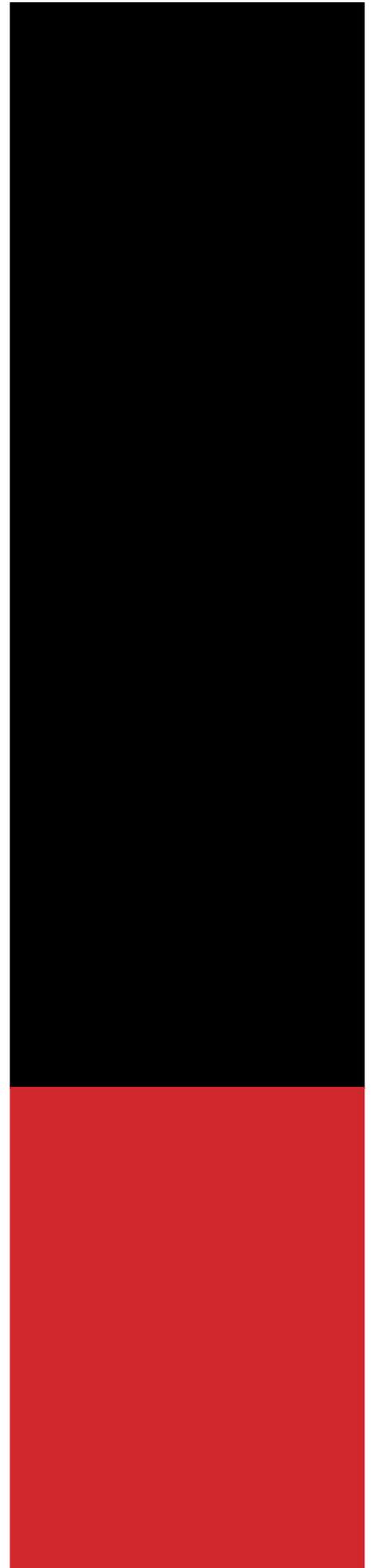


THE TOP TEN PRACTICE TIPS OF ALL TIME

COURTESY OF: DAVID MOTTO



INTRODUCTION

What if there were proven strategies for learning a musical instrument? Wouldn't you want to know them?

What if just a few specific tips changed your practicing?

So that...

- You accomplished more.
- You got more done in less time.
- You remembered more.

If you're like most musicians, you would definitely want to know these tips.

It's not enough to know **what** to practice. You need to know **how** to practice.

You can learn **what** to practice from many trusted sources:

- Music teachers
- Books, magazines, and websites
- Instructional videos
- Recordings
- Sheet music

But, where have you learned **how** to practice? I constantly hear from musicians that they have no idea how to get the most out of practicing. The best practice methods seem mysterious. And, this frustrates them.

You can learn WHAT to practice from many trusted sources. But, where have you learned HOW to practice?

If you already know **what** to practice, and you could combine that with **how** to practice, imagine...

- How much you would accomplish
- How confident you'd feel
- How much better you'd get

Just imagine!

It doesn't matter if you're a seasoned pro or a beginner. You may practice 10 minutes a day or 4 hours a day. The secrets to practicing successfully work for everyone.

The 10 Practice Tips in this report reveal those secrets.

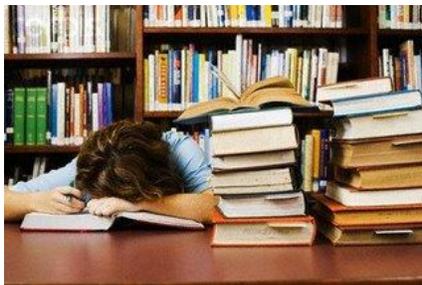
- These practice tips work for **all** practice situations.
- These tips apply to **all** instruments, ages, and genres.
- The list can be applied to **all** individuals, ensembles, beginners, and professionals.

Are you ready to get started?

***The secrets
to practicing
successfully
work for
everyone.***

TOP TEN TIP #1: PRACTICE EVERY DAY

Daily review beats cramming once a week



This advice might seem obvious since many musicians know they should practice every day. But, they don't know **why** they should do it. And, they **don't** do it!

Here are two very important reasons why practicing every day works:

1. LONG-TERM MEMORY

The human brain only remembers what it perceives as being important:

- Repetitions
- Highly emotional events

Everything else gets washed away and forgotten.

If your songs – and the steps needed to perform these songs – aren't in your long-term memory, you'll never play your best.

