

A red circular outline containing the text "JB MASTERCLASS SERIES" in red, uppercase letters.

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A pair of white earbuds with a white cable, positioned vertically on the left side of the page. The earbuds are at the bottom, and the cable extends upwards, looping around the text.

MINDFUL PRACTICE

TIPS FOR MAXIMIZING YOUR
PRACTICE TIME

JOSH BYNUM



TIPS & SUGGESTIONS FOR MINDFUL PRACTICE

Allowing yourself to be truly creative in a performance environment necessitates harnessing your anxiety and spinning that energy into adrenaline. Believe it or not, the discipline of practicing can have a lasting impact on these subjects.

What follows are just a few suggestions for making the most of your preparation time each week. For anyone who raised their hand on the question of feeling as if your performances don't always match your preparation...this is for you. Always be willing to re-evaluate your process. Let me know what you think, if you have questions, or another point of view. I would welcome the discussion!

1. Know thyself:

- What are your current practice habits? How much time each day? How is that time allocated? What are your session goals? Do these answers align with your performance (or career) objectives? If not, what habits are worth keeping...and which need to be re-examined?

2. Define what practice is to you --- and what you want from it:

- Practice doesn't need to carry an association of "forced labor." Who's forcing you? Why is labor a bad thing? I can easily remember some of my best feelings being after a long day of hard manual labor (landscaping). A very cathartic feeling of accomplishment....while being dog tired.
- I define practice as a period of creative problem solving. It's a balance of Artistic and Practical thought. I want to go into a session with a clear plan, and be able to walk out having done EXACTLY what I set out to do. Along the way, as obstacles present themselves ---- I don't get frustrated. I just try and identify what is the EXACT issue, and think of different methods of "attack." I try each of them until I land on what works. The longer you do this, the better your first instincts will be.
- In his awesome TED Talk, Victor Wooten recommends ---- Play more and practice less. Does that mean forget practice? Of course not. Just that creative performance can feed your inspiration to want to practice and become more communicative (expressive) on your instrument. But if we agree that music is a form of expression and communication ---- that also means you need to get a better grip on the language itself. Just allow yourself to MAKE MISTAKES and have the freedom to learn and grow.

3. What is your IDEAL practice environment? When is your IDEAL practice time?

- Take this week and actually chart when you are most AWAKE each day. Do you notice trends? Early, midday, evening, late night? This might be indicating when is best to get optimal work done.

- Do you crave distraction and noise? Not necessarily conducive to focused practice. You'll know focused practice when you stop watching the clock, and actually lose track of time. Now...ultimately, we want to be responsible with our time (so I encourage you to actually set alarms --- 10 minutes, 25 minutes, etc.) to get a feel for the passage of time and how you use (or misuse) it.
- Do you prefer to play outside or inside? Sitting or standing? Awareness of lighting, posture, concentration, fluency of technology (is it easily integrated....or a distraction), etc . These are a few factors to discover optimal learning TIME and SPACE.

4. Practice Journal:

- This is one of the functions of your lesson doc, but you may also like to have a physical journal to jot things down. 3 purposes of the journal: Results from TODAY. Ideas for TOMORROW. Goals for NEXT WEEK.
- Like anything, you get what you invest. Are your observations surface level? That is a likely indicator that your practice is as well. Not that you need to write War & Peace each day. I typically write in shorthand --- a few ideas, observations, plans, goals, etc. Keeps me moving in a linear direction. *MUSIC ED majors ---- get ready, this is a precursor to creation of lesson plans, which will definitely be a thing.
- If you haven't identified "the mission" how can you define success? Levels of goals: Daily; Weekly; Monthly; By Semester; Annual; Degree; Career. Musical; Personal; Professional.
- Make a habit of writing down your goals (or habits that you WANT to establish) and make them visible to you each time you get the instrument out of the case.

5. Self Recording:

- Sharpens musicianship. Prevents distorted self-perception (for better or worse). Heightens efficiency. Enhances lessons. This is effective for solo practice, and incredibly beneficial for chamber rehearsals (an objective and impartial judge of the group's product).
- Don't like what you hear? Do you tend to get emotional and frustrated about that, or kick into creative problem-solving mode? Avoidance isn't the answer --- that means you don't trust your love of the Art of Music. If it can't bear or hold up to scrutiny, then it's a shaky love affair.
- I like to mix up what and how long my recordings are. I've recorded and listened back to my daily routine (several times). Excellent way to judge the effectiveness of your time spent and the quality of your routine. Do you sound better (more "dialed in" at the end than at the beginning?

- If working fragments --- I'll record a string of several runs and then listen back, taking note of progress...or lack of. Helps me evaluate HOW I'm practicing.
- After "shedding" an etude (entire or portion), I'll record the performance. That helps me not be panicky about "the red light" of recording, and to understand that it always counts. Not just at the performance (or recording).

Finally --- just to give you some buzz words to latch onto in your daily journey to improve your technical and artistic approach to music making. Gerald Klickstein (The Musician's Way) refers to this as the Habits of Excellence:

- Ease
- Expressiveness
- Accuracy
- Rhythmic Vitality
- Beautiful Tone
- Focused Attention
- Positive Attitude

Here's another exercise for you ---- define what these terms mean to you. Put them in rank order twice:

- 1. Based on how important you think they are
- 2. Based on their priority in your mind on a daily basis (in practice and performance).

Do these columns line up? If not, how can we get there? That's evaluating your process...making sure that it lines up with your goals.

Suggested reading:

Allen, David. Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity
Carter, Christine. The Sweet Spot: How to Accomplish More while Doing Less
Colvin, Geoff. Talent is Overrated
Covey, Stephen. The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
Coyle, Daniel. The Little Book of Talent: 52 Tips for Improving Your Skills
Coyle, Daniel. The Talent Code
Erickson, Anders. Peak
Gallway, W. Timothy. The Inner Game of Tennis
Green, Don. Fearless Performance.
Hyams, Joe. Zen in the Martial Arts
Klickstein, Gerald. The Musician's Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, & Wellness
Pressfield, Steven. The War of Art
Stulberg, Brad. Peak Performance
Werner, Kenny. Effortless Mastery
Williams, Susan. Quality Practice