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## Piano Practice Tips

Everybody is under intense time pressure these days, and musicians are no exception. In reply to the many requests about efficient piano practice, here are some experts tips that can help you make the most of your practice time.

1. **Get organized.** Practicing the piano efficiently is really about how to organize one to get the best results from the effort expended. It's essential to be very clear about our daily practice objectives. Many students find that writing a daily practice plan helps them to focus on their most important practice tasks and gives them a feeling of accomplishment as they complete each one. Teachers can write plans for beginning students so that they know exactly what to focus on at home.

2. **Focus on one task at a time.** Discipline yourself to complete each practice goal before moving on to the next. In the long run, you'll save enormous time by completing the day's work on your Mozart sonata before studying Debussy, rather than bouncing back and forth between them at whim. While you might not get that new Chopin etude note-perfect and up to tempo today, you can indeed 'finish' a given passage with musical polish at a slow tempo. Indeed, Sviatoslav Richter's way of building his enormous repertoire was to finish each line of music before moving on to the next.

3. **Only practice with full concentration!** In his autobiography, Daniel Barenboim cites this as a fundamental rule for practicing. If your practicing does not demand enormous reserves of concentration, then you're not practicing properly. Five minutes of concentrated practice is far more valuable than five hours of moving your fingers while your mind wanders. The mind must be active at all times, since it is first and foremost the mind that must play the piano.

4. **Always warm up first!** Properly warmed-up hands will allow you to accomplish the physical tasks demanded by difficult repertoire with greater ease and with fewer errors. I find that [scales](#) and arpeggios make for the best warm-up.

5. **Practice slowly.** It is a known psycho-physiological fact that the brain cannot absorb musical information in detail when playing fast. It is therefore essential to work slowly and carefully at all times. Never try to force speed; as such attempts are harmful both to the memory and to acquiring velocity.

6. **Don't allow yourself the 'luxury' of mistakes.** Mistakes cost far too much time to repair and only create uncertainty, whereas your practice ought to build security. Remember, your performance is a direct result of how you practice, and efficient piano practice means playing correctly. If you start making mistakes, it means either that you're going too fast to learn the music or that your brain is tired. If that's the case, it's best to take a break and do something—anything—else.

7. **Practice only short passages.** The brain absorbs musical information much more readily when it is not overwhelmed by quantity. Each day, practice just one passage, and practice it extremely carefully and thoroughly. This makes for far more efficient piano practice in the long run.

8. **Schedule your practice sessions.** As useful as this tip may be, it must be subsidiary to the rule of only practicing when the mind can best concentrate. For many people, this is first thing in the morning. Not only is the mind fresh, but you'll have a feeling of accomplishment having started your day by completing a major task, not to mention an emotionally rewarding one.

9. **Keep a practice journal.** A practice journal is a log of your practice sessions, including what you practice and for how long. It can be a notebook or even a spreadsheet. At the end of each practice session, write down exactly which pieces you studied and the number of minutes spent on each one. I've discovered that timing me forces the mind to focus, and the clock doesn't lie. At the end of the week, month and year you can discover how much time you spent on each piece, which can help you when planning your repertoire and performances in the future.

10. **Study away from the piano.** Some of the most efficient piano practice can be accomplished without a piano. Analyze the piece, listen mentally, hear each voice in your inner ear, sing each line, and discover thematic relations and harmonic subtleties. It is always amazing to me how many music students simply learn notes without ever really knowing the piece or its compositional strategy. Instead, be sure to make mental study and analysis an integral part of your piano practice.

While these efficient piano practice tips themselves take some practice, I'm certain that you'll experience gains in productivity from the first day you start using them. Happy practicing!



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