

SCALE UP STORIES

Nancy Colier

My 10-year-old has been studying piano for five years now, and for five years, we have been struggling to get her to practice. Bribes, threats and bargains are the currency of necessity. I think there was one time in the five years, after a recital, that my daughter seemed to be genuinely happy about playing piano. She was proud of herself after that performance, and it seemed that she could see how her hard work had amounted to something that mattered to her. But that was short-lived and the next day, the same resistance returned. “Try another instrument,” friends and teachers cheerfully suggested. And we have. I can say that I now know the sound of many different kinds of instruments, from woodwinds to strings, hitting the tile floor. I suppose it hasn’t all been dreadful, though. Sometimes, when my daughter’s friends come over, she likes to show them what she can do on the piano and that seems to bring her a sense of satisfaction. By and large however, the piano has been five years of one big cacophonous yelling match, with a whole lot of “Noooooooooooo’s” and a sprinkling of slamming doors thrown in for harmony.

Challenge and discipline are good for children (and adults). Learning a difficult skill teaches us to push through frustration, and it strengthens the link between hard work and the joy of being able to do something well. True joy rarely comes without hard work, and we come to know this experientially when we do something hard on a regular basis. Taking on a challenge also teaches us to tolerate delayed gratification, to stay with something even when it is not fun, because of what will come later. We learn that there can be value in an experience, even when it is not pleasurable. Being willing (and tough enough) to keep practicing something hard gives us a sense of pride and inner strength. It connects us to ourselves in a very profound way.

When our practicing starts to deliver results, it is gratifying to know that we alone have put in the hours and offered up the blood, sweat and tears that now result in our competence (and excellence). This process results in a deep sense of self worth that is not transitory or grandiose, but rather firmly grounded in the connection between hard work and ability.

Furthermore, there are periods in every life when one has to do very hard things for sustained periods of time, with or without a payoff at the end. Life is a challenge. Practicing a difficult skill is like practicing life itself. It helps develop the ability to be able to make it through these hard periods, without going numb or going mad. In this way, activities that require discipline and challenge teach children critical skills that they will undoubtedly need at some point in their lives. The benefits of sustaining a practice in something that requires us to stretch to our outermost limits, to stay in it through fear, frustration, anger, boredom, all the mind plagues — to journey through a place where we don’t think we will come out the other side, has profound benefits that are too numerous to mention here.

So, that brings me to the question at hand... for how long? For how long do we, as parents, keep pushing a child through their resistance? At what point do we stop forcing them to do something (that they say they don’t want to do) for the sake of building important life skills and learning important life lessons? What is the tipping point when pushing through their resistance is no longer teaching them the importance of sticking with something hard, but rather becomes a lesson in ignoring

their personal sonar, that inner voice which tells them what they really want to do? When does the forcing of a challenging skill stop being something that helps connect our children to themselves and become something that actually disconnects them from themselves and their truth?

I have reached my tipping point personally, in part because I think we are working against the truth of *what is*, and on a more basic level, because I do not want the disruption in our family life to continue. Also, I wonder if at this point, since our daughter is 10, if we are not just banging our heads against a wall. It is quite possible that she may *not* take anything important from all this struggle. If she never learns to play piano well, which she won't if she doesn't practice or practices haphazardly (so as not to lose TV time), then all of this battling, this disruption in our home, will have been for what? She will not earn the sense of accomplishment and self worth, the link between hard work and joy that we were hoping for. I am beginning to believe that giving her the right to say "No," at this stage, may be more powerful in terms of teaching her a sense of her own value and strength.

I have asked my daughter if there is anything else that she would be interested in learning, something that would be a challenge and that she could practice at home on a daily basis. As of yet, we have not discovered another possible discipline, but that may change. Some people believe that we should stick with the plan, and that she should learn piano whether she wants to or not. To this mind, the ongoing conflict and familial dissonance contains a purpose that trumps the lived experience of it. Even if it's 18 years of fighting, she will get her vocal chords' worth of benefits from the experience. I, however, am not so sure and I wonder if we, like many families, are now just fighting over a concept, over an idea of what is good for children in general.

Here's what I know:

1. After five years of taking weekly lessons, my daughter consistently does not want to practice the piano.
2. When my daughter plays well, she feels happy and proud of herself.
3. After any improvement/success, she immediately returns to *not* wanting to play.
4. My daughter does not want to do the work that is required for her to play the piano well.

As far as I understand it, these are the *What is*-s. I am not interested in proving a concept, being right or winning the war. I am interested in giving my daughter the chance to build a deep, unquestionable, and very personal sense of her own ability, strength and toughness. Perhaps for her, these teachings will come from being so fierce as to have her "No" finally heeded by her two equally fierce parents?

Coincidentally (or not), as I write this just now, I am listening as my younger daughter bangs around on the same piano that my older daughter drops her clothes on. Without prompting, my 2-year-old often climbs up on the bench to sing a song and play a melody that she creates. The truth is I love the way my older daughter hangs her clothes on the keys just as much as the lovely sounds wafting into my office right now. Perhaps after all the trying to give something that is not wanted, there comes a time to fall in love with *what is*. Perhaps that time is now.

PRACTICE HACKS

by Noa Kageyama, Ph.D.

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"The right kind of practice is not a matter of hours. Practice should represent the utmost concentration of brain. It is better to play with concentration for two hours than to practice eight without. I should say that four hours would be a good maximum practice time—I never ask more of my pupils—and that during each minute of the time the brain be as active as the fingers."

~Leopold Auer

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Practice

Whydowedoit?

Two reasons

How many people do you know who love to practice? Who wake up bright eyed and bushy tailed every morning, eagerly anticipating a fun-filled day of scales, etudes, excerpts, and concertos in their windowless practice room? I'm betting that you can't think of many.

So why do we practice anyway? What's the point of it all? We practice to achieve two things.

One, to get better at *playing* our instrument. To develop our knowledge, skills, and abilities, enabling us to play at increasingly higher, more sophisticated, and subtly nuanced levels over time.

Two, to get better at *performing* on our instrument. To improve our ability to fully demonstrate our talents on cue. After all, improved skill and ability don't do much for us, if we only sound great in the practice room.

In this lesson, we are going to work on #1 - getting more done in less time, so you can avoid being stuck in the practice room all day, wondering why everything sounds an awful lot like it did yesterday...and the day before that...and the day before that...

In this lesson, you will...

1. Discover how many hours of practicing per day is optimal (and be able to enjoy the rest of your day guilt-free).
2. Learn how to tell the difference between productive practice and unproductive practice (so you can spend your valuable time getting better instead of spinning your wheels).

3. Use a strategy for prioritizing your practice time (to save yourself from getting so bogged down in the details that the first page sounds 10 times better than the rest of the piece).
4. Accelerate your learning process, thanks to two unique practice models.

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Mindless Practice

Easier, but costly

When was the last time you taped yourself practicing to evaluate your use of time? If you are in a music school or conservatory, take a 10-minute walk and eavesdrop on your colleagues. What do you notice about how they practice?

You'll notice that most folks practice on autopilot. It's very common to hear someone play through a piece until they hear something they don't like, then stop, then repeat the passage again until it sounds better, and resume playing until they hear the next thing they aren't happy about, at which point the process begins anew. When asked why they stopped, they might say "*It was out of tune*" or "*It didn't sound very good*" but when pressed for more details, such as which notes specifically were out of tune, in which direction, and by how much, they're not quite sure. This is a sure giveaway

that they were practicing mindlessly.

Three problems associated with mindless practice

#1: It wastes your time

Why? Very little concrete learning takes place when we practice this way. This is how we can practice a piece over and over for days and weeks and still not feel like it's gotten much better. In fact, by practicing this way you are actually digging yourself into a hole because what this model of practicing does do is strengthen undesirable habits and tendencies, making it that much harder to correct these in the future.

#2: It hurts your confidence

When you practice mindlessly, you aren't taking the time to consciously identify the critical combination of ingredients it takes to play the way you want. In failing to do so, there is a part of you that realizes you have no idea why sometimes a passage sounds great, and sometimes it doesn't. This will exacerbate your nerves leading up to an important performance.

Real on-stage confidence comes from being able to (a) nail it 5 times out of 5, (b) knowing that this is not just because you are having a good day, but in fact you can nail it on demand because (c) you know exactly what needs to happen from a technique standpoint for you to get it

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right the first time.

#3: It's mind-numbingly boring

Practicing mindlessly, and going through the motions with little thought or creativity is a chore. It's about as fun as doing the dishes or folding laundry. That's why it feels like work.

So what's the alternative?

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Deliberate Practice

The secret of expert performers

Deliberate (aka mindful) practice

Deliberate practice, on the other hand, is goal-directed, problem-solving, solution-focused practice. Instead of mindless trial and error, it's an active and thoughtful process of experimentation with specific goals and hypotheses. It involves taking the time to stop, analyze *what* went wrong, *why* it happened, and *how* one can correct the error permanently.

Put another way, violinist Paul Kantor once remarked that the practice room should be like a laboratory, where one can freely tinker with different ideas, both musical and technical, to see what combination of ingredients produces the result you are looking for. Read this short article from STRINGS magazine for more on Kantor's approach.