Practicing every day gives the brain the *repetition* it needs to successfully transfer information into long-term memory.

If your songs aren't in your long-term memory, you'll never play your best.

2. THE LEARNING CURVE

Most musicians think their learning curve should go up in a straight line and they should see improvements each and every day.

The reality is the learning curve goes up *and* down. While there may be general improvement over time, the day to day reality can feel like a roller coaster!

It's important for musicians to expect the ups and downs of the learning curve. This process is totally normal and should never lead to frustration.

Practicing every day minimizes the time between the dips along the learning curve and gets musicians closer to their next breakthrough.

HOW TO PRACTICE EVERY DAY

Don't think you need hours of practice time every day! Just do what you can. Practicing every day for a few minutes will give you a lot more progress than practicing one day a week for an hour.

So, if you know that an hour a week is all you can do, here's a suggestion:

Try 10 minutes a day instead.

Whatever you do, practice every day.

You can even think of this practice tip in a completely different way: Just Practice Today

And when you wake up tomorrow, tell yourself the same thing: Just Practice Today

You'll be glad you did.

***Practicing
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TOP TEN TIP #2: HAVE SPECIFIC GOALS

Know what you're going to do before you do it



How do you know if you met your goals if you don't have any goals?

This seems like a silly question, but many musicians start their practice sessions without giving *any* thought to what they want to accomplish while practicing.

So, before stepping into your practice room, make sure you have some goals for today:

- Know what you are going to accomplish *before* you practice.
- Write down your goals and priorities *before* the practice session.
- Decide how long you will practice *before* you start playing.

GOALS MUST BE ATTAINABLE

Unattainable goals can lead to frustration. Frustration can lead to questioning why you are even bothering to try. Eventually, some musicians faced with unattainable goals will give up—and quit playing music.

Having attainable goals does just the opposite. You'll look forward to playing music every day. You'll feel a sense of accomplishment when you play. You'll have the sense that your playing is getting better.

Many musicians start practicing without giving any thought to what they want to accomplish.

GOALS MUST BE SPECIFIC

One way to make sure your goals are attainable is to make the goals very specific. Every goal must be specific so you have absolutely no question about when you have successfully reached the goal.

If the goal is vague, most musicians will be confused in the practice room.

How specific should your goals be?

Very specific.

CREATING SPECIFIC GOALS

Non-specific Goal: Work on pg. 10 in your method book.

Specific Goal: Be able to play the first two lines of pg. 10 at quarter = 40 bpm without stopping by your next lesson—five times in a row—legato or staccato.

Non-specific Goal: Learn “Take the A Train”

Specific Goal: Today, learn the melody to the bridge of “Take the A Train” and record yourself playing it accurately at $\frac{1}{4}$ speed.

SPECIFIC, ATTAINABLE GOALS LEAD YOU TO SUCCESS

Creating specific, attainable goals is crucial to your success. If your goals are vague, or if they are completely out of reach, you will feel frustration and dread.

Accomplishing specific goals that are within your reach will make you feel confident and in control. Confidence and control lead to musical success.

***Creating
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TOP TEN TIP #3: BEGIN WITH THE BASICS

Technical warm-ups help everything else



The difference between good musicians and great musicians is their level of controlling Music Basics.

Virtuosity comes from complete control of basic musical elements like intonation, tone/timbre, rhythm, dynamics, phrasing, and time. However, many musicians want to skip the Basics, concentrating instead only on the fun stuff, like learning a new song.

Remember this rule:

Working on the Basics is what allows musicians to learn songs in the first place!!

PUT A BASICS ROUTINE INTO EVERY PRACTICE SESSION

No one wants to cover the Basics **after** working on a fun song. This means that scales, arpeggios, long tones, technique, and etudes should **start** your practice sessions.

Promise yourself that you'll cover this technical material before you work on a new song. Even if you only warm up on Basics for a few minutes, it will have a tremendous effect on the rest of your practice session.

Working on the Basics is what allows musicians to learn songs in the first place!

HOW TO BUILD A BASICS ROUTINE

This list can be shortened or lengthened depending on the amount of total time spent practicing, but it gives a good, general overview:

- Long tones first—focus on tone
- Scale exercises—focus on pitch, rhythm, and time
- Arpeggios—focus on tone, pitch, and rhythm
- Etudes—focus on dynamics, technique, and all other Basics

Notice that covering these types of exercises makes musicians think about each of the Basic elements.

