

# Cross Training

## A System for Improving Your Practice and Playing

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### Part 1: *WHAT* to Practice

Most drummers practice regularly and put in enough time to obtain good results, but often those results are slow in coming. My Cross Training method should help improve your practice sessions so that you can achieve better and quicker results. I've developed this method while teaching drumset at a University and working with hundreds of students through the years.

The term Cross Training is built around these basic strategies...

- 1) what to practice,
- 2) how to practice,
- 3) setting goals,
- 4) sticking to a consistent routine.

How long you practice is not so important; it's what and how you practice that are critical.

There are two main types of practice – *maintenance* and *development*. Maintenance practice keeps you in good playing condition by maintaining your muscles, tendons, ligaments, strength, endurance, coordination, and touch in performance condition. Developmental practice increases your existing skills and adds new ones. Both of these types of practice are important.

Some days when I can only practice 30 minutes or less, I work on maintaining and slightly improving my current skill level. Longer practice sessions (more than an hour) allow you to grow as a player. To develop as a player you should practice every day, regardless of how much time you put in.

This first article is about the WHAT of Cross Training. That is that you should practice regularly in each of the following five areas, or categories: Technique, Styles, Improvisation/Musicality, Reading, and 'Other'.

**Technique** is the physical and musical ability to play the ideas that you hear, imagine, imitate, synthesize, and create. Some topics to work on here include control, accuracy, fluency with stickings, accents, execution, coordination, and brush technique.

**Styles** - studying, learning, listening to, and practicing ALL styles of drumming and music - rock, funk, jazz, metal, Afro-Cuban, Brazilian, breakbeat, etc. Don't limit your growth by defining yourself as a rock drummer, or jazz drummer...you're a drummer. Your rock playing influences your jazz playing, which influences your Afro-Cuban playing, and so on. You develop a unique voice by studying and combining many styles, regardless of what your primary style of playing may be.

**Improvisation and Musicality** - every time you play the drums you're improvising and interpreting - maybe not in an extended solo, but in grooves, sounds, and fills. There's not just one way to play anything...there are many - be creative and trust your imagination. Things to work on here include feel, touch, tone, balance between sounds, accompanying, and improvising. Here's where the how of playing is important (more about that in future articles).

**Reading** - two main areas here - Sight Reading and Literature. Sight Reading skills are all about *Recognition* and *Repetition*...seeing and repeating those basic rhythms that tend to show up most often in drum parts - quarters, 8<sup>ths</sup>, 16<sup>ths</sup>, and triplets. Depending on your career goals, the ability to read a drum chart accurately and play it musically the first time you see it, may be vital to your success. Reading is a good skill to have as it enables us to think and express our ideas in written form, and there are many ways to dramatically improve this skill. The other area here, Literature, includes working on pieces written for snare drum or drum set, transcriptions of recordings, and some drum method books. Reading music is a window that provides us with a deeper understanding of music and rhythm, and gives us the knowledge to see, know, and think about drumming.

**'Other'** - these are all the things you do to gain additional skills and knowledge WITHOUT the sticks in your hands. Examples include reading Drum Club (!), transcribing grooves and solos, watching drum DVDs, experimenting with tuning methods, composing something for drum set, reading biographies of famous musicians, reading equipment web sites, and listening, listening, and more listening.

My next article on the subject of practicing will address the HOW of Cross Training. Until then, think about these five categories and begin to make a list of things you'd like to work on in each area.