

The most successful musicians are the ones who learn to maximize their practice time.

- Musicians who learn to use their practice time wisely can accomplish twice as much in half the amount of time.

### Effective practice techniques

1. Work out the fingering.
  - a. Most mistakes made in performance are caused by fingering errors.
  - b. Choose appropriate fingering.
  - c. Never deviate in rehearsal.
  - d. Never change fingering at the last minute.
  
2. Seven step method (Good for learning new music, or working out problems at any stage of learning)
  - a. Right hand only
  - b. Left hand only
  - c. Pedal only
  - d. Left hand and right hand together
  - e. Left hand and pedal together
  - f. Right hand and pedal together
  - g. Right hand, left hand and pedal together
  
3. Slow practice
  - a. Use a metronome
  - b. No church musician should be without a metronome.
  - c. Don't use the metronome during the initial learning phase. (when working out notes)
  - d. Learn to play along with a metronome.
  - e. Move up one number at a time. Repetition during slow practice will solidify the notes in your brain and in your hands.
  - f. Never practice faster than you can play accurately.
  - g. "If you want to play fast, practice slowly." (Paul Pollei)
  
4. Four "F's" (Don Cook : *Organ Essentials*, 1992. p. 130)
  - a. Find (identify the problem)
  - b. Fence (isolate the problem)
  - c. Fix (repetitions using appropriate practice techniques)
  - d. Fit (put the pieces back together—playing the passage in context)
  
5. Work backwards through each phrase, beginning on each beat, every other beat, or the beginning of each measure. (Establish many starting places.) Useful to facilitate playing through when a stumble occurs during a performance.
  
6. Intensify the difficulty of the problem
  - h. Most appropriate when the passage can be played but not with enough confidence.
  - i. Example: Play the difficult passage with hand crossed, on separate manuals.
  - j. Afterwards, when played as written, the passage seems much easier in comparison.
  
7. Rhythms. Good for music with passages consisting of the same note value. It is very valuable for learning baroque music. Superimpose different rhythms over the written rhythm. Example: The

problem passage consists almost entirely of sixteenth notes. Superimpose the following rhythmic patterns, one at a time, over the sixteenth notes:

- two eighth notes followed by two sixteenth notes
- two sixteenth notes followed by two eighth notes
- triplet followed by an eighth note
- eighth note followed by a triplet
- dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note
- sixteenth note followed by a dotted eighth note.

8. Vary articulation: Detached when it should be legato.

During the initial learning phase, the number one time waster is to play the entire piece/hymn from beginning to end. The reason this is so counter-productive is because we practice the mistakes and we become very proficient playing those mistakes. We then have to go back and undo what we have learned wrong. If we spill something on the floor, we don't clean the whole house. We go right to the spot.

- Go immediately to the problem passage and work it out.
- Play the entire piece/section as a reward or incentive after having worked out the problem(s).

### **Prepare a practice plan for each practice session**

1. Decide how much time is available for practice. Are you playing next Sunday or are you in a rotation and have three weeks?
2. Incorporate the above mentioned practice techniques.
3. Considerations:
  - a. How much time before performance
  - b. How many pieces to be played
  - c. The learning stage of the pieces to be played. Some, you may be reviewing, others you are learning for the first time.
  - d. Personality – what works for you
4. Use a kitchen timer if necessary.
5. Divide up the available time.
  - a. Example: You only have only 20 minutes to practice. Target specific measures of one or two hymns. Make a simple practice plan, choosing from the above practice techniques.

Don't become discouraged if the next time you practice, you feel like you are back to square one. Consistency will yield results and you will learn to play with greater confidence and skill.

Developing good practice habits is an investment in time.

*"... And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Matt 25:20.*

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