



KEEPING IT

Strategies for Better Practice

INTERESTING

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“The secret of getting ahead is getting started.” –**Mark Twain**

“He who loves practice without theory is like the sailor who boards ship without a rudder and compass and never knows where he may cast.” –**Leonardo da Vinci**

“I've always considered myself to be just average talent and what I have is a ridiculous insane obsessiveness for practice and preparation.” –**Will Smith, actor, public figure**

“There's nothing like fear to make you practice.” –**Joseph Alessi, New York Philharmonic**

“Make a game out of practice; you're still a child at heart.” –**Harvey Penick, golf pedagogue**

“Practice like you've never won. Play like you've never lost.” –**Michael Jordan, basketball legend**

OBJECTIVES

1. Understanding the importance of location and a good warmup.
2. Developing a plan and determining realistic expectations.
3. Identifying the problem areas and strategies to start addressing them.
4. The importance of the right frame of mind and rewarding your work.
5. Five resources for further study.

1. Location and atmosphere matter

- Find a quiet place that you will not be disturbed - No TV!
- This location needs to be consistent so you can find a practice mindset quickly.
- Stock it with the necessary items like pencils, water, metronome, and tuner.
- Turn your phone to “Airplane Mode” to avoid distractions.
- Surround yourself with inspirational imagery.
- Schedule your practice AHEAD OF TIME and at generally the same time daily.

2. Start with a Warmup

- Allow for a short warmup before each practice session.
- It does not have to be virtuosic, just enough to get into the right frame of mind.
- Take some time to get your air moving.
- Tension is the enemy of sound.
- Some basic warmups might include exercises that touch all of the different areas of production (long tones, flexibility, range development, starting sound, etc.)
- Having trouble getting started? Use the “Action Principle”

3. Have a plan

- Make practice goals before you start.
- Try to be specific about what you want to accomplish.
- Not all practice sessions have to be the same.
- Experiment with finding the best days and times for you.
- It isn't always necessary to do fundamentals in every session.
- Make it fun and incorporate some listening!

4. Have realistic expectations

- Quality, not quantity. Being busy doesn't equal progress!
- Break it up. Work on small parts, then put them together.
- Work towards improvement, not perfection.
- Your practice goals can help you or hurt you. Have short-term and long-term goals.
- Focus on one goal at a time, this is very important!
- It's better to practice in small chunks rather than marathon sessions.
- Left brain = words and numbers, Right brain = images, sensations, and SOUNDS
- Be kind to yourself.

5. Seek out problem areas

- Avoid repetitive playing for no reason.
- Start at a tempo where you can play ALL the notes and ALL the rhythms correctly THE FIRST TIME.
- When you encounter a problem, break it down to manageable chunks.
- Practice each element separately (Rhythm, pitches, dynamics...)
- Think musically about what you are doing at EVERY step.
- The trick is to practice without the errors as early as possible and then repeat it, over and over.

6. It's more than just the notes!

- Learn the tendencies of your instrument.
- Learn the history of your instrument.
- Listen to GREAT musicians!
- Know the story of the piece you are working on if there is one.
- Visualize your success.
- Minimize negative self-talk and develop positive self-talk.
- It is more important to HEAR what you want it to sound like than HOW you sound at that moment.
- Develop tools, and know when to use them.
- Mind over matter – Think MUSIC, MUSIC, MUSIC!

7. Record yourself

- Record yourself both in audio and video formats. Observe in chunks & take notes.
- Watch your performances with an ear towards kindness but realism.
- Put yourself in the teacher position and imagine what they might say.
- Do not get hyper-focused, but do think in a more general perspective.
- Break things up into parts and develop a real sense of what you want it to sound like BEFORE you play.
- Create a process: Give attention to one detail of your playing at a time. Too many can distract and overwhelm.

8. Frame of mind

- Include some practice away from the instrument.
- Study the music and develop a working knowledge of context.
- When practicing, be in a practice frame of mind. When performing be in a performance frame of mind.
- Work vs. Play. “Cry in the Dojo, laugh on the Battlefield” –Samurai maxim
- Develop a process to get into the right frame of mind, start with something simple and then proceed with your plan.
- Keep a practice journal. Studies show that you lose 48% after the first 24 hours of surface level recall, and 24% 48 hours after you read something. You only retain 20% of what you read.
- Use repetition effectively. Practice makes permanent.