This is the kind of practice that is the hallmark of expert performers, from music, to sports, to business. Dr. K. Anders Ericsson is the world's leading authority on the acquisition of expertise and expert

performance, whose research is the basis for the so-called "ten-year" or "10,000 hour" rule. He has found that it takes at least 10 years and/or 10,000 hours of *deliberate practice* in order to achieve an expert level of performance in any domain - and in the case of musicians, upwards of 15-25 years to reach an elite world-class level.

It's easy to get distracted by the big numbers, but the real key here is not the *amount* of practice required, but the *type* of practice required to reach an elite level. Practicing any old way just doesn't cut it.

So what does deliberate practice look like?

Let's say you are working on an excerpt, and you are struggling to get the first note to sound like it does in your head. You record yourself, and then listen back.

More on Dr. Ericsson's work:

Profile in *The Australian*

The Making of an Expert

The Role of Deliberate Practice in the

Acquisition of Expert Performance

Was the first note sharp? Flat? Too loud? Too soft? Too harsh? Too short? Too long?

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Hmm...well, the note was sharp, lacked enough of an attack to begin the note, and wasn't sustained with enough intensity. How sharp was it? A little? A lot? How much longer do you want the note to be? How much more of an attack do you want?

Ok, the note was a little sharp, a bit too short and rather anemic sounding, and required a much clearer attack in order to be consistent with the marked articulation, dynamics, and mood.

So, what did you do that caused the note to be sharp? What do you need to change to make sure the note is perfectly in tune next time? How do you ensure that the length is just as you want it to be, and how do you get a consistently clean and clear attack to begin the note so it begins in the right character?

Now, let's imagine you tweak a few things, record this next attempt, and listen back to the recording. Does this new combination of ingredients more effectively convey the mood or character you want to communicate to the listener?

If yes, write the key ingredients down (to make it easier to remember), and then figure out what needs to happen for you to be able to produce this desired result consistently.

Egad!

Feeling overwhelmed? Is that a bit more intense than the typical 5-minute chunk of your practice sessions?

That's ok. As soon as you get into the habit of practicing this way and see how much more interesting and gratifying it is, you'll be hooked.

Plus, you also won't have to practice as long as you do now to notice positive results (Yay! More time for Angry Birds!). In fact, the literature on expertise suggests that there is little benefit from practicing more than 4 hours a day, and that gains begin to decline after the 2-hour mark.

Musicians weigh in

Not surprisingly, some of music's great historical figures have made recommendations that are strikingly similar to what the research suggests. Eugène Ysaÿe, for instance, recommended 3 hours of practice per day, and Leopold Auer suggested 4 hours max. Heifetz

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is said to have taken Sundays off, and violinist Donald Weilerstein has been known to encourage taking a 24-hour mini-break from one's instrument every week. Itzhak Perlman suggests five 50-minute sessions, max.

What's wrong with practicing more? Nothing, *if* you can stay productive. You can certainly *play* or even rehearse far more than 4 hours a day, but being able to make gains and sustain the level of focus needed for deliberate practice is a different story. If you're fully engaged in deliberate practice, you'll find yourself feeling pretty tapped out both mentally and physically, and be hard pressed to sustain a high level of focus for much more than 4 hours. Besides, this is a marathon, not a sprint. In the same way that people lose weight most effectively when they adopt a lifestyle change rather than a crash diet, you want to have a practice regimen that is sustainable, day in, day out.

Ok, so let's get down to business. But first, a word of caution. Resist the temptation to radically transform your practice habits overnight. You'll be so wiped out, there will be nothing left in the tank for the next day. Again, aim for sustainable changes over time. Like in the parable about the tortoise and the hare, slow and steady wins the race.

Oh - and one more thing

Do invest in a practice notebook. I recommend getting a notebook and pen so you can have a dedicated place devoted to collecting your thoughts, observations and notes about the valuable nuggets of wisdom and insights you are discovering in the practice room. Otherwise you'll forget, and it'll be 2 steps forward, 1 step back.

I'd encourage you to spring for something that you'll take pleasure in carrying around and writing in and keeping on your bookshelf for years to come (like the famed Moleskine variety, for instance), as this will make it more likely that you actually use it. And as a bit of a pen geek, I'm partial to these ultra fine-tipped pens that are such a pleasure to use that it makes you look for excuses to write things down.

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Practice Hack #1

Learn more in less time by practicing at the right time of day

Practice when you're most productive

What are your most productive hours during a day? Are you a morning person? A night owl?

We all tend to experience certain peaks and valleys in our energy during the course of a day. Some have lots of energy in the morning, others find that their energy grows as the day progresses, but then they hit a wall around 3pm and are pretty much useless until 5pm.

Because deliberate practice is such an active mental process, trying to practice during low-energy periods results in a lot of wasted time and the development of bad sloppy habits that are going to require more time and energy to fix later.

Conversely, we can learn a lot more effectively and make a lot more progress (and be less frustrated) if we practice at times when our minds and bodies are naturally more alert and focused.

Create an energy log

Print out this week-at-a-glance hourly calendar and take a week to fill in how alert you are from hour to hour (say, on a scale of 1-10, where 1="I need a nap" and 10="I'm ready to go run a marathon").

Based on this chart, try to schedule practice time during your peak energy hours, and schedule grunt work, naps, chores, or exercise for those times when you don't have the energy to really concentrate and practice effectively.

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Practice Hack #2

A simple strategy to make it easier to get off the couch and begin

Don't rely on willpower

For many, the hardest part of practicing is simply getting started. But rather than trying to increase one's willpower, and forcing oneself to practice, see if there's any way to make things easier and *reduce* the amount of willpower required (because willpower seems to be a limited resource).

As an example, one simple but helpful strategy is to keep your instrument out (somewhere safe, of course), so that if you should have the sudden urge to practice or try out a new way of approaching a phrase, you can pick up your instrument and begin playing immediately, instead of having to open your case, and spend 30 seconds getting everything set up.

Thirty seconds may not seem like much, but the extra effort it takes to get your instrument out of the case and put it back could be the little hurdle that represents the difference between practicing and not practicing.

You can learn more about the science behind mastering self-control here.

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Practice Hack #3

A strategy to increase your motivation to practice

Curiosity killed the cat

Remember the phrase "curiosity killed the cat?" Suspense can indeed be a very effective tool for motivating people to act. Season finale cliffhangers, for instance, can make it more likely for people to tune into the show the following season.

You see suspense every day in advertisements for the evening news as well, where they tease you with a few details about a can't-miss segment or expose (or heck, the weather) and make you wait until the end of the show in order to see the thing they promised at the beginning. It doesn't seem to matter that it's almost never worth the wait; we can't seem to help ourselves once we get a nagging question in our head.

We can use this principle to make it easier to get motivated to practice.

How to get back into deep practice mode quickly

I once read about a computer programmer, who made it a habit to break a piece of code before he took his lunch break. That way, when he returned from lunch, his first order of business would be to fix that piece of code. He found that this strategy of having a clear task to tackle, and a clear idea of how exactly to attack the problem, made it a whole lot easier to quickly get back into the flow of work.

Next time you're getting close to finishing up a practice session, identify a problem area that you'd like to fix, and write down a few possible solutions to try - but do not allow yourself to try any of them yet!

Go take a break, and when you return from your break, *now* you can begin with this problem area and the potential solutions you already identified. You'll find that the suspense created by this unfinished task not only makes it more motivating to return to the practice room, but easier to get back into the flow of practicing as well. Learn more about the science behind this here.

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Practice Hack #4

Get motivated and get more done in less time

Practice Sprints

In a related vein, the next time you find yourself drifting into autopilot mode, or are feeling resistant to practicing for a full session, try a practice sprint.

This is helpful because we tend to be much more productive in short bursts. Also, we are more effective when we have clearly defined problems to solve.

This is also helpful if you have a tendency to get sucked into one of those practice black holes where you obsess over a single note or phrase, and the next thing you know, an hour has gone by with little to show for it.

Hint: In general, you will likely find that 45-minute or shorter practice sessions are more effective than practice sessions longer than an hour. Why? It's easier to maintain a high level of intensity and focus when we know in advance that we only have to do it for a short time. But this is about sprints, so let's start by experimenting with an 8 or 10-minute interval.

Practice Sprints

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Practice Hack #5

The easiest way to be more productive in the practice room

Three-minute attention span

A recent study found that students could only stay on task for an average of three minutes at a time. As you might expect, those who were able to stay on task longer tended to be better students.

Interestingly, it didn't matter how many times a student checked Facebook in a 15-minute span. Just checking *once* was correlated with being a worse student.

This might be explained by the fact that it's not just the beep or alert of an incoming text that is distracting. It's the voice in your head that wonders if people have responded to your witty Facebook status update. Or whether so-and-so read your text about dinner. Or what fun thing is happening right now that you might be missing.

There are two problems with this.

One, you're not practicing deliberately; your mind is elsewhere while you merely go through the motions. Which means you aren't being as effective in your problem-solving as you could be. It also means that you could be creating bad habits that may sneak up on you at the worst possible time.

