

Keeping Your Drum Practice FUN!

Here's some ways I keep from getting too stressed about practicing and have made my drumming experience so much more fun and effective. Now, I look forward to practicing!

1. I take the exercise so slow that I can play it right the first time. Why practice mistakes? Only then do I gradually increase the speed. If I make a mistake I start back at a slower speed. A good drummer can sound good at very slow speeds - not just blazing fast! Think musical!
2. Count and sing out loud and precisely. Exaggerate by making rests whisper and notes loud. This separation will help your mind coordinate your hands & feet more easily. The drummer must be the human clock - absolutely precise. If you can't count it or sing it, you likely can't play it!
3. I change the "voices" or sounds of the exercise by playing it on different drums, cymbals, pots, pans, phone books, buckets, percussion instruments, etc. Sometimes, I play it with multiple "voices" (one for each hand), or have one of the "voices" be played by my bass drum. Be creative. Use your imagination - that's half the fun. Keep notes in your journal what sounds good. Record yourself and listen back while driving in the car. You'll learn lots!
4. When practicing the drum set, I get 1 part going and then sing or count one other part. Only then do I try adding the 2nd part while still singing/counting it. Then I start singing/counting a 3rd part while keeping the other 2 parts going, before playing it. And finally, do the same for the 4th part. Sometimes, I try every combination of 2 parts first, gradually increasing their speed. Then I try every combination of 3 parts, gradually increasing their speed. Then I try putting all 4 together. Sometimes I just focus in on the tough group of notes, playing them all together very slowly and then gradually faster. Sometimes I just work on the notes in Count 1, then Count 2's notes, and then adding them together. Then I work on Count 3's notes and add it to Count 1 + Count 2. Then I work on Count 4's notes, and then add it all together. Be patient with yourself. Get mentally organized first - sneak up on your brain gradually - then systematically you will become coordinated. Don't go so fast that you end up practicing mistakes, because then you waste time trying to erase those memories from your brain.
5. Play your exercises to a metronome – there's so many good phone apps now! But ultimately play to music. That's when you really know your beats, fills, and solos, and will have the confidence to play with others. Plus it's so much more fun!
6. Have ALL your drum stuff together in 1 place, so you're not wasting practice time looking for it.
7. If at all possible, video tape yourself or watch yourself in a mirror - a picture says a thousand words! You can zero in on your technique (not to mention goofy faces) and become your own best teacher.
8. Listen to as many different types of music and drum videos as possible - variety is the spice of life. Don't get blown away from incredible drummers. If you can pick up just one thing, then great. Otherwise just view it as inspiration. Your head must be filled with music to get it into your heart, into your hands, and into your feet. Read drum magazines. Practice 15 minutes a day minimum. This is your music education!

9. I keep a practice pad in the TV room and a pair of sticks in the car. Why? Because we all have the same amount of time in the day. Successful people find ways to utilize the “scrap” or wasted time in their day. It adds up! I can get an incredible “chops” workout while watching my favorite TV show or playing on the dash or steering wheel while driving across town. And I love road trips - hours of reading new drum books & magazines, and chops workouts.
10. Set up a practice calendar and mark down 15 minutes each day. Get that 15 minutes in and mark it off. Log it on your assignment sheet for your lesson. The next week add just 1-2 more minutes. Before long you will be at 30 minutes and have a lifelong habit established (it only takes 21 days in a row). You can’t “cram” for drumming. It’s what you do every day that counts!
11. Make yourself a poster and write in your drumming goals and paste pictures from magazines that help you create a vision for what you want to do. Remember “a man perishes without a vision.” Look at it daily!