of your piece. (YouTube, jwpepper.com, etc.)

*Be objective, honest, careful, even obsessive, but don't be too hard on yourself. It's OK to make mistakes, it's how we learn. Just learn how to fix mistakes quickly.*

*Happy Practicing!*