But the biggest problem is a little more subtle. Consider that your ability to concentrate and stay focused for extended periods of time is a key performance skill that you'll need in order to play your best in recitals, competitions, auditions, and in long orchestral performances - from the first note to the very last. Well, what do you think will happen on stage, if you essentially practice zoning out and being sort of absent mentally when you're practicing? Unfocused practice deprives us of a tremendously valuable opportunity to develop "attentional endurance"; the ability to stay focused for long periods of time.

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There is no such thing as a Facebook emergency

Make it easier for yourself to focus on your practice session and the agenda you've laid out. Put your phone in a different room and turn it off. That way it takes a little while to boot up, making it less likely that you'll turn it on in the middle of practicing. After all, when was the last time someone notified you of something that qualified as

an emergency via Facebook? Or the last time you received any sort of notice via your phone that couldn't wait an hour or two?

Try making some sort of deal with yourself where you are only allowed to check your phone at certain times if you've been productive. Something like, you can log onto Facebook only after you've gotten two solid practice sessions in.

Practice Hack #6

Maximize your efficiency by setting limits on practice time

What is Parkinson's Law?

Productivity-obsessed folks often talk about a phenomenon called Parkinson's Law which is extracted from the first sentence of a humorous essay published back in 1955 by a British historian.

Parkinson's law states that **“work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.”**

In other words, if we have a week to complete a paper, the paper will take a week to write. On the other hand, if we only have 24 hours to write the same paper, it'll get written in 24 hours.

Likewise, if we have all afternoon to practice, we'll spend the whole afternoon practicing. You'll get things accomplished, just not in the most expeditious way possible.

Hacking practice time

Let's say you were only allowed to practice two hours today. What would you spend your time on? How would the intensity of your focus change? What shortcuts or strategies would you develop to ensure that you make the most of your time? What decision rules would you create to avoid getting too bogged down in details that don't represent the most effective use of your time and energy?

People often say that when they've been forced to practice less due to an injury, they become more productive and find a way to get more done in less time. Many musicians also discover that having a baby forces them to be much more productive with their practice time as well.

Get more done by practicing less

Rather than getting injured or having a baby, why not train yourself to hack your practice room efficiency by limiting your practice time for a week? Set

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a daily practice time limit that you are not allowed to exceed - say, 50-75% of the amount of time you normally spend practicing. Set a timer for the total amount of time you're allowed to practice for the day, and see what happens if you go into your day with a clearer plan, more specific objectives, and a determination to be productive with every single minute of your time.

Some find it helpful to keep the timer somewhere visible, so you can see every single precious minute of practice time slowly tick off the clock. But others find it incredibly stressful and distracting, so you might just have to try it for a few days and see how you respond.

Practice Hack #7

Cycle through your repertoire in multiple passes to make the most of your time

Remember that time and energy are limited

It may be true that heaven is in the details (or the devil is in the details?), but then again it can be easy to get so bogged down in microscopic details, that hours of valuable time are lost to perfecting a single note or phrase. There's nothing wrong with spending a lot of time getting the details just so, except if we are doing so at the expense of other important and critical aspects of our playing.

I remember preparing the Bach Chaconne for a competition, and getting so obsessed with intonation, that I spent weeks working through just the first few lines. Meanwhile, there were a whole range of other issues that were being neglected (e.g. voicing, shaping line, pacing, tone color, not to mention memorization and the rest of my repertoire). I had to force myself to stop obsessing, zoom out a bit, and identify what was going to give me the most bang for my buck.

So how do we avoid this perfectionist trap? **Iterative practice.**
What's that?

An iterative process

Remember when your parents wouldn't let you go out and play until you had cleaned up your room?

You probably started by cleaning up the most obvious stuff first. Clothes on the floor, books that ought to be on a shelf, a stale pizza crust or two. If that failed to garner your parents' stamp of approval, you moved on to things like organizing your desk. And if your parents' expectations still weren't met, you kicked it up another notch, and so on, until your parents finally relented and let you leave. This was an iterative process. You cycled through your room multiple times, taking care of increasingly finer details on each

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pass or iteration.

Here's one example of an iterative model for prioritizing practice time. One of my teachers used a pyramid to graphically represent iterative

Iterative Practice Model

Plan on working through a piece in multiple passes (or iterations), by surveying the current state of a piece and creating practice goals and objectives at several different levels. For instance:

30,000 feet (big picture basics)

20,000 feet (finer details, but still relatively obvious things) **10,000 feet** (more picky details)

ground level (nitpicky microscopic stuff)

Ensure that you are taking care of the higher altitude stuff as well as the lower altitude details.

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practice. Foundational elements were at the base, and ultra fine details at the very top.

Another teacher described it as a series of filters, each one finer than the next.

Things may not end up being as neat and tidy and linear as the plan you start out with, but this prioritizing in this way will help keep you from losing track of time and fixating on minor details at the expense of major ones.

Practice Hack #8

The single most important page in the strategy guide

Problem Solving Practice Model #1

What does deliberate practice look like? Here's a 6-step problem-solving model.

Problem Solving Practice Model #1

1. **Define the problem:** *What do I want this note/phraseto sound like?*
2. **Analyze the problem:** *What is causing it to sound like this?*
3. **Identify potential solutions:** *What can I tweak to make it sound more like I want?*
4. **Test potential solutions:** *What tweaks seem to work best?*
5. **Implement the best solution:** *Make those tweaks permanent*
6. **Monitor implementation:** *Are these tweaks continuing to get me the results I want? Or*

do they need to be refined?

Problem Solving Practice Model #2

Want an even simpler formula? Try this (from *The Talent Code* by Daniel Coyle).

Problem Solving Practice Model #2

- 1. Pick** a target
- 2. Reach** for it
- 3. Evaluate** the gap between the target and the reach
- 4. Return** to step one

If you've not yet read *The Talent Code*, it's well worth picking up. Coyle's blog is also a great read, with helpful, often inspiring, and easy to consume articles like this one: [3 Rules of High-Velocity Learning](#).

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Take a Break!

Reward yourself for a day of productive practice

? *Click here.* **Take another step forward with these additional resources**

Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning

by Peter Brown, Henry Roediger, and Mark McDaniel

Honestly, the title says it all. It turns much of what we thought we knew about studying and practicing upside down, and I guarantee it will change how you study, practice, and teach. I think it's a must-read for everyone, and I bet you'll find yourself recommending it to other people as well by the time you're done reading it.

Also available as: Kindle | MP3 | CD

The Talent Code

by Daniel Coyle

My favorite non-academic book on the talent and expert performance literature, *The Talent Code* explains the concept of deliberate practice, why it's so critical, and what happens inside our brains when we engage in the right kind of practice. With lots of stories from education to sports to music (Meadowmount and a few specific musicians get a nod), it's also an entertaining and inspiring read.

Also available as: Kindle | MP3 | CD

Mastery

by George Leonard

Modern society predisposes us to be seduced by the allure of instant gratification and the quick fix. But as Beverly Sills once said, "*There are no shortcuts to any place worth going.*"

This classic book will inspire you to want to pursue the path of mastery (vs. seeking the quick fix). It explains the nature of practice and skill development and via its explanation of practice plateaus, will give you the patience to continue to work at something - even on days when it seems like no progress is being made.

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Where can I find more?

I hope you found this strategy guide helpful. Ultimately, the contents of this guide represents just a tiny sampling of the performance psychology-based exercises and techniques that top performers use to maximize their learning in the practice room, and perform optimally in high-pressure situations.

So if you've had this nagging feeling that you're capable of much more inspired and confident playing, but haven't found a way to play like you know you can when it counts, don't worry! There's nothing wrong with you - it's not a matter of talent or the lack of some innate "performer" gene.

The research suggests that there are certain mental, physical, and emotional states that are more optimal for performing one's best under pressure - and the athletes (and musicians) who've learned how to access these states on cue, are the ones who tend to rise to the challenge when it matters most.

If you're interested in continuing on this path towards becoming a more "bulletproof" musician and performer, the **Beyond Practicing** home-study course will help you learn the most useful skills that sport psychology has to offer. I'm totally biased, of course, but it's modeled after the live courses I teach at Juilliard, and contains the most effective techniques that I've shared with musicians around the world. Techniques that have helped hundreds win auditions, competitions, and ultimately, play more like themselves on stage.

Take a few seconds to check out the course description (bulletproofmusician.com/beyond-practicing) and see if the course is right for you. If you have any questions, feel free to email me at noa@bulletproofmusician.com.

In the meantime, happy practicing!

Noa Kageyama, Ph.D.

HOW MUCH PRACTICE SHOULD YOU DO?

2 hours? 4 hours? 8 hours? 12 hours?

How much is enough?

Is there such a thing as practicing too much?

Is there an optimal number of hours that one should practice?

What Do Performers Say?

Some of the great artists of the 20th century have shared their thoughts on these questions. I seem to recall reading an interview with Rubinstein years ago, in which he stated that nobody should have to practice more than four hours a day, explaining that if you needed to practice more than four hours a day, you probably weren't doing it right.

