

# More Effective Learning

## Improving Practice Skills, Memory, and Drumming (Part 2)

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### The Practice Chart

On the podcast page on my website directly beneath the title of this podcast is a sample practice grid – take a look at that now – and maybe download and print it out later on. I practice for 20 to 30 minutes at a time in each of the categories listed there. Again, that's at least 20 minutes, but no more than 30 minutes in each area before moving on to the next, and different, category. The categories are 1. movement and mechanics, 2. technique, 3. styles and musicality, 4. improvisation, 5. reading and literature, and 6. "other".

I'll describe these and give a few examples of things that you can fit into each category, although ultimately the specific categories you decide to use, and what you put in each category, is completely up to you.

**1. Movement and mechanics** (this is essentially about correct limb and body movement): relaxed grip, left foot rocking, right foot swivel, Moeller technique, double bass drum exercises

**2. Technique:** Stickings, Hand/Foot combinations, Linear techniques, Rhythmic independence, Volume independence, Open-handed playing, 3/2 clave independence

**3. Styles:** Jazz, Odd-Time Jazz, Rock, Riley Book, Garibaldi Book, Bossa Nova, Mambo, Shuffle, Afro-Cuban 6/8, Big Band

**4. Improvisation/Musicality:** Fills, trading 2 measure solos, 4's, 8's etc., soloing over ostinatos, Feel, Volume balance, Extended solos, Drum tunes, Jazz tunes, song form, Phrasing in Groups of 3's, 4's, and 5's

**5. Reading/literature:** my 8<sup>th</sup> note variation sheet titled "complete 8<sup>th</sup> note variations" which you can find and download from the podcast page on my website, the Ted Reed Syncopation Book, Louis Bellson Book, Alexander Lepak Book, Beyond Syncopation Book, Cirone Book, a Jazz standards Fake Book, the Vic Firth Book

**6. Other:** Transcribing beats and solos, Drum tuning, Reading drummer biographies, reading the text in Drum method books, Modern Drummer Magazine, Experimenting with set-up, watching quality drum videos, studying websites like Yamaha, Vic Firth, Zildjian, Remo – there's an amazing amount of great information there, and going to concerts/clubs

Here's how to use the chart. First, place an appropriate idea in each of the boxes that you want to practice. Work on the first one for twenty to thirty minutes, and then move on to the next box in the same row (switching to the next and different category). When you finish a row, move down to the next row, and repeat the process. After ninety minutes, make a note of where you're at on the chart, and take a break. The break will help deepen your learning.

Start your next practice session where you left off, and when you get to the bottom of the page, go back to the top and start again. After a few weeks, as you begin to make noticeable progress in with some items and they start to move toward your comfort zone, create a new practice schedule with things from your last routine that you want to continue working on, and add some new items.

The 6<sup>th</sup> category, titled "other", is intended for items that don't require you to have sticks in your hands, at least not playing – it can include transcribing, reading and researching, working on drum tuning, etc. When you're practicing, you can skip the 'other' category until a time later in the day when you can't be at your drumset.

Here are a few topics that I also include with my practice – all are extremely valuable, and all will be topics on future podcasts: Virtual Reality Practice, Non-stick Practice (moving your limbs without the sticks), Visual/Mental Practice

### **Final Thoughts**

Change it up! Contrary to popular belief, most people do better over time by varying their study routines and practice locations. The greater number of environments in which you practice or rehearse, the sharper and more lasting the recall of that material becomes. Since we cannot predict the context in which we'll have to perform, we're better off varying the circumstances in which we prepare. This kind of experimenting reinforces learning and strengthens memory and recall.

Here's another - remember the word SCORE, specifically the initials SCR as a general guide to how to practice **S=spaced, C=challenge, and R= random**

**S=spaced:** practice a few things for 20 to 30 minutes maximum, then take a break – maybe for a half hour, maybe 2 or 3 hours. It's better to practice for three 1-hour sessions than for one 3-hour session.

**C=challenge:** primarily work on things that challenge you and help you develop; and

**R= random:** when you practice, move between categories. In other words, instead of working on technique for an hour, do that for 30 minutes followed by improvisation or styles for 30 minutes.

Also, remember the three **F's: Focus, Feedback, and Fix.** **Focus** intently on what you're working on; **Feedback:** record and listen back and assess if it sounds correct, and, **Fix** what you need to make what you're working on better.

**Here are some tips I share with my students:**

- \* Always set goals, and remember that *how* you practice is as important as *what* you practice.
- \* Practice in context through a wide range of tempos. For example, when you're practicing rhythmic independence with jazz time, work on a wide range of tempos from slow to fast, so that you develop your rhythmic vocabulary at all tempos.
- \* Practice mentally (rehearsing, imagining, thinking, analyzing) whenever possible. Although physical practice is preferable to mental practice for learning a motor skill, mental rehearsal is an effective method for augmenting learning.
- \* Learn many styles of drumming and music, even if it's just to inform your primary interests.
- \* Read and research often.
- \* Use your imagination and develop your own unique musical voice. Learning becomes almost unlimited through elaboration, which is adding your own elements and ideas to what you're practicing.
- \* Repetition alone is not enough. Understanding, as well as the conceptualization and self-expression of what we learned, makes information useful and usable.
- \* Take breaks during practice, after an hour or 90 minutes, take a half hour and do something completely different.
- \* Drumming is not a right-handed or left-handed instrument, it's both-handed
- \* Get enough sleep – sufficient sleep is critical to learning
- \* Be patient, be engaged, be enthusiastic, and have fun!