For many musicians focusing on just one Basic at a time is the most useful. Other players like to combine musical elements into a single exercise. You can use your own judgment and adjust your Basics warmup each day.

***Use your
best
judgment
and adjust
your Basics
warmup
each day.***



TOP TEN TIP #4: FOCUS ON THE TOUGH STUFF

How to master difficult material



“Tough Stuff” is the term I use for musical material you want to avoid. It’s the music that seems:

- Too hard, too high, or too fast
- Too complicated
- Too... impossible

It’s the stuff you don’t think you’ll ever really be able to learn. It’s the stuff you can’t imagine playing yourself.

The Tough Stuff is also the key to becoming a successful musician...

WHY THE TOUGH STUFF IS SO IMPORTANT

Practicing should focus on material musicians **cannot** currently play, not on everything they already do well.

The Tough Stuff makes you grow and mature more quickly than simply playing what is already comfortable.

Musicians must fight the temptation to play through an entire piece of music while practicing. Instead, you must focus on the Tough Stuff to make real progress.

***Practicing
should
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material
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SPEND MOST OF YOUR PRACTICE TIME ON THE TOUGH STUFF

You should spend half to three-fourths of your practice time on the Tough Stuff. At many practice sessions, you can actually ignore the material you already play well.

Is this the way most musicians practice? Of course not! This is exactly the opposite of what most musicians do.

Many musicians spend their entire practice sessions playing through songs from start to finish. They only play the songs they already know. Then, they wonder why their playing never gets any better!

TURNING FEAR INTO CONFIDENCE

Musicians tend to fear the Tough Stuff. They intuitively want to avoid it at all costs. This fear slows down the road to musical mastery.

To overcome the fear caused by the Tough Stuff, you need a technique that gives you confidence and control.

Here's the trick: Make the Tough Stuff seem easier.

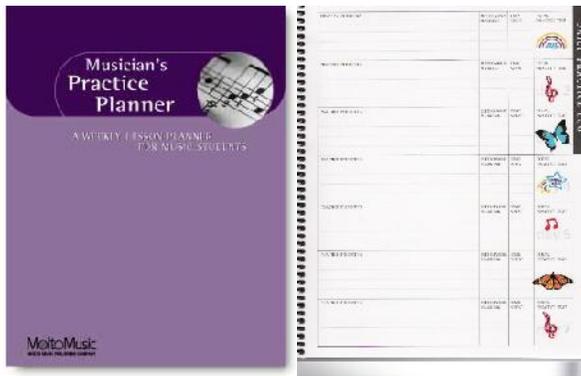
- If the rhythm is too fast, play the notes as quarter notes.
- If the pitches are difficult to control, play only the rhythm.
- If you're not sure what all the notes are, play each pitch one at a time, without focusing on the rhythms at all.
- If the whole section just seems impossible, play it at a very, very, very slow speed.

These techniques make the Tough Stuff seem familiar—something that can be controlled *today*. Feeling in control gets rid of fear. Getting rid of fear boosts your confidence. Being confident helps you handle the Tough Stuff in the first place!

***Don't spend
your entire
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TOP TEN TIP #5: WRITE IT DOWN

Why written logs and practice journals are so important



Learning a musical instrument takes time. These Top Ten Practice Tips help speed up the process, giving musicians a faster and easier way to learn. But, it still takes time.

In any project that takes time, it's important to:

- Remember what you need to do **today**
- Keep track of your long-term goals
- Recognize your accomplishments

There's just no way to remember these things without writing them down.

With written reminders in a practice planner, you will:

- Accelerate how quickly you improve your playing
- Stay organized and motivated
- Achieve your goals more easily and notice your progress
- Know exactly where to start every time you play

There's no way to remember your plans and goals without writing them down.

WHAT TO WRITE IN YOUR PRACTICE PLANNER

Each day, spending a minute to plan your practice session will have a big payoff. Here are suggestions for what to track in your practice planner:

- A prioritized list of what you'll practice and specific goals for each item
- How much time you spent on each item on your list, and your total practice time for the day
- Your metronome markings
- Questions and feelings that came up while practicing

YOUR PRACTICE PLANNER HELPS YOU STAY MOTIVATED

In addition to accelerating your learning and helping you remember what you're supposed to play today, keeping a written practice journal has another positive effect: Keeping you motivated.

If you're ever having one of those days when you think you're not improving at all, just look at your practice log from a few months ago. You'll be amazed at how far you've come since then. Truly amazed!