Other great artists have expressed similar sentiments. Violinist Nathan Milstein is said to have once asked his teacher Leopold Auer how many hours a day he should be practicing. Auer responded by saying "Practice with your fingers and you need all day. Practice with your mind and you will do as much in 1 1/2 hours."

Heifetz also indicated that he never believed in practicing too much, and that excessive practice is "just as bad as practicing too little!" He claimed that he practiced no more than three hours per day on average, and that he didn't practice at all on Sundays. You know, this is not a bad idea – one of my own teachers, Donald Weilerstein, once suggested that I establish a 24-hour period of time every week where I was not allowed to pick up my instrument.

What Do Psychologists Say?

When it comes to understanding expertise and expert performance, psychologist Dr. K. Anders Ericsson is perhaps the world's leading authority. His research is the basis for the "ten-year rule" and "10,000-hour rule" which suggest that it requires at least ten years and/or 10,000 hours of *deliberate* practice to achieve an expert level of performance in any given domain – and in the case of musicians, often closer to 25 years in order to attain an elite international level. Note that the real key here is not the *amount* of practice required (as the exact number of hours is debatable) but the *type* of practice required to attain an expert level of performance. In other words, just practicing any old way doesn't cut it.

Mindless Practice

Have you ever listened to someone practice? Have you ever listened to yourself practice, for that matter? Tape yourself practicing for an hour, take a walk through the practice room area at school and eavesdrop on your fellow students, or ask your students to pretend they are at home and watch them practice during a lesson. What do you notice?

You'll notice that the majority of folks practice rather mindlessly, either engaging in mere repetition ("practice this passage 10 times" or "practice this piece for 30 minutes") or practicing on autopilot (that's when we play through the piece until we hear something we don't like, stop, repeat the passage again until it sounds better, and resume playing through the piece until we hear the next thing we aren't satisfied with, at which point we begin this whole process over again).

There are three major problems with the mindless method of practicing.

1. It is a waste of time

Why? For one, very little productive learning takes place when we practice this way. This is how we can practice a piece for hours, days, or weeks, and still not feel that we've improved all that much. Even worse, you are actually digging yourself a hole by practicing this way, because what this model of practicing *does* do is strengthen undesirable habits and errors, literally making it more likely that you will screw up more consistently in the future. This makes it more difficult to correct these habits in the future — so you are actually adding to the amount of future practice time you will need in order to eliminate these bad habits and tendencies. I once worked with a saxophone professor who was fond of reminding his students that "Practice doesn't make perfect, practice makes *permanent*."

2. It makes you less confident

In addition, practicing this way actually hurts your confidence, as there is a part of you that realizes you don't really know how to consistently produce the results you are looking for. Even if you establish a fairly high success rate in the most difficult passages via mindless practice, and find that you can nail it 3 or 4 out of every 5 attempts, your confidence won't grow much from this. Real on-stage confidence comes from (a) being able to nail it 10 out of 10 tries, (b) knowing that this isn't a coincidence but that you can do it the correct way on demand, because most importantly (c) you know precisely *why* you nail it or miss it — i.e. you know exactly

what you need to do from a technique standpoint in order to play the passage perfectly every time.

You may not be able to play it perfectly every time at first, but this is what repetition is for — to reinforce the correct habits until they are stronger than the bad habits. It's a little like trying to grow a nice looking lawn. Instead of fighting a never-ending battle against the weeds, your time is better spent trying to cultivate the grass so that over time the grass crowds out the weeds.

And here's the biggie. We tend to practice unconsciously, and then end up trying to perform consciously — not a great formula for success. Recall from [this article](#) that you have a tendency to shift over into hyper-analytical left brain mode when you walk out on stage. Well, if you have done most of your practicing unconsciously, you really don't know how to play your piece perfectly on demand. When your brain suddenly goes into full-conscious mode, you end up freaking out, because you don't know what instructions to give your brain.

3. It is tedious and boring

Practicing mindlessly is a chore. Music may be one of the only skill-based activities where practice goals are measured in units of time. We've all had teachers who tell us to go home and practice a certain passage x number of times, or to practice x number of hours, right? What we really need are more specific outcome goals — such as, practice this passage until it sounds like _____, or practice this passage until you can figure out how to make it sound like _____.

After all, it doesn't really matter how much time we spend practicing something — only that we know how to produce the results we want, and can do so consistently, on demand.

Deliberate Practice

So what is deliberate, or mindful practice? Deliberate practice is a **systematic** and **highly structured** activity, which is, for lack of a better word, *scientific*. Instead of mindless trial and error, it is an **active** and **thoughtful** process of **experimentation** with **clear goals** and **hypotheses**. Violinist [Paul Kantor](#) once said that the practice room should be like a laboratory, where one can freely tinker with different ideas, both musical and technical, to see what combination of ingredients produces the result you are looking for.

Deliberate practice is often **slow**, and involves **repetition** of small and very specific sections of your repertoire instead of just playing through (e.g. working on just the opening note of your solo to make sure that it “speaks” exactly the way you want, instead of playing the entire opening phrase).

Deliberate practice involves **monitoring** one’s performance (in real-time, but also via recordings), continually looking for new ways to improve. This means really listening to what happens, so that you can tell yourself exactly what went wrong. For instance, was the first note sharp? Flat? Too loud? Too soft? Too harsh? Too short? Too long?

Let’s say that the note was too sharp and too long with not enough of an attack to begin the note. Well, how sharp was it? A little? A lot? How much longer was the note than you wanted it to be? How much more of an attack did you want?

Ok, the note was a little sharp, just a hair too long, and required a much clearer attack in order to be consistent with the marked articulation and dynamics. So, why was the note sharp? What did you do? What do you need to do to make sure the note is perfectly in tune every time? How do you ensure that the length is just as you want it to be, and how do you get a consistently clean and clear attack to begin the note so it begins in the right character?

Now, let’s imagine you recorded all of this and could listen to how this last attempt sounded. Does that combination of ingredients give you the desired result? In other words, does that combination of ingredients convey the mood or character you want to communicate to the listener as effectively as you thought it would?

Few musicians take the time to stop, analyze *what* went wrong, *why* it happened, and *how* they can correct the error permanently.

How Many Hours a Day Should I Practice?

You will find that deliberate practice is very draining, given the tremendous amount of energy required to keep one’s full attentional resources on the task at hand. Practicing more than one hour at a time is likely to be unproductive and in all honesty, probably not even mentally or emotionally possible. Even the most dedicated individuals will find it difficult to practice more than four hours a day.

Studies have varied the length of daily practice from 1 hour to 8 hours, and the results suggest that there is often little benefit from practicing more than 4 hours per

day, and that gains actually begin to decline after the 2-hour mark. The key is to keep tabs on the level of concentration you are able to sustain.

5 Keys For More Effective Practice

1. Duration

Keep practice sessions limited to a duration that allows you to stay focused. This may be as short as 10-20 minutes for younger students, and as long as 45-60 minutes for older individuals.

2. Timing

Keep track of times during the day when you tend to have the most energy. This may be first thing in the morning, or right before lunch, etc. Try to do your practicing during these naturally productive periods as these are the times at which you will be able to focus and think most clearly.

3. Goals

Try using a practice notebook. Keep track of your practice goals and what you discover during your practice sessions. The key to getting into the “zone” when practicing is to be constantly striving to have clarity of intention. In other words, to have a clear idea of the sound you want to produce, or particular phrasing you’d like to try, or specific articulation, intonation, etc. that you’d like to be able to execute consistently.

When you figure something out, write it down. As I practiced more mindfully, I began learning so much during practice sessions that if I didn’t write everything down, I’d forget.

4. Smarter, not harder

Sometimes if a particular passage is not coming out the way we want it to, it just means we need to practice more. There are also times, however, when we don’t need to practice harder, but need an altogether different strategy or technique.

I remember struggling with the left-hand pizzicato variation in Paganini’s 24th Caprice. I was getting frustrated and kept trying harder and harder to make the notes speak, but all I got was sore fingers, a couple of which actually started to

bleed. I realized that there had to be a smarter, more effective way to accomplish my goal.

Instead of stubbornly keeping at a strategy or technique that wasn't working for me, I forced myself to stop practicing this section altogether. I tried to brainstorm different solutions to the problem for a day or so, and wrote down ideas to try as they occurred to me. When I felt that I came up with some promising solutions, I just started experimenting. I eventually came up with a solution that I worked on over the next week or so, and when I played the caprice for my teacher, *he* actually asked *me* how I made the notes speak so clearly!

5. Problem-solving model

Consider this 6-step general problem-solving model summarized below (adapted from various [problem solving processes](#) online).

1. Define the problem (what do I want this note/phrase to sound like?)
2. Analyze the problem (what is causing it to sound like this?)
3. Identify potential solutions (what can I tweak to make it sound more like I want?)
4. Test the potential solutions to select the most effective one (what tweaks seem to work best?)
5. Implement the best solution (make these changes permanent)
6. Monitor implementation (do these changes continue to produce the results I'm looking for?)

Or simpler yet, check out this model from [Daniel Coyle's book The Talent Code](#).

