

# Practice and Audition Tips

Michael W. Burris 1/16/2017

I was thinking about what it's meant for me to be a student of drumming for the last 49 years. Sure, I've had my down times where I just didn't feel like practicing - and I didn't! I look back at those times with lots of regret, knowing that if I had just applied a few things (I unfortunately learned later), I would never have lost that valuable time. Time is all that we have, isn't it? Our experiences, memories, and progress really just go back to how we use our time. There's really no inherent difference between a beginner and a more seasoned player - one just figured out how to get a little bit of practice in on a daily basis. So here are some tips I've picked up along the way to conquer that "monster of practice." Please share with me ways that you have found to 1) get to your practice in, 2) improve the quality of your practice.

1. Have a list of realistic goals. You can't hit the target if you don't have one!
2. Take each item on your "Assignment and Practice Log" I've taught you this week and decide how much time you will give each on a daily basis. Feel the satisfaction of checking the box off each day that you meet your goal. Keep track of what you are having troubles with. Plan it out first, and then work your plan.
3. Maintain good posture and sit on a good drum throne - you'll end up playing longer and pain-free.
4. Be regular about your practice time. You'll progress faster if you spend 15 min. per day rather than every other day for a half-hour. Your muscles have a memory that has to be reinforced daily! Remember it's hard by the yard but cinch by the inch!
5. Take advantage of wasted time by practicing your stick control: on your practice pad while watching TV, on your steering wheel while driving, on your leg while riding as a passenger, while making those long phone calls, etc. Keep your sticks with you (in the car, book bag, TV room, etc.) - you'll be amazed how often you reach for them. It's the little things we do that add up!
6. If you practice more than 30 minutes, take short breaks between categories to maximize your concentration.
7. Practice very slowly & evenly, and then gradually build up speed. This allows for the brain and your limbs to learn from each other - mental organization before physical coordination. It also improves rhythmic accuracy. You'll actually end up playing faster & more precise sooner!
8. Count out loud to build that internal clock. It speeds up your learning as the brain starts to use it as a "fifth limb" in getting rhythms to fall into place while maintaining the pulse. If you can't count it and sing it, you probably can't play it. This you can do while riding in the car!
9. If at all possible, practice as often as you can to a loud metronome, click track, or drum machine. It's imperative that a drummer keep perfect time - the rest of the band depends on it. YouTube and phone apps have excellent metronomes and backing tracks for every style of music.

Here's something I picked up from the University of Arizona on playing a **good audition**:

- Listen to a recording of the piece several times, paying close attention to rhythm, tempo, dynamics, tone quality, and style. With the score, study and listen carefully to how the passage fits with the other instruments.
- Practice the excerpt - slowly at first - and be certain your rhythm is absolutely correct, your pitches are absolutely correct (for mallet excerpts), and your tempo, dynamics, tone, and style are appropriate for the excerpt.
- Listen to additional recordings from outstanding orchestras and conductors and note how the performance of the excerpt is similar and how they differ. Listen to it so many times that you KNOW the score.

- Continue practicing the excerpt for continuity and consistency. If possible, play the excerpt while you listen to the passage with the orchestra.