PRACTICE PLANNERS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR MUSIC LESSONS

To get the most from the time and money you're spending on your music lessons, make sure you leave **every** lesson with a written assignment that includes specific practice goals, not just page numbers, song titles, and lists of scales.

If your teacher isn't writing this down at your lesson, ask them to write it for you. Otherwise, you will forget what you're supposed to do (and why you're supposed to do it) when you start playing your instrument.

Spending a minute to plan your practice session – in writing – will have a big payoff.

TOP TEN TIP #6: SLOW IT DOWN

The Magic of Muscle Memory



Musicians usually think that they practice to play their instruments better. That's only part of the story.

Practicing is actually training your muscles to carry out complicated sequences of actions so your instrument can be manipulated to create the sounds you desire. Once a sequence is learned, the muscles can do the sequence automatically, as if they have a memory of their own.

This process is known as Muscle Memory, and it is a secret of musical success.

WHY MUSCLE MEMORY IS IMPORTANT FOR MUSICIANS

If your muscles learn to play a passage of music correctly, you will be able to perform that music correctly – automatically! However, if your muscles learn a sequence wrong, you will continue to make mistakes every time you try to play that music – **automatically!**

So, practicing musicians must make sure their muscles are learning the sequence correctly. **Every time** the sequence is played, it must be done right.

This is definitely not the way most musicians practice. Actually, it's the opposite of how most musicians practice.

***Every time
you play a
sequence
of music, it
must be
done right.***

TO PLAY THE MUSIC RIGHT, SLOW DOWN

By practicing music very, very slowly, musicians give their muscles the opportunity to play the music correctly – the first time!

At very slow speeds, it is possible to see and/or feel the exact moment when the muscles want to make an error. You can fix the potential mistake before it even happens.

So, how slowly should the music be played? As slowly as needed to play every pitch with the correct rhythm. Don't worry about how slow you have to go. Just make sure to play without making mistakes!

THE BENEFITS OF VERY SLOW PLAYING

When you slow down your practicing, you'll gain a lot of benefits:

- Build your musical skills more quickly
- Remain confident
- Eliminate frustration when learning new songs
- Learn the music correctly right from the start
- Save enormous amounts of time
- Memorize efficiently and effectively
- Avoid the truly awful process of making a mistake, abruptly stopping, going back to fix the mistake and moving on. (I call this the [SAD Syndrome](#).)

Practicing slowly, methodically, and correctly will forever change the way you approach playing your instrument.

At very slow speeds, you can fix potential mistakes before they happen.

TOP TEN TIP #7: BREAK IT DOWN

Organizing Music into Small, Digestible Sections



Musicians typically try to learn a song by starting at the beginning and playing through to the end. Then, they go back to the beginning and play through to the end again. And again. And again.

This is the “Top to Bottom” method of practicing, and it seems a lot more like performing than practicing!

The Top to Bottom method is not a successful way to learn. It avoids the Tough Stuff and causes the [SAD Syndrome](#).

THERE'S A BETTER WAY: BREAK MUSIC INTO SECTIONS

When you break music into short sections, you can learn each section comfortably. Each section becomes an attainable goal that can be mastered.

This makes the job of practicing easier. When you make your goals for today, you can easily work on just one section.

Short sections give you attainable goals, which make practicing easier.

HAVE FUN WITH THE SECTIONS

Once you've broken your music into small sections, there are many ways to practice them. Here are a few suggestions:

- Practice each section – in random order.
- Practice only the most difficult section (the Tough Stuff) very, very slowly. Skip the rest of the song today.
- Play through the piece backwards—start with the last section, then play the next-to-last section, and continue until you finish the first section.
- Master the transitions between each section.
- Play the last section, then the last two sections, then the last three, etc. Eventually, you'll play through the song from beginning to end.

BENEFITS OF BREAKING IT DOWN

By breaking down your music into small sections, you'll get a lot of benefits:

- Instead of feeling overwhelmed by an entire song, each section becomes an attainable goal that can be mastered.
- You'll have greater motivation, confidence, and control.
- Small sections help with memorization.
- Musicians avoid the common pitfall of the beginning of a piece being perfect while the rest is neglected.
- Middle sections will be practiced as much as the beginning and the end of the song.

Just like cutting a pizza into pieces makes it easier to eat, cutting music into sections makes it easier to learn.

You can avoid the common pitfall of the beginning of a song being perfect while the rest is neglected.