1. Pick a target
2. Reach for it
3. Evaluate the gap between the target and the reach
4. Return to step one

It doesn't matter if we are talking about perfecting technique, or experimenting with different musical ideas. Any model which encourages smarter, more systematic, active thought, and clearly articulated goals will help cut down on wasted, ineffective practice time.

After all, who wants to spend all day in the practice room? Get in, get stuff done, and get out!

BTW, if you found this article helpful, get immediate access to the **Practice Hacks** PDF, which includes a summary of these practice models, plus 7 additional tips for getting your work in the practice room to "stick." **Click here** to get it now.

UPDATE: Think all of this only relates to classical music? Jazz aficionados, check out this post on [practicing effectively](#) written by acclaimed jazz violinist [Christian Howes](#) for a helpful perspective and tips on practicing in jazz. Funnily enough, we were in Suzuki together back in Columbus, OH as kids.

UPDATE #2: Came across this thoughtful [post on deliberate practice](#) written by an astute young cellist at Northwestern University.

UPDATE #3: And an excellent, [thought-provoking piece on deliberate practice for folks in business](#) and other non-musical fields (and a fascinating blog besides).

How to Motivate Your Child to Practice

By Dr. Robert A. Cutietta

Among the numerous challenges that parents face in handling children's music lessons (choosing the instrument, finding a good teacher, etc.), getting kids to practice is the most daunting of all. The severity of the problem and the importance of practice make it hard to believe that there are so few articles addressing this. What's more, parents and music teachers often resort to the failed tactics they remember from childhood in desperate attempts to motivate kids to practice. A common example of this issue is the "practice for 30 minutes" rule, in which a music teacher will recommend that the child practice 30 minutes a day and generally increase this time as they get older. In attempts to enforce adherence to this arbitrary commitment, parents will often "pay" the child for 30 minutes of "work" with something rewarding like watching TV, playing outside or playing video games. The problem with this method is that it makes the 30 minutes of practicing something to be endured in order to do something that is valued. But what is so sacred about 30 minutes of practicing? Where did this standard unit come from? How is it better than 27 minutes or 34?

To transform practicing into a rewarding activity, parents should encourage reaching daily musical goals. For example, instead of saying that 30 minutes of practice is enough regardless of what is achieved, you might say, "Today the goal of practicing is to play the first eight measures of your piece without any mistakes." Whether reaching this goal takes 12 minutes or 40 minutes isn't important. What is important is that the child knows the musical goal of each daily practice session and feels motivated to be as efficient as possible while practicing in order to reach that goal and feel that sense of accomplishment. If the goal is playing the first eight measures on Monday, the logical goal for Tuesday is to play the next eight. Pretty soon, the child will acknowledge the cumulative goal of the week: to play the entire piece free of mistakes. This leads to more motivation, more effort during practice and most importantly, pride in what they have accomplished.

Although this method achieves greater success, it also requires more effort by the parents; it's easy to look at the clock and monitor 30 minutes, but goal-related practicing means setting daily goals for your children, monitoring the ease or difficulty your child experiences with his music and setting new, more demanding goals. Don't worry! Here are some tips to help you:

First, divide the week's goal or teacher's expectations into seven equal parts and make sure your child understands each one. On some days, your child might choose to work toward two days' worth of goals, in which case, it's wise to give them the option of skipping the next day's practice session.

Daily goals should be attended to every day and should involve playing scales or other technique-building skills; advancement on specific pieces can be more spread out, as long as the child continues to move forward with the piece. While it may be tempting, don't bargain with practice time. Although in trying to skip a day, your child may really mean, "I will practice double tomorrow," this sets the standard that practice time is negotiable.

Progress should be measured and appropriately altered each day (if needed) by analyzing the amount of effort, frustration and completion/advancement in reaching the daily goals. Yes, this is more work than monitoring 30 minutes a day, but in the end, this will be much easier than the agony of forcing children to adhere to the

mandatory 30 minutes of meager, unmotivated effort. It will also make everyone's life a little more enjoyable!

Dr. Robert A. Cutietta is the Dean of the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music. He is the author of "Raising Musical Kids" and a popular speaker whose areas of expertise include the middle-school learner, choral education, learning theories and the psychology of music. Additionally, he is a highly regarded musician and educator with extensive knowledge about the full range of musical talent nationally as well as internationally.

PragmaticMom • 5 years ago Should practicing be something that is self-driven by the child versus making the kids achieve a practice goal? At what point should your child want to practice or choose to spend their time working on music? We don't do practice goals with our kids for sports skills, for example.

abcd PragmaticMom • 2 years ago Do you need to make your kids do their homework? Kids will rarely want to do anything that takes work, and piano does take work. Yes you need to make your child practice, at least to an extent. If they're taking lessons and not practicing it is frustrating for the teacher and the child isn't really learning.

BocaMom • 4 years ago I am extremely frustrated. I have a teen who made All-District and All-State Bands all through middle school on sheer talent. She does not work particularly hard and usually puts effort in only about a week before an audition. She does enjoy the accolades that come with making prestigious bands. She is now in high school and does not seem to care at all about the upcoming auditions. She did not work hard before All State and did not make it. She was very disappointed. All-District auditions are now in one week and she does not seem to be too concerned. How do I motivate her to work for these things? She's not a little kid anymore and has a very busy schedule.

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CP BocaMom • 2 years ago Some kids just need to fail, in order to help them to decide what they want from life. You could just sit down with her and ask her what HER goals for her life are. Maybe she has already learned everything she needs to learn from this process, maybe she needs a different musical direction or a different instrument or to learn to write music. The point is to listen. and HEAR what they are saying. Maybe she'd like to explore new things and take a break from band for a year. to find something she really does want to work hard at.

Rachel Jenkins • 4 years ago As a professional player and teacher I agree that set amounts of time are not the way to go. However, setting a goal such as playing a small section without mistakes is also a bit intense too. If that were me when I was eight, I would get upset more and more if a specific mistake kept happening (and it does if you tell yourself "No mistakes allowed"). Students need to feel special and rewarded through their music-making and having a teacher who is passionate about Music and the

instrument makes a big difference. Getting a child to 'fall in love' with an instrument is the primary aim from an educator's perspective. Once this is achieved the practice becomes automatic (as someone else commented re. we don't need to make children practice sports). Regarding 'mistakes', I tell my kids these do not matter and that we learn from mistakes, and that includes me.

Vivace Teacher Rachel Jenkins • 3 years ago The first time you or student plays a piece should be the time that mistakes are avoided by playing slowly. When my students (even and especially the young ones) are earning a small section, I reward the attention required to learn it correctly by challenging them to play with no mistakes, disregarding tempo. I put out 3 Skittles, and tell them if they play it correctly, the Skittles are all theirs. If they make a mistake I eat one of them. This really challenges them to concentrate, which is a difficult thing to do at first. Once they have learned something, though, even if it is wrong, I usually don't try to "fix" it because it is much more frustrating to change a learned behavior.

Viktoria Kaposi Rachel Jenkins • 4 years ago Hi, I like your comment so much.... I am passionate about music and about my son. I believe in my child and the power of music.

Cherie Spannenburg • 4 years ago I tell my students that it's how they practice that matters. They should set their own goals each practice. As they are often busy with other activities such as homework or sport, I give them a "Practice Menu". One quarter of their practice should be their appetiser - warm up, scales etc. Half of their practice should be the repertoire they need to work on, taking time to work on sections or phrases and put it all back together for a "performance". The last quarter is dessert. They should finish on a positive note by playing what they like to play - popular music, band music etc so that the last thing they remember about practice was fun - not the frustration of still not quite getting that passage right. It seems to work with my students reasonably well.

MusicTech • 4 years ago Interesting post on rewards and motivations behind practice. There's a neat app on the Apple Store called Music Quest that's trying to do the same thing.<http://musicquestapp.com/>It's an app designed for kids 5-12 that gets them excited to practice by tracking their times and generating on-screen responses. Kids like using it because they can see the results of their efforts faster. Give it a try?

TrombonePianoGuitarHarmonica • 6 years ago The article above is well written. As a parent of an eight year old who is practicing piano and a two year old soon to take up an instrument, I totally picture what this article is talking about. I smiled when I read the "childhood" desperate attempts; I've had my share. Today, as an adult I play several different instruments: Trombone, piano, guitar, harmonica. And I sing as well.

