



Getting Better Results From Your Practising – 13 Tips

Many prospective students say that they have a lot of trouble with making practising fun while getting good results at the same time. I believe that if practising is not fun and you are not seeing positive results, then you need to sit down and see where you are going wrong.

Often students don't have a goal in mind of what they really want to achieve, or if they have, don't have a plan of attack to achieve it. Many of my students who have a goal and a plan can achieve whatever it is they want in a lot less time than they thought it would take. For example, a person with a three year goal to pass the audition to study music at university level can easily achieve it in two years or less with no extra practice time if they have a plan. Of course if you increase the practice investment it will take even less time to achieve that goal.

We all need to practice our favourite instrument on a regular basis or we would never get ahead or improve our skills. You don't need to do a lot of practice each day, but it is best if you can do whatever you can, even 15 minutes a day is better than nothing.

One of the biggest mistakes is in relying on luck, or the hit and miss method – which can only bring hit and miss results. As a teacher, I want to see great results, and fast. So in a nutshell here are 13 pointers to help make your practising a lot more fun – and be more efficient at the same time.

1. Motivation – you need a good long-term goal to strive towards. Only practice things that take you towards that goal and improve your general musicianship while proceeding with a single minded purpose – don't let yourself go off track. Have a daily goal too – something that you can easily achieve in one day, like improving the change between two chords, or moving the metronome up a couple of beats on a certain exercise or phrase. This will help keep your motivation up.

2. Distractions can be your worst enemy. Make sure that you turn your phone off, clear the workplace of any clutter and anything that is not relevant to your practising task. Tell others in the house you are not to be disturbed while practising. Any other distractions like the room is too hot or cold, chair is too high, or the like also need to be fixed before you begin.

3. What do you already know? Look at the whole piece you are practising and figure out what parts you already know and what is new. Concentrate more on the things you don't know rather than the things you do know, or the things that are difficult. Many players just practice what they are already good at, which is unproductive.

4. Break everything down into small manageable chunks. Overloading yourself is a common problem. Maybe just practice three or four notes at a time, or even two or three chords.

5. Motor, ear and finger problems – if you have trouble with playing, it is mainly because the brain, ear and fingers are not connected. The fingers don't know where to go because you have no system in place that is connected to the ear or brain.

6. Proceed slowly. Make sure that you begin any new exercise, song or whatever, very slowly. You should play so slowly that a mistake is impossible. Don't go back and correct it later, if you practice mistakes you will get good at playing mistakes. Only work the speed up after you have something going really well slowly.

7. Rest up with mini breaks. Once you have mastered something slowly, take a well-earned rest for a few minutes. Then get back to the task.

8. Attention span – only work in small time frames so that your attention is on the job at hand completely. Once your mind wanders and

you start thinking about the movie tonight or what you want for dinner, then you have gone for too long and it is time to take a break.

9. Group what you are learning. Once you have learnt a few small units of what you are doing then string a few of them together into larger chunks.

10. Always apply what you are learning immediately into your solos, back up parts, or whatever you are playing live. Also, can you find other areas where you can use what you have just learned? Maybe that country lick will work in a blues song, etc.

11. Measure the results – and there are many ways you can. Use a metronome to measure speed and timing. Use a recorder as a measure for how many mistakes are happening. Record some practice material today and play it back in a year's time to judge how much you have improved over the last year.

12. Avoid being overwhelmed. It's a common problem and the pitfalls of taking on too much new information in a small space of time are many. Paralysis can occur very quickly if overwhelm is not recognised quickly. Limit the amount of new things to learn until you can play whatever it is you are working on now well.

13. Practising and playing guitar are two different concepts. Practising is normally done on a conscious level where you are fully focused on improving skills. Playing guitar live is normally done at an unconscious level, so all your fingerings, technique, song forms, etc, have to be mastered and memorised so you can concentrate fully on your part in the song without thinking about technique etc.

It could take a while, maybe months, to implement all these ideas and get them working well for you. Once you have them working well, you might need to fine tune them so as they can work even better for you.


Practising and playing guitar really are two different concepts, but practising guitar should be just as much fun as playing with your friends jamming or in a band. If it isn't then you are doing something seriously wrong and might need the help of an experienced teacher.

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