TOP TEN TIP #8: USE A METRONOME

Controlling Time Improves All Your Playing



This picture shows an old-fashioned, mechanical metronome. That doesn't mean you need to use a metronome like that.

There are digital metronomes, drum machines, recording software, and metronome apps for today's musician. These devices perform great tricks like clicking eighth notes, triplets, or sixteenth notes; setting up practice loops; and giving an accent on a downbeat in whatever time signature you're using.

No matter what metronome you choose, let's be clear:

You need to use a metronome when you practice!

METRONOMES ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH

Practicing happens when you're alone. If you practice without a metronome, you have no objective way of knowing if your tempo is even or not.

When you turn on a metronome, you suddenly have a perfect timekeeper. The metronome clicks will show you if you are speeding up or slowing down. You will no longer wonder if your tempos are even because the metronome does not lie.

***No one
should think
they can
count
evenly
without the
help of a
metronome.***

METRONOMES SAVE YOU FROM EMBARRASSMENT

If you believe your time is even and you're wrong, you will have a false sense of security. Here's what will happen:

- You will **think** you're ready to rehearse or perform with other musicians.
- When the other musicians at a rehearsal don't slow down for you, you'll have feelings of inadequacy, embarrassment, and confusion.

METRONOMES REVEAL THE TOUGH STUFF

There seems to be a breakdown in the space-time continuum whenever a musician encounters something that's hard to play. Time just seems to stretch and slow down—often without the musician even knowing this is happening!

Because many musicians are so focused on playing the right notes (pitches), they often neglect rhythms and tempo in order to play pitches accurately. Using a metronome while practicing reveals the areas in a song that are challenging to play at a regular, even tempo.

These areas will need more practice time if you want to fully master them. Without a metronome, you can easily fool yourself into thinking that you're ready to perform the entire song.

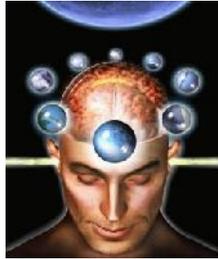
Using a metronome is an absolute must for musicians who want to see real gains in their playing.

Using a metronome reveals the areas in a song that need more practicing.



TOP TEN TIP #9: PRACTICE AWAY FROM YOUR INSTRUMENT

How to Visualize Success



This practice tip surprises many musicians. After all, how can you practice without your instrument?

Well, it turns out that visualizing playing your instrument can be nearly as helpful as actually playing it.

Visualizations are incredibly powerful tools. They are used by Olympic athletes, leading businesspeople, government diplomats, and other highly successful people. All musicians can benefit from this strategy.

VISUALIZATION #1: HEAR THE MUSIC IN YOUR MIND

Here's a fun visualization. All you need to do is mentally run through a song you're currently learning. Essentially, you're just listening to the music in your mind.

Is there a section you can't quite hear clearly? This is a clue that you should practice that section more!

You should easily be able to run through the music mentally and sing it from memory – every note, rhythm, dynamic, articulation, and phrase.

Visualizing playing your instrument can be nearly as helpful as actually playing it.

VISUALIZATION #2: SEE YOURSELF PLAYING SUCCESSFULLY

This visualization is a little more complicated. In addition to hearing the music in your mind, add these other elements:

- Feel yourself playing your instrument.
- Make sure you see yourself playing easily and flawlessly.
- Picture the performance venue.
- Be sure to feel calm, cool, and collected.
- Know that you have control of the music.

YOU CONTROL YOUR VISUALIZATIONS

Here's the good news: You have total control of your visualizations. After all, they're just your own thoughts.

Here's the bad news: If there are difficulties with a mental run-through, there will probably be difficulties when actually playing! Watch out for areas of discomfort during your visualizations. Then, return to your instrument and fix those areas in the music.

ALWAYS VISUALIZE SUCCESS

Make sure you visualize yourself being successful. Never visualize failure or mediocrity.

By taking control of your playing and feeling confident during your visualizations, you will be better prepared when you actually play your instrument. And, while visualizations can't replace regular practicing, they are an essential tool with many benefits.

You have total control of your visualizations. After all, they're just your own thoughts!

TOP TEN TIP #10: ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

How to Stay Motivated in the Practice Room



Staying positive and motivated will take you a long way toward making your practice sessions great. After all, you'll get a lot more done if you're feeling motivated.

There are specific techniques for creating motivation. Along with the visualizations in the previous Practice Tip, it's a good idea to work on the actual thoughts you have **while** practicing.