StringAlong • 5 months ago "There will be ups and downs, and the child will need to learn to persevere through the tougher times. Parents will need to be supportive, patient, and strict at the same time. To quit learning when facing with difficulties is definitely not a good idea, we should instead use these opportunities to build stronger character in the child." - extracted from <https://goo.gl/7zv16K>

Viktoria Kaposi • 4 years ago "Getting a child to 'fall in love' with an instrument is the primary aim from an educator's perspective." - i am so happy to read this. What I as a parent is doing, trying to inspire him in every possible way... What can be fun for a 6 years old boy? Colouring sheets, telling him fairy tales about the power/fun/mystery of music, watching sometimes youtube, listening to music, that HE LIKES, and yes, i have bought a good deal of extra stuff from amazon. Reading, writing music notes is also fun! Finding the good attitude is the trick I think. Never push a child. And now it happens that suddenly my son can say - mom, i would like to play this song! And then he sits at the piano and practises. Not for 30 minutes, oh, no! maybe 10? and that is great! If he is really interested he will increase the time self. At least this is my best hope :)

Mil • 4 years ago 2 of my 3 kids are taking piano lessons. The 10yo is on his 3rd year and usually practices without me having to remind him. The 8yo (on her 1st year) needs a little more motivation: it encourages them a lot to tell them that every other day they will play for me or their dad. I know nothing about piano, but just sitting there and clap when they finish, and tell them how good it sounded (if in fact it sounded good) or tell them it may sound better with practice, has worked better for us than timing, making them practice 3-5 times each piece every day, or the no mistakes approach.

eugesounds • 4 years ago I'm not sure anyone "likes" to practice (I know I don't!) but this post does a good job of presenting a few ideas to make things simpler. Here's another take: <http://makingmusicmag.com/a...>

Alana eugesounds • 4 years ago There are plenty of people who like to practice--in fact, LOVE to practice. Passion music and your instrument (the cello in my case) and the successes of daily goal-oriented practice keeps me coming back.

Quanita raderter • a month ago this is interesting website that i found useful to motivate children for music..

Matthew Curney • 10 months ago This is an excellent post, and a topic I've thought a lot about. I want to mention Pianu.com here, because it's a piano-learning website that uses gameplay elements to make practicing fun. There's a library of song tutorials, and a series of lessons:

<https://pianu.com/the-twelv...>

Hope someone finds this useful on this thread, and helps logging those hours of practice. Thanks!

Eric Geggatt • a year ago Working with the elderly residents who have dementia, I know how important music is for people. Especially kids! I found a great list of music programs for young kids and teens on TeenLife that some of you might be interested in! Check it out!

<https://www.teenlife.com/ca...>

Jboy132 • a year ago While there are not magic bullet or short cuts to becoming an expert musician. There is a tool called MyTractice (www.mytractice.com) that can help anyone become efficient at the music practice, irregardless of their current level of proficiency. It is a amazing tool for music teachers and for parent to see their children are spending their practice time.

Dawn Farry • 2 years ago I've had success when students have a friend also studying with me. Besides an aura of competition in becoming skillful and encouraging one another, duets between the two are especially helpful in motivating practice at home. Accountability! Also, it's imperative that the student leave their lessons with a clear understanding of what and how to practice their week's assignment. Recording repertoire as an aid in accomplishing the piece more easily is also helpful and students are more eager to get after it as a result of listening.

Recitals are also motivators for practicing. Lastly, sit with you student now and then when they practice (it can feel alienating at the piano alone, FYI). Ask your student to show you what they are learning and ask them to teach you! Make it a fun, interesting, connecting time for the two of you by playing easy duets, singing together to song repertoire, composing and improvising in a serious manner or just for the fun of it! Be an example of discipline yourself and praise your child for their practice time and accomplishments along the way. Hugs, smiles and "high fives" go a long way and perhaps, further than video game or tv time. :)

Marzena Splawski • 2 years ago As a long time piano teacher educated in Europe, and working mostly with young children I can say that the 30 minutes daily practice is typically an American invention. In European music schools it is much harder - more difficult piano pieces to learn in each music year, and much more practice needed to be able to master those pieces. It is never about the timing, it is about the whole different school system. Main problem all my students here have is remembering piano pieces they learn for a longer period of time. Amazingly, they play it perfectly at the piano recital, next week or month they forget it totally. I and my other friends who attended the same music school still can play so many piano pieces we have mastered at the age 8 or 10 - just never forgotten. But in our school system, we had to pass exams (tests) on quarterly or monthly basis, than at the end

of the year, we had a general review of everything we have learned during an entire school year. The same rule applies to music.

Best advice for parents: ask children to play for you your favorite piano piece they have played at the previous recital (or school year) from time to time, so they review it, and don't forget. Practice can be always started with a well known piece. It is a pleasure to play it, it is a great warm up for fingers (usually with faster tempo), and than it is time to learn a few measures of a new piano piece. Repetition is very important especially for more difficult music phrases. It does not have to be perfect the same day, but it needs to be mastered at least at the end of the week, to progress to the next part. Younger children need parents help with practicing. I recommend using large stickers cut in 4 equal pieces. Each one is awarded for a little part of piano piece. Until they get their sticker whole again, the piano piece is not mastered, yet. It is also great to put little bright sticky notes in all places with errors (do not overwhelm your child with too many of them at one time), than change them from orange to yellow, and to green when it improves.

Organize the practice time in a really good time (not when there is a favorite show on TV, or time for some fun playing outside). Never place the piano in an area where everybody likes to watch TV, or even take a nap. Your child wanting to practice will feel in everybody's way, and finally feel discouraged to do so.

There is a great music software for piano beginners and very young pianists that shows how well the child is progressing, award stickers and grades, children love this program, they repeat everything even more times to get it completed.

There are Free parts of the program to try
<http://www.pianohi5.co>

Music Lessons Melbourne • 2 years ago I don't "should" on myself very often but I should have taken the summer off. I'm envious you are enjoying a well-deserved break!

Gail Cavanaugh • 3 years ago I have been teaching piano for about ten years now. I taught in after school programs where I had a waiting list for children to get into the class. I taught in groups of six. In the beginning, children were distracted by the others in the class and engaged in talking with each other. I spread them around the class away from each other and gave them several songs to practice. This worked so that by the end of the quarter, they were able to play in a recital for their parents. I have a very low drop out rate because the children were interested in playing piano. I now have a student who I am teaching privately in her home who is not diligent about her studies. I tell the children that I have to practice new songs just like they do and that all piano players have to practice every day.

Yasa540 • 3 years ago As a responsible pianist I wanna teach my little brother guitar. Actually I play a houndred of videos or audios from youtube to motivate and encourage him and Another aim is I wanna Develop his listening and playing skill by ear. In fact each individual has a memory of sounds if this part will be filled the child will have more encouragement to play the piece.

And I really avoid comparing him with his friends and Definitely I'll help him to budget his time to do every thing.

Edward Motter-Vlahakos • 4 years ago Sometimes, for me, getting students the music they want entails me transcribing a particular pop song for them, that involves a lot of decisions for me about trying to be true to the original melody so the students can play along with the track (key, rhythm, register, etc) or transpose the piece to an easier key and with a simplified rhythm which will enable them to play it more easily. Sometimes giving them a very difficult transcription which is clearly beyond their current abilities is an excellent motivator, and sometimes it isn't, every student is a unique individual who responds to a wide range of positive or negative reinforcements- some will rise to the challenge and work their butts off to be able to conquer the piece and some will curl up in a little tearful ball and quit. One parent came up with an excellent motivator for her daughter (who was a very commercially minded girl), she paid her \$5 for every day that she practiced on her own for 30 minutes or more- but at the end of the week the child had to pay for her lesson herself. Pretty quickly the student realized that if she practiced 7 days a week she would be turning a \$10 profit weekly, and promptly doubled her efforts at home. Everyone is different, and part of our job as teachers is learning what makes each pupil tick, and helping them develop good discipline which will reward them with a wealth of achievements, both in music and life. This is the way we do it at my studio, <http://www.nassaubaymusicle...> anyway...

Ross • 4 years ago Good idea, but for some parents a real challenge is not knowing enough to be able to offer real assistance, eg can't read music enough to identify an error. Another example for young students playing eg a wind instrument, the parent can't offer assistance in corrective action to produce sounds to play a piece that they can't read. All of this leads to frustration for students and parents.

V-Share Trailers Ross • 3 years ago Your point is the driven force for us to build our piano learning platform <http://www.v-share.ca> . We partner with several pianists to record the high quality video/audios of all the songs of popular piano books in US, Canada and Australia like Keith Snell series, RMC series, Faber series. We developed an application on iPad or Android tablets to on-demand play these videos. Currently we provide level 1 to 5 videos and they really help thousands of the students and parents. They don't search around on YouTube for a video which they are not sure about the quality, instead they just simply trust us as many teachers recommend our videos to parents and students as the demo for daily practice.

MattB • 4 years ago I think holding up great musicians as role models could help too. Look at what he (she) does! Don't you want to be able to play like that? They had to practice just like you and now look at their success. You can do it too.

Viktoria Kaposi • 4 years ago I also took my 6 yo son to the concert of the "Recycling Orchestra". These kids were not pressed to practice i think at all.... They have just got TIME and OPPORTUNITY to DISCOVER what music can do...<http://www.treehugger.com/c...>

Trisha guest • 4 years ago <http://ihatepracticing.word...>

Richard R. Reitzin • 6 years ago I regard this as excellent advice - setting regular, daily, measurable and achievable goals for practice sessions. Adherence to this approach is certain to produce excellent results in the vast majority of cases. Well done, Dr. Cutietta.

