

Cross Training

A System for Improving Your Practice and Playing

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Part 2: *HOW* to Practice

In my first article, I outlined the five main categories of things to practice for drumset as prescribed in my Cross Training method: Technique, Styles, Improvisation and Musicality, Reading, and 'Other'.

In this article I will explain my principles of How to practice those things.

Let me start by repeating, How long you practice is not as important in your development as What and How you practice.

The Cross Training practice system requires you to move between each of the five categories during every practice session, and spend about the same amount of time on each one. Let's begin by creating two documents, or forms, to chart out a practice routine or schedule and you'll see what I mean.

First, take a piece of paper, or create a document on your computer. This is your Master List of those things you want learn to do, or do better. List the five categories across the top of the page next to each other and draw lines down the length of the page separating each category so that you have five columns. Place in each column all of the things in that category that you need or want to work on. If you're like me, each list will be fairly long. Try to make your list in a priority order – that is, at the top put those things that need the most work or those that you need to develop quickly due to some kind of approaching deadline – like an upcoming concert or recording. Know that this list will constantly have items changing in priority order (for me, things I need to work on almost never come off!).

Here's a sample of a Master List (of course, your list of items in each category will differ from this...this is just an example):

Technique	Styles	Improvisation/Musicality	Reading	'Other'
* stickings	* jazz (90 bpm)	* rock 2-beat drum fills	* Bellson Book	* watch a drum video
* hand/foot exercises	* fast Samba	* soloing over ostinatos	* Syncopation Book	* transcribing
* dbl bass exercises	* Afro-Cuban 6/8	* working on feel and groove	* drum charts	* read drummer interviews
* brush technique	* Garibaldi Book	* metric illusion	* Lepak Book	* work on drum tuning
* jazz independence	* blues shuffles (med-slow)	* recording and critiquing your playing	* advanced snare drum literature	* focused listening
	* linear playing in odd times	* jazz 4's at various tempos		

Next, take a look at the example *Drumset Practice Grid* below and try to make one like it, or go to my website www.dicciani.com and download the one there. You'll see the five categories listed across the top of the page with four blocks underneath each one. Simply fill in each block with something from your *Master List* that you want to develop, or maintain, in each category.

Drum Practice Grid

Date:

Technique	Styles	Improvisation/Musicality	Reading	'Other'

Now you're ready to start your session! Each item, or block, should be practiced at least 20 minutes, but no more than 30 minutes at a time (that's the Cross-Training system). When you've finished practicing that item move directly to the block in the same row in the next category and practice that item. In other words, after practicing for 20 minutes of *Technique* block #1, move directly to *Styles* block #1. Continue across the page until you've finished practicing in the *Reading/Literature* category and then go to *Technique* block #2.

You're probably asking what about the '*Other*' category. I usually skip over the '*Other*' category until I've finished the physical parts of my practice session, and I've put the sticks down – maybe to take a break, or maybe to do these things late at night, or riding the train to work, etc.

When you've finished practicing for that day, start the next day where you left off. When you get to the bottom of the page, return back to the top. Keep practicing the items in these blocks until you start to notice some satisfactory improvement. Then get out another blank practice form and fill in the blocks

with either some items from the last sheet that you still want to continue working on, or with some new items from your *Master List*. Depending on how much time you practice, each form (*Drumset Practice Grid*) should last between 2 and 4 weeks, then it's time to fill out a new one. Make sure you date and save each routine so that you can track your progress and maintain a record of what you've practiced.

That's it...the system of Cross Training for drumset! This is a very flexible method that you can tailor-make to fit your needs. Feel free to use this system exactly, or adapt it to your needs and change it around to make it work for you. Just remember, the key elements of my Cross Training system are practicing different kinds of things (categories) and devoting equal time (20 to 30 minutes) to each item in each category.

My next article will include some overall important tips on practicing like listening, contextualizing (one of my favorites), protecting your hearing, and consistency. Feel free to contact me with comments or questions. Good luck and have fun!