WHAT IT MEANS TO ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

When you accentuate the positive, you change two aspects of your practicing from negative to positive. These areas are where musicians commit creative suicide, and they have a tremendous effect on your ability to play a musical instrument:

- The language you use when you think.
- Self-criticism.

Let's take a look at each.

It's a good idea to work on the actual thoughts you have while practicing.

YOUR LANGUAGE AFFECTS THE OUTCOME OF PRACTICING

A big task for you is to change your negative language about your practicing into positive language.

Every time you frame your thoughts about practicing in a negative way, you weaken your ability to improve quickly. Positive language will keep you motivated and make you more successful.

Any negative thought or statement has a positive version that will serve you much better in the practice room.

ALL CRITICISM MUST WORK TOWARD THE PRACTICE GOALS – NEVER AGAINST YOU

Why is it that musicians criticize themselves when they can't play something accurately? Practicing is really about problem solving.

This process has absolutely nothing to do with the quality of the person who is practicing. So, musicians need to stop directing their criticism inward. Instead, look outward by focusing on the solution, not on the problem.

Don't allow yourself to say, "I can't play these notes. Something must be wrong with me." Find the actual issue and its solution. For instance, "I can play these notes when I get the C# in the middle of the phrase."

This type of critical thinking, which addresses real musical issues – and not your character or abilities – will make practicing more rewarding and successful.

Accentuating the Positive will get you closer to your musical goals. And, it will make you happier.

***Musicians
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CONCLUSION

Each of the Top Ten Practice Tips gives you a proven approach to improving your playing. If you start using any **one** of the Top Ten Practice Tips, you'll start improving faster than ever before.

But, the real secret is:

All these Top Ten Practice Tips work together. If you use them all, your progress will be incredible.

YOUR NEW PRACTICE PLAN

Imagine this scenario:

First, you come up with a plan:

- Write down today's goals before you play anything.
- Define specific sections of your music that need work today.

Then, during your practice session:

- Start with a Basics warmup.
- Focus on a specific goal by working on the Tough Stuff very slowly with your metronome on.
- Give yourself specific feedback and positive encouragement.

Finally, after the practice session:

- Write down what you did and how it felt.
- Later in the day, go over mentally (without your instrument) the same material and picture yourself playing successfully.

What would happen if you did this **every day** for the next two weeks? Two months? Two years?

***If you use
all of the
Top Ten
Practice
Tips
together,
you're
progress
will be
incredible.***

THE TOP TEN PRACTICE TIPS ARE EFFICIENT

Using these tips makes practicing much more efficient and effective than the usual approach musicians take to practicing.

You'll find yourself getting more done in less time and making more progress toward your musical goals.

The Top Ten Practice Tips can easily be integrated into what you're already doing in the practice room. They don't take any extra time. Actually, you'll save time by following these strategies.

THERE ARE MORE THAN TEN TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR PLAYING

The Top Ten Practice Tips put you on the path to becoming the musician you've always dreamed of being.

And, there are a lot more than these ten tips to transform your playing, keep you motivated, and help you prepare for any performance. I've identified 101 strategies you can use to learn any song you want to play. These strategies are included in my *Ten Minute Virtuoso* books.

[More information on the 101 strategies in *The Ten Minute Virtuoso* books.](#)



***The Top
Ten
Practice
Tips
actually
save you
time.***

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



David Motto is a musician, writer, and expert on the best way to learn musical instruments. He is in demand throughout the United States as a speaker and teacher. David is the coauthor of the best-selling book, [Musician's Practice Planner](#), and the author of three instructional books for the bass guitar. His latest five books are [The Ten Minute Virtuoso](#) series.

David is also the owner of Molto Music Publishing Company and writes the [blog on the Molto Music website](#). He has taught private lessons for over 25 years and was a member of the music faculty at San Francisco State University for 12 years. He has performed on over twenty commercially released albums and is a member of the Recording Academy—which gives him the privilege of voting for the Grammy Awards.

David has done countless hours of research on exactly what helps musicians excel. He has accumulated a huge body of information on what works and what doesn't work to master a musical instrument. This raw information has been turned into 101 specific strategies that save musicians hundreds of hours and transform their playing. These strategies are collected in his [Ten Minute Virtuoso](#) books.

[More information on these strategies and The Ten Minute Virtuoso books.](#)

[Contact David](#) with questions or comments on the Top Ten Practice Tips and to let him know how these strategies are working for you.

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