Rewards – Classroom Management Tips and Ideas

B U G S

Submitted by: Margo, Kindergarten, [Originally posted at the Discussion Forums](#)

I just wanted to share something my school does at this time of year to help control the “soon to be out of school” craziness that goes on. I have read in other posts where the kids are really starting to lose their good behavior sense. About 6 weeks from the end of the year, all adults get a bunch of “bugs” (Being Unusually Good). They are just pieces of paper with cute little bug drawings on them and the initials BUG written across them. The idea is to catch someone, or groups of someones, or even whole classes being unusually good. If you get a bug, you turn it in to your teacher and a total is kept. The best is when you earn a class bug-it counts for the total number of children present at the time. At the end of the week, we email one person our total bug count for that week.

The class in each grade level who has acquired the most bugs gets an ice cream treat. The runner up gets a special treat as well. The only caviat is that I can't give my own class bugs. It must come from someone else thinking we are doing a great job. This really works wonders. Before walking down the hall, I remind the class that we are trying to get some bugs and they straighten right out. When monitoring other kids, all I have to do is mention the fact that I have bugs to hand out and they quiet down, etc. The newness doesn't wear off because each week is a new week and the kids strive very hard to be the bug winners. I hope I have explained this well enough. Give it a try in your school and see if that end of the year excitement doesn't calm down just a little.

Behavior Management with the Spirit of the Olympics

Submitted by: Jodi and Laura, 3rd Grade

To go along with the Olympics, my friend and I came up with an awesome idea to help you and your students maintain positive behavior. We cut letter size manilla folders into eighths and put each child's name at the bottom. These cards are then Velcro-ed onto the side of each child's desk for easy reference and privacy. We put a piece of Velcro in the center to hold gold, silver, and bronze medals. Each medal signifies a level of behavior. Gold represents a students who has stayed positive and on task. Each day a students has “Stayed Gold” they will receive a certificate. If they stay Gold all week, they earn extra recess or some other privilege. You can even reward students for staying gold all quarter or year. It gives those students who are less than perfect an opportunity to work towards something positive and it shows our appreciation to the students who are always well behaved. It's a great way to monitor student behaviors and for students to self check!

Bug Bucks

Submitted by: TRC, 1st

The theme in my classroom is ladybugs (I'm a collector). I keep a bag of small pre-printed tickets hand called “Bug Bucks”. When a student is caught doing something positive in the classroom, he/she receives a “Bug Buck”. The students place their bucks in a plastic container they keep inside their desks. When a child has collected 10 bucks, they cash them in for a trip to the class treasure box. I also take “Bug Bucks” as well. Students may have to give the teacher a buck for excessive talking, misconduct, etc. This “buck” idea can be adapted to fit the theme in any classroom. In our first grade pod we have everything from “Bear Bucks” to “Cow Cash”. This has been a very effective way of rewarding positive behavior in my class!

Class Achievers

Submitted by: Tisha Frasier

This technique works very well with second and third grade. I use a chart from any teacher's supply store. I put each student's full name on the chart. Students receive a check for transitioning smoothly from one activity to another, following directions the first time they are given, staying on task and completing classwork, etc. These are my classroom rules. There are approximately 24-26 boxes per student. The first student to reach the end of the chart is the first place class achiever. I award the four top achievers with a certificate of achievement and a bouquet of decorated pens, pencils and erasers. I make it into a mini award ceremony by inviting the principal or other staff members. The whole process includes pictures with me! They love it! Everybody wants to be a classroom achiever!

Grade Level(s): 1-2, 3-5

Community Bubble Gum Machine

Submitted by: Regina T

I use tag board to create a giant bubble gum machine. I draw three lines representing the rewards that will come when the bubble gum is filled to each line. I use colorful dot stickers to represent the bubble gum. When I catch them doing a good deed or following direction, they receive a gumball to place in the machine. They work together to achieve their reward. A reward could be popcorn and a movie, picnic, etc.

COMPLIMENTs

Submitted by: Unknown

Cut out the letters for the word COMPLIMENT. Each time the class receives a compliment from faculty, parents, visitors, etc. they earn a letter. Once the class has received all the letters to the word, reward them with a special privilege. For example, popcorn/coke party, movie day, game day, or treats that they like.

Compliments

Submitted by: Diana

Next to my desk, I keep a compliment jar (small glass fish bowl). I allow the students to put a marble in this jar for any compliment the class receives from another teacher, parent in the school, or the principal. When the jar is filled to the top they will be rewarded. I also allowed the class to pick their reward so they feel they really accomplished something. My class chose an ice cream sundae party.

Grade Level(s): K, 1-2, 3-5

Credit for being on task

Submitted by: Beth, 2nd grade

I place book pockets on the corner of each student's desk. Then I place a colored index card in the book pocket. I explain to them that this card is their own "credit card" (they can decorate it if they wish) Then as I see positive behavior in the class I hole punch the card. When the students obtain a certain amount of hole punches (you can determine the number) they can choose a small prize on Fridays and then it begins again on Monday. Just make sure only you have access to the hole puncher so it is not tempting for the "little ones" to be sneaky!

Grade Level(s): 1-2, 3-5

Dipping for Dollars

Submitted by: Trudy

Grade Level(s): K, 1-2, 3-5

I've used a behavior technique called "Dipping for Dollars" for the last 3 years, and

it really works! I have a large plastic jar filled with fake coins (make sure the kids can't see through it). Every child who has good behavior during a day gets to take a dip from the jar the next morning. I also give dips for random acts of kindness, showing responsibility, good citizenship and quality work. Each child has a small plastic box to store their money in. Every morning when they get their dips (if they deserve any) they also trade pennies for nickels, nickels for dimes etc... When a child has saved up \$5.00 they can turn it in for one of these rewards: 20 minutes of free time, a pack of chewing gum, sit by a friend for a day, or sit at the teacher's desk for a day. Each day that the entire class gets a dip someone reaches into a container and draws out a poker chip that has a number 5 or 10 on it. When the class has accumulated 200 "Party Points" we plan a class party! Last year we had an ice cream party, a popcorn party, a Pokemon party, and a game day party. The kids really like this, it's inexpensive, and not a lot of work. Another great benefit is that when it comes time to teach a money unit in math it's a snap, because the kids have been counting and trading their money every day of the year!

Good Work Coupons

Submitted by: A.Montgomery

This year I'm going to try a great technique I heard of from a fellow teacher. At the end of the class, or during class work, students working hard, staying on task, following directions, etc., will receive a Good Work Coupon. They are to keep these in a safe place because at the end of the month or 6 weeks grading period, we will count them up. The student who has the most coupons or has gathered at least "X" number of coupons (you set the number) can choose from the gift box. Micheal's craft store always has \$1 gifts at the front of the store. Pads of paper, stationary, bracelets, pencils. I'll also put all the coupons into a basket and draw out a couple names. This works well and motivates those students who are often overlooked by teachers dealing with discipline problems.

Grade Level(s): 6-8

I "Caught Ya" doing something great!!

Submitted by: Angee Duvall, Primary

Last year, I got so tired of always disciplining the "bad" kids and never giving enough attention to the "good" kids so I came up with this plan. This has helped me reward those children who are always with me, who are always listening, who follow directions, etc. And it helped me motivate those children who struggle to try harder. I printed up some small, colorful 1-in x 1-in pieces of paper that are labeled "I Caught Ya doing something great!" I keep a stack in my pocket all day long. Whenever I see someone doing something great, I give them a "Caught Ya." They put their name on the back and put it into the "Caught Ya" basket. On Fridays, my helper of the day chooses one friend to stay in from recess and they count the "Caught Yas." They count how many each student has and put the numbers on a piece of paper for me. They then place all the "Caught Yas" back in the basket for later. Knowing who has won, they have to keep it a secret until I reveal the winner to the class (I usually do that right after lunch). After lunch, I reveal who had the most and give a small prize (a coupon to the movies, a small toy, etc.). I then take the basket and we draw three papers out of the basket. These students get a piece of candy. If we draw out the same student two times, then that student gets two pieces of candy. It motivates the children to get as many as they can because they never know when they might win!!! I then dump out the basket, and we begin again. It has helped me so much with behavior in my classroom!

Jelly Bean Behavior

Submitted by: Leslie Whitehead, third grade teacher

Grade Level(s): K, 1-2, 3-5

I use Jelly Beans (or any other small candies will do) to reward children who are on task. Find a “fun” container to store your goodies in. I found a really groovy rabbit with sun glasses that ejects the candy like a gum ball machine. When I see that someone has followed directions well, is sitting quietly, and is ready to start the next subject I reward them with a goodie. All I have to do is stand up front and quietly point to the student and say one bean and the rest of the kids fall into line.

Keeping kids on task – Fun Friday*Submitted by:* Nancy, elementary

Grade Level(s): K, 1-2, 3-5

Every Friday, I set aside a period of time (about 1/2 an hour) for “Fun Friday”, during which time the children can have free time for an activity of their choice (board games, and creative materials are available, as well as the classroom library and exploration centers). This time is automatically theirs, unless their behavior during the week interferes with the completion of a lesson or an independent task. If a student fails to finish an assigned task to the best of their ability in a reasonable amount of time because of behavior issues (NOT ACADEMIC DIFFICULTY, OF COURSE!), the assignment goes into the “Fun Friday tray”. At the beginning of Fun Friday each week, I distribute unfinished work, and those children have to complete the work before they can play. It’s a real consequence, rather than an arbitrary punishment, and it really works!

