

PRACTICE . . . How?

BY JOSH GOTTRY

PRACTICE. It is an instruction that every music student has heard many times. That doesn't mean each one has done it or even knows HOW to do it. Simply being told to practice is like being told to learn, but without knowing what to learn, how much of it to learn, or some methods for learning. So, if practice is so important, how should you practice?

CREATE A PRACTICE ROUTINE

This involves two parts. First, set aside a regular practice time. Whether it is before school, after school, right after dinner, or at exactly 7:42 p.m., the important thing is to be consistent. Making a regular practice time helps train our body and brain to focus on percussion at a particular time in the day. Second, set up a normal practice order. A good suggestion would be to start with a warm-up, include solo practice, band or percussion ensemble music, and sightreading, and end with something fun. Habits are incredibly hard to break . . . both good ones and bad ones, so if you create a practice habit, your practice time should be more enjoyable and productive.

PRACTICE A SET AMOUNT OF TIME EVERY DAY

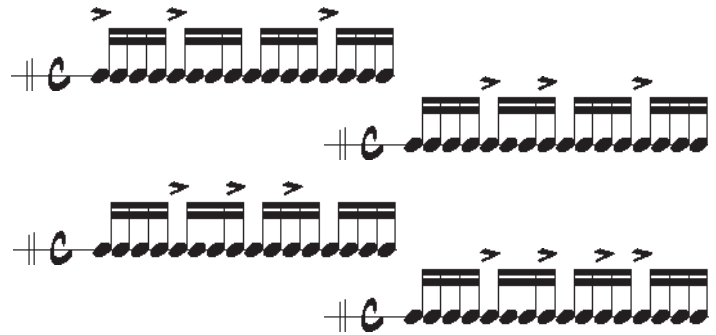
Every teacher will tell you that practicing 15-20 minutes every day is much more fun and effective than 5 hours every weekend. The reason, is that between every time that we practice, we forget some of the things we learned. The more often you practice, the easier it is to improve. If you only practice once a week (say, right before your lesson?!?), you'll probably spend more time trying to remember what you fixed last time than improving something new. The length of time you practice should increase as you get older and more experienced, but the focus should always be on practicing regularly as opposed to extensively.

WARM-UP EFFECTIVELY

My general rule is never waste your own time. As for warm-ups, I always try to use warm-ups to prepare both my hands and my mind. To do this, I suggest creating exercises that focus on problem spots in the music you are practicing. For example, let's say you're having trouble with the following accent pattern on a snare drum part.



Here are some short exercises you could use to focus on that pattern and warm-up your hands at the same time.



This way, you can warm-up at the same time you are training your hands to play patterns you will need later.

PRACTICE ALL PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS

Percussion is much more difficult to practice simply because there are so many instruments to include in our practice time. The basics would include snare drum, keyboard percussion, timpani, and drumset or multiple percussion. However, the more you progress within percussion, you'll find yourself adding ethnic percussion (congas, steel drums, etc.), concert hand percussion instruments (tambourine, triangle, cymbals, etc.), and much more into your regular routine. While these additions do require additional planning, they also adds plenty of variety and should definitely limit any boredom!

KEEP TRACK OF YOUR PRACTICE

Take a few minutes at the end of each practice time to write down exactly what you practiced and for how long. Next, make a note of what you need to make time for during your next practice session. The more organized you are regarding music and instruments to be practiced, as well as exercises to be used, the more effective your practice becomes.

Good Luck!



Josh Gottry is an active percussion instructor, performer, and composer in Gilbert, Arizona. He serves as an instructor for several local percussion ensembles and private percussion students, and performs regularly as both a soloist and ensemble member. As a composer, Mr. Gottry is a three-time ASCAP grant recipient with seventeen works published for percussion. Josh Gottry is a clinician for Mike Balter Mallets, Pro-Mark Sticks, and Yamaha Percussion.