

# Cross Training

A System for Improving Your Practice and Playing  
© Marc Dicciani <[mdicciani@uarts.edu](mailto:mdicciani@uarts.edu)> <[www.dicciani.com](http://www.dicciani.com)>

## Part 3: Some Practice Tips

If you've been reading my articles here over the past few months, you probably have a good understanding of my 'Cross Training' practice method for drummers. Now that you've built your personalized practice schedule, and have experimented with this approach, there are just a few more assorted, but important, things I'd like to say on the subject of practicing for drumset.

**Make sure to listen**...in these three ways.

1) **Listen** to recordings of other drummers and musicians. Drumming is an aural (sound and listening) language and tradition that requires some imitating of drummers and their playing styles, and copying things you hear. In fact, listening is one of the most important ways of understanding the role of drums, and in learning how to play.

2. **Listen** to the musicians with whom you're playing. Listening to the other musicians you're playing with is crucial to playing accurately and musically, and to making music together as a group, and communicating with each other.

3. **Listen** to yourself! Make sure you don't forget about this equally important aspect of listening. Every drummer who has been recorded knows what a humbling experience it is to listen back to your own playing. Many times, what you think something sounds like that you played, is not at all what it really sounds like. And it's through the frequent process of recording and listening to yourself play that you develop your own sense of what sounds good and how you want to play. Record yourself through whatever means you can, and as often as you can; record yourself when practicing alone and especially when playing with others. This is referred to as developing numerous 'listening perspectives' and develops your skills as a complete musician.

**There are no professional 'padders', only professional drummers.**

The drum pad can be an extremely valuable tool for use in developing CERTAIN aspects of your playing. But, I've never seen a saxophonist practicing all day on a plastic model of a sax, or a pianist practicing on a drawing of a piano! Use the pad as a tool; it's not a drum, and it's not a musical instrument. Spend most of your time on the drums, especially when working on Styles and Improvisation where musicality, touch, tone, timbre, balance, and dynamics are essential. And, when you do

practice on the pad, especially technique, make sure you keep your feet moving...those muscles need maintenance and development too.

### **Contextualize**

Contextualization is a big word that just means to practice and study in a musical context as often as possible. For example, when practicing your jazz time, or a funk groove, or a song, you should try to do so with a band (not always possible) or even just a bass player or chordal instrument (sometimes possible), or at least with high quality play-along recordings, or full CD recordings (always possible). Some of these recordings are not ideal, but all of them are preferable to playing drums by yourself with no music and out of a musical context. The same holds true with practicing improvisation, independence, and comping (accompaniment). Remember also to use the metronome as a tool, when necessary, but not all of the time. Although it may help with certain things, it may not be your best tool in developing your musicality or feel. Practice whenever possible with other musicians or recordings – that's what I mean by contextualization. This will also help you to hear, and intuit (understand and know by hearing) song form and musical structure. The more music you listen to and play to, the more you can hear and understand your role in that context. Always try to remember the goal is to play drums to music and with musicians, so try to practice that way as much as possible.

**Practice at many different tempos (tempi)**...the things that sound and feel good to play at 90 beats per minute, will probably not sound as good at 200bpm. The opposite is also true. Fast tempos are not just medium tempos played faster – they are DIFFERENT tempos with a different use of notes and space. It's important that you practice everything through a range of tempos that are appropriate to that style.

Let me now leave you with **10 practice tips** I give my students:

- 1) Wear ear protection whenever possible and appropriate to what you're practicing, and try to practice at volumes that are tolerable, taking breaks frequently to give your ears a rest. Your ears will become fatigued long before your hands, so give them some breaks.
- 2) Plan your practice routine carefully and change it up every couple weeks, avoiding practice ruts (working on the same thing for too long). Give some items a break from daily practice, don't practice them for a couple weeks, and then come back to them – you may be surprised to see that they've actually improved (one of the benefits of cross-training).

- 3) Good practice sessions should be both fun and frustrating. Fun because you're playing the drums, and frustrating because you're working on things you don't do well - practicing correctly is a humbling experience.
- 4) Try to practice every day, even if it's just for a short while.
- 5) Concentrate and focus while you practice and eliminate distractions (television, cell phones, etc.) - you'll learn and develop much faster, and this will help to increase your focus and concentration while performing.
- 6) Balance your longer practice sessions between both Maintenance and Developmental practice (see articles #1 and #2 of this series).
- 7) Be realistic and honest - make sure that most of the things you practice will have measurable results on the DRUMSET. In other words, if you really want to develop your feel and sensitivity, only practicing singles and doubles fast and loud may not yield the results you want.
- 8) Practice doesn't make perfect, PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT. Whatever you practice is what you'll improve at - if you want to improve at something, practice it. Something that you've never practiced is not likely to magically appear in your playing during a major concert. Practice smart to play better.
- 9) Remember that the goal is not to become a better 'practicer', but a better drummer. That is the result that my Cross Training practice system is designed to achieve. The goal is the drumset; or as a good friend of mine once told me... "the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing"...it may sound funny, but I believe there's wisdom there.
- 10) BE PATIENT - practice is hard and becoming the drummer you want to be is very difficult; drumming skills develop over many years, in fact they develop over a lifetime. And remember to try to have fun doing it...it's probably why we all started playing drums in the first place. And when you do go to perform, try to play as if no one is watching and no one is listening, and it's just you and the band and the music and the joy of playing the drums. ☺

**Marc Dicciani** is the Director of the School of Music at The University of the Arts, and a Professor of Drumset. He's performed and toured with countless renowned musicians and entertainers, and conducted drum clinics around the world. Marc is an artist clinician for Yamaha Drums, Sabian Cymbals, Regal Tip Drum Sticks, Remo Drum Heads, Latin Percussion, and MONO cases. Contact him at [mdicciani@uarts.edu](mailto:mdicciani@uarts.edu) and visit him at [www.dicciani.com](http://www.dicciani.com).