Movie Tickets

Submitted by: Mrs. Aleceia Reeves

Grade Level(s): K, 1-2, 3-5

I give out those small tickets used at the dollar movies or carnivals for good behavior, following classroom and hallway rules, being kind and courteous (saying thank you, bless you, etc.), sharing (without being asked), returning notes to/from parents, returning homework, ETC. The students are instructed to put their initials on the back, and to put them in a safe place. (One year, my third graders deposited and withdrew them from a class bank.) On Friday, we have a movie party, the students must first purchase a ticket to see the movie (6 tickets), then they may purchase popcorn, soda, candy, etc. with the rest. It sounds expensive, but I usually only purchased one pre-popped bag of popcorn, one liter of soda, and cheap/on-sale candy.

Puzzling behavior*Submitted by:* Karen

I take a small poster and cut it into ten jigsaw puzzle type pieces. I then put the pieces in a colorful folder pinned to a bulletin board. When the whole class has really great behavior (ie works hard in groups without any disagreements) they earn a piece. They may also earn a piece if they receive a compliment from an adult on the whole class behavior. To keep it honest I tell them that I need to hear the compliment from the adult. The aides in my building know I do this so they make a point of telling me when my class is really good in the cafeteria or outside. The music and PE teachers also drop me notes or e-mail me to let me know. When a puzzle is complete, the class earns a treat of some kind-candy, popcorn, longer recess, or free trips to the treasure chest for everyone. It also makes a great year around bulletin board since all I have to do is switch out the puzzle pieces in the folder. The caption reads “Good behavior puts it all together!” To add to the fun I never tell the kids what the poster is. They have fun guessing as I add pieces.

Student of the Week

Submitted by: T. Click, Haynesville, LA, 1st

My co-teachers and I have a student of the week. It works very well with us. What

you do is keep track of student behavior however you want (chart, tickets, etc.). At the end of the week, the student with the most points, or least points depending on whether you keep track of positive behavior or negative behavior, gets to be the "Student of the Week" the following week. A note is sent home with the child on Friday stating that they may bring a picture or stuffed animal from home to put on their "Student of the Week" desk. The special desk is decorated and is in a special place in the room. The student also gets to wear a "medal" (you can find these pretty cheap at Oriental Trading) for the week so the other students and teachers in the school can recognize their good behavior.

Table of the week

Submitted by: Leigh Johns

I award a table of the week prize to the table that earns the most beads that week. I use beads from the crafts dept. and tupperware container for storage of the beads. Each time the tables are working quietly, staying on task, keeping a neat table, etc., I award that table a bead. At the end of the week the table with the most beads gets a prize. The prize may be 20 minutes in the library, a free coke at snack, a prize from the prize box, etc. It has made my class want to work together!

The Helping Hands Can

Submitted by: Rena

1. Take an ordinary can (i.e., coffee, peanut, etc..) and decorate it to your taste. I use bright colors and huge writing for the younger children. — 2. Fill the can with popsicle sticks. Be creative! — 3. Have the children color or paint the sticks. Once the sticks are finished, label the sticks with the wonderful jobs the children like to help the teacher do (i.e., running errands, line leader, pick a movie, win small prizes-pencils, candy, erasers, pick a book of the day, etc..) — 4. When an individual or team members are working quietly, complete seat work, finished all homework, shows kindness and respect to others, plays safely, etc., a stick is drawn from the can and that child or children are rewarded with the job or prize indicated on the stick. — 5. It is also a good idea to make a chart to keep track of the children and to post inside the classroom. This activity works great because everyone wants to lend a helping hand!
- 2.

Why do students act so terribly when a sub is in????

Submitted by: Unknown

This year, I told my students that the sub would have "Awesome Behavior" coupons to give to deserving students. When I return from being out, those student who earned coupons are waiting to get to the Treasure Box. (Yes, the treasure box still works in the 6th grade!)

The Best Strategy for Motivating Bored Music Students

by Abraham Levitan

No one is good at something all of the time.

Writers, artists, athletes, business owners and employees all go through dry spells—we're uninspired, our work stinks, our performance suffers, we dread practicing. In short, we're just not feeling it.

This is "The Dip" as characterized by Seth Godin in his popular 2007 book "The Dip: A Little Book that Teaches You When to Quit (and When to Stick)", and anyone who pursues an art, hobby, even a job, goes through it.

Including music students.

Including *your* music student.

It may manifest in any or all of the following ways. Student:

puts up a fight about practice or refuses to practice

stops looking forward to showing teacher their progress

stops looking forward to lessons period

is less interested in music overall

complains to parents or teacher that playing the instrument "isn't fun anymore" or lessons "are too hard"

claims they don't have time for lessons or practice

As parents and teachers, we know that music lessons are well worth the challenge of slumps like these, because the impact playing music has on our brains, bodies, and souls is tremendous, whether we intend to become professional musicians or not. (For further reading on the subject, this article from the Music Instrument Center outlines the plentiful benefits of both listening to and playing music.)

So how do we help our students rise above The Dip?

1. Help your student recognize The Dip.

Even young kids can understand this. Normalize what they're going through, because it is normal. Tell them about your own dips and how you got through them. Reassure them they're not alone.

When you're an adult in a dip, you can get through it by sheer endurance. You recognize that it's okay not to be gushing with enthusiasm over your activity all the time. But kids might not have that kind of perspective, and they're probably going to need some help.

In that case...

2. Focus on process over content.

Take martial arts as an example. I guarantee you not every karate student is passionate about kicking and sparring, but every karate kid can tell you what color belt they are, and when they get to move to the next color or level.

The system is brilliant, because even if a kid feels a dip, there is something cool,

colorful, and public to mark their progress.

Same goes for musicals. I've seen many students get really jazzed about moving from the chorus to a supporting role to (maybe!) a lead role.

In these examples, the process, structure, or levels behind the activity become more important or exciting than the activity itself. What a way to pull through a dip! With private music lessons, sometimes it seems to a kid like they're looking at a vast terrain of "I'm going to do this once a week for years without any way to mark my progress."

Well then, it's time to make some levels. Or goals. Or a reward system. However you want to frame it is fine, as long as you think, plan, enact, and track. Here are some ideas to consider:

Personality type

A type-A kid get might get really into keeping a practice chart, and beating his average practice time each week. (Think about the motivational power of wearing a steps-tracking device like the Fitbit.)

Hobbies or interests

You could customize an approach to your student's own passions. A visual artist or learner may enjoy earning points toward decorating a practice notebook each week. A poetry writer could set poems to music, and work toward creating an album.

Sports!

Sports present a really obvious way of keeping a sometimes boring event engaging. We've all sat through uneventful or low-scoring games because the culture, competition, players, and strategy keep us watching. How can this idea be applied to music lessons? Could each song represent a different level of the playoffs? Can you work toward making a song ready for the World Series?

For one soccer-loving student, former Piano Power teacher Jackie Arrigo drew a soccer field on a piece of paper. The rule was, for every flashcard the student got right, he earned a pass toward the goal, with five passes equaling one goal. Every flashcard he got wrong, Jackie got the pass.

(A game like this could be used for any kid, even if they're not particularly interested in soccer!)

Apps

Speaking of games, phone apps are brilliant at taking "veggies" activities— good for you but not always thrilling— and game-ifying. Here are some suggestions.

Competition

Piano Power teacher Andrew Doney once had five students (who didn't know each other) poised to graduate from the same book at the same time. He told the students about each other and made an informal, friendly competition of it— a race to the end of the book. His students got really into it!

Recitals or open mics

Instant goal! For many kids, knowing they're going to play a song in front of actual

live human beings is enough to get them trotting through a dip.

Parents have an advantage.

Unlike teachers, parents have the advantage seeing their kid in a multitude of learning environments. They witness firsthand which activities connect and which don't. So much of whether an activity connects has to do with the way the kid perceives the "rules", format, and presentation.

Does the experience makes the kid feel like a superstar, or does it cause them to bang their head against the wall? Can you determine why?

Parental input is priceless if it extrapolates beyond "my kid likes soccer" to "my kid likes soccer because..." Give that information to a teacher and they will thank you for it.

As a teacher or parent, here are some questions to ask yourself:

After coming up with goals or systems, are you revisiting them to evaluate how your student is doing, and whether those goals are still exciting?

Are you actively encouraging them to explore music on their own — by asking them to write down songs they've been excited by recently, etc.?

Are you providing visual reminders of how much (or how little) they've improved over a period of time? Does the fun part relate to the progress/motivation part? i.e., when they achieve a goal (or make lots of progress towards it), do you do something extra-fun in the lesson to celebrate? Or do they feel like working on goals is taking away from their "fun time"?

Ideally, "the dip" is nothing but a natural reminder that it's time to reconnect a student to their material in a more compelling way. Aim for robust teacher-parent communication, and a deep understanding of what motivates each individual student.