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## 7 Tips for Effective Musical Practice

By Kevin Sinclair

The quality of your practice is much more important than the quantity. The old saying "practice makes perfect" is only true if the practice itself is perfect. Here are 7 tips to help make your practice more effective and efficient.

Practice motions slowly

The muscular memory of our bodies allows us to physically carry out patterns of motion with little or no conscious involvement. Examples of muscular memory include walking, riding a bicycle, typing, and of course playing a musical instrument.

In order to develop this memory, the muscles require training in the form of repeated conscious guidance from the mind. First the mind must learn the pattern. Then the mind must "teach" the pattern to the muscles.

The mind initially must control all the motions of the muscles. The more controlled and precise the motions, the more quickly the muscles will develop muscle memory.

Slow practice also allows the mind to teach "antagonistic muscles" to relax. Antagonistic muscles are those that move in opposite directions. By relaxing antagonistic muscles you can reduce tension and facilitate faster and easier performance and avoid potential injury.

Practice in small cells

A "practice cell" is simply a finite series of motions. Musical cells can correspond to anything from a few notes to an entire work. When practicing, it is important to practice small cells of just a few notes. Practicing small cells limits the amount of information the muscles have to learn at one time. It also facilitates the mind's focus and concentration.

Link the end of one cell to the beginning of the next

To help the muscles develop a sense of continuum throughout the piece of music, the last motion in a

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cell should be the first motion of the following cell.

Practice each cell in bursts

Once the muscles have learned a pattern, they will be capable of executing it without conscious control. Initiate the pattern through a conscious command and allow the muscles to execute it in a burst.

Don't practice mistakes

For every repetition required to learn a pattern of motion, it takes 7 times the number of repetitions to change the pattern. If in the course of your practice you make an error, stop. Review in your mind the

pattern. And further reduce the speed of your motions.

Pause between repetitions

When dealing with repetitive activities, the mind is better able to focus when the repetitions are broken up by short pauses. After two or three repetitions, pause for about 30 seconds to regain focus.

Take frequent breaks and don't "over-practice"

B.F. Skinner and other experts have found that the mind's ability to learn drops significantly after prolonged intense concentration. Research shows that studying too long (i.e. more than four hours) can deplete chemicals in the brain necessary for learning. Therefore, it is best to take frequent breaks (a 5 minute break about every 20–25 minutes) and practice no more than 4 hours consecutively.

By applying these techniques, you can dramatically improve the quality of your practice. You'll be able to use your time more efficiently and increase the effectiveness of your practice.

Kevin is the owner of

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, a site that provide information and articles on how to play

guitar for beginners to advanced players.

### **The Biggest Obstacle To Your Guitar Progress**

**By Craig Bassett**

Here's a quick question for you. What's the one biggest thing stopping you from becoming the guitarist that you truly want to be? Is it lack of time to practice? How about lack of money to get guitar lessons?

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How about a spouse who doesn't support your guitar playing endeavors? Or what about having to work long hours to support your family?

If you're like 97% of guitarists, you said the wrong answer. The right answer is YOU. Everyone is their own biggest obstacle to their guitar playing progress. Before you get offended and abuse me, let me explain further...

I believe strongly that our reality is based not on our circumstances but our PERCEPTION to our circumstances. This means that you could have two guitarists in exactly the same situation who react completely differently to that situation. I'll give you a real life example...

I have a roommate who works a nine to five job. Nothing unusual there... a lot of people do. Unfortunately this roommate uses his job as an excuse not to practice. He says that when he gets home from work he's always too tired to practice. I suggested to him once that he could get up an hour earlier each day to practice. This comment caused him to look at me like I was insane. Bottom line? My roommate isn't willing to make a VERY small lifestyle change to pursue his musical dreams. Most likely he'll go to his grave lamenting the fact that he "never had time to practice". How sad!

Luckily, not everyone has this loser perception. I have students who are just as busy (or busier!) but perceive the whole situation differently. They see their nine to five job as a challenge. They meet this challenge by getting up early to practice. They also make sure that they exercise regularly so that they have the energy to practice after work as well. Bottom line? They are steadily progressing towards their musical goals and dreams!

Can you see how the different perceptions of the same circumstance caused two different sets of actions?

Let's now look at a simple way that you can perceive your "negative circumstances" differently. Please follow the following steps...

\*\*\*Step One\*\*\*

Write down a circumstance in your life that you feel is slowing down your guitar progress.

\*\*\*Step Two\*\*\*

Write down exactly HOW the circumstance prevents you from progressing.

\*\*\*Step Three\*\*\*

Write down at least ten action steps that you could take to overcome the circumstance. Don't stop until you have at least ten.

\*\*\*Step Four\*\*\*

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Just do it! Take action and DO the action steps. Do what ever it takes. Remember...your musical development is at stake!

One last thought. I believe that for EVERY excuse you could ever have, there are guitarists in the world who have overcome exactly the same excuse.

Craig Bassett is a professional guitarist, author and guitar tutor. To gain TOTAL mastery of the guitar fretboard notes, please go to:

<http://www.GuitarNoteMastery.com>



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