9. Reward yourself

- Satiety - the state of feeling sated or full. Reward yourself with something different.
- Take a walk, watch a comedy, have a treat - breaks are good.
- Focus on finding that ratio of work and play that works for you.
- Practice is work time, performance is PLAY time.

10. Five resources for further study

- “The Art of Practice” by Howard Snell. Pen Press Publishers, 2006.
- “The Inner Game of Tennis” by Timothy Gallwey. Random House Pub., 1997.
- “Performance Success” by Dr. Don Greene. Routledge Press, 2002.
- “Harvey Penick’s Little Red Book” by Harvey Penick. Simon and Schuster, 2012.
- “The Audition Playbook” by Rachelle Jenkins. Author published, 2019.

KEEPING IT INTERESTING: Strategies for Better Practice



Dr. Chris Combest serves as assistant professor of music at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, TN, where he leads an active career as a performer and educator. In addition to teaching applied tuba, he conducts the MTSU euphonium-tuba ensemble and instructs brass chamber music. A faculty fellow and a member of the graduate faculty, Dr. Combest is also co-director of the Stones River Chamber Players, the music faculty ensemble-in-residence at MTSU, and performs with the MTSU Faculty Brass. Prior to joining the music faculty at MTSU, he served on the faculties of the University of Texas-San Antonio, Southern Illinois University, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and is former Principal Tuba with the Louisville Orchestra in Louisville, KY

As a performer, Dr. Combest is Principal Tuba with the Nashville Opera and has also appeared with the Indianapolis Symphony, San Antonio Symphony, Lexington Philharmonic, Illinois Symphony, Orchestra Kentucky, the Victoria Symphony (TX), the Dallas Wind Symphony, the Tone Road Ramblers and various artists including film composer John Williams, the Canadian Brass, and Audra McDonald. In addition to his work in Nashville, he can be heard on broadcasts for National Public Radio, the B.B.C., and on hundreds of recording credits for Sony, Disney, and Hal Leonard publishing. A few of his commercial recording credits include "Andres Cardenas - Violin Concertos of Barber, Stock, and Copland" (Albany), "Brass Masters: Vol. XI" with the Lexington Brass Band (Polyphonic), and "Live from St. Louis" with the Saxton's Cornet Band. [His latest solo recording titled "Under Tennessee Skies"](#) features new music for the tuba inspired by Tennessee and was recognized with a Silver Medal for Outstanding Achievement by the Global Music Awards and a nomination for the Roger Bobo Award for Excellence in Recording by the International Tuba Euphonium Association in 2021

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As a teacher, Dr. Combest's students are active throughout the United States, both as professional performers and music educators. His students have won ITEA Competitions, placed in the artist and young artist divisions of the Leonard Falcone International Solo Competition, are members of U.S. professional orchestras and military bands, and occupy college teaching positions. Dr. Combest has adjudicated various international solo competitions including the Leonard Falcone Competition, the Asociación Española de Tubas y Bombardinos (AETYB) Competitions, the International Tuba Euphonium Association Competitions and has performed at many national and international conferences, festivals, and workshops, including the International Tuba Euphonium Conference, the Burgos Chamber Music Festival and the U.S. Army Band Tuba-Euphonium Workshop in Washington, D.C

As a dynamic supporter of new music, Dr. Combest has commissioned dozens of new works for the tuba and euphonium in collaboration with such composers as Barbara York, John Stevens, Rodney Newton, Robert Litton, James Grant, James Stephenson, and Ethan Wickman. He is a member of the Board of Directors for the Leonard Falcone International Euphonium Tuba Competition, where he serves as the Tuba Competitions Music Chair and is a Life Member of the International Tuba Euphonium Association (ITEA). Dr. Combest holds a B.M. from Eastern Kentucky University, an M.M. from the University of Louisville, a D.M.A. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and his teachers include Roger Bobo, Mark Moore, John Jones, and Jim Willett

Dr. Combest is a Performing Artist and Clinician for Melton Meinl Weston and B&S instruments.