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Effective Practice

Five strategies for effective piano practice

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine five strategies to practice more effectively. Classical musicians, especially pianists, have to spend a lot of time practicing and it is important to make sure that the practice is effective. This paper has the following aims: to improve practicing skills and practice more effectively by developing two old strategies, memorization, and self-recording as well as, trying three new strategies, namely, the three-minute exercise, mental practice, and physical care. As a part of my research, I wrote a practice diary to document my use of these strategies so I could follow my own progress and difficulties. The results show that organized and scheduled practice sessions lead to a more effective practice.

Keywords: Effective practice, strategies, piano, memorization, self-recording, mental practice.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Definition of effective practice

Sustaining a successful career in music requires commitment and hard work. Musicians need to practice in order to be successful in playing a musical instrument. Musicians who are pursuing a career in music spend a lot of time practicing but it differs considerably the amount of time they practice. It is important for musicians to manage their time and organize their schedules.

Essential elements for quality and efficiency include planning ahead, keeping an organized diary, and being prepared. In the book *Preparing for Success* by Susan Hallam and Helena Gaunt (2012) practice is defined as the following:

"Practice is required to develop a range of musical skills: technical skills for playing the instrument; listening skills to monitor whether the music is being played appropriately, and skills concerned with reading and performing music... practice involves maintaining existing skills, learning new music and preparing for performance." (Hallam & Gaunt, 2012, pp. 47-48)

It is important to use your time as effectively as possible when practicing as over-practicing can lead to physical injury and a lack of efficiency of overall performance. Effective practice can take many forms depending on the task and the context. Furthermore, effective practice for each individual can depend on broad differences in their level of expertise. The skills they have gained will influence the way they practice over time. It is therefore important that the musician knows their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as different strategies so the efficiency in practicing can be further developed (Hallam & Gaunt, 2012, p. 51).

It is important to be aware of the conditions that are necessary for musicians to practice effectively. Hallam and Gaunt (2012, p. 59-60) summarize the conditions in the following way:

1. Optimizing concentration
2. Coping with distractions
3. Ensuring that there is somewhere suitable to practice, and that the working environment is conducive

4. Arranging for sufficient time to practice in relation to other commitments
5. Being aware of when it is necessary to take a break
6. Planning practice times
7. Ensuring that equipment is working properly

To maintain a successful practice, it is important to find strategies that work. This will help individuals learn faster when it comes to memorizing, sight-reading and improvising (Williamon, 2005, p. 23). Many musicians use different strategies and no single strategy is suitable and guaranteed for all musicians (Williamon, p. 123-129).

Effective practice requires the musician to set goals for each practice session, as well as long-term goals. Hallam and Gaunt (2012, p. 51-53) present the importance of setting goals in order to practice effectively. They suggest that it is vital for effective practice to set goals for each practice session, keep track of the progress towards the goals, set up long-term goals, change short time-goals and long-term goals if necessary to maintain a positive process (Hallam and Gaunt, 2012, p. 53).

By setting goals, not only does it enforce motivation, but it is also creating an environment for deeper focus when working with the instrument (Hallam and Gaunt, 2012, p. 42). If musicians do not establish some sort of goals or do not know how they want to practice, it can lead to inefficient practice. Performance psychologist Noa Kageyama (n.d.) points to three major problems with inefficient practice: first of all, that it is a waste of time, secondly, it is tedious and boring, and lastly, it makes musicians less confident. He mentions that the majority of musicians practice rather inefficiently, which leads to bad habits. According to Kageyama (n.d.), it will be difficult to correct these bad tendencies in the future if it is not done from the start. He recommends deliberate practice because it is systematic, it requires focused attention and clear goals.

Kageyama (n.d.) cites the violinist Leopold Auer. When asked how many hours a day musician should practice, Auer responded that if musicians' practice with their fingers, no amount is

enough, but if they practice with their mind, two hours is plenty. This comment inspired me to study and implement efficient practice strategies.

1.2. Background

I started playing the piano when I was eight years old. I remember my first piano teacher inspired and motivated me to practice and play the piano. When it came to practice, most of the time I considered it enjoyable rather than a chore. It was not until I began my bachelor studies at the Iceland University of the Arts that I started to think about how I practice, and how I schedule my practice time. At that time, I had already decided I wanted to be a musician.

I remember my first piano lesson where I played Schumann Fantasiestücke's "Des Abends" with sheet music. The first thing my former teacher did was to turn the sheet music upside down and ask me to play it again. With struggle, I managed to play the whole piece by ear. Then he asked me about my memorization. I told him that it takes me a long time to learn a piece. We had a long discussion about memorization and at the end of the lesson, he gave me instructions on how to memorize a piece. He said that I should memorize from the first note and start the memorization process the very first time reading a new piece. It was a slow and a difficult process to learn, but with each semester I felt a steady improvement. Shortly after, my former teacher introduced me to self-recording. I had not used it before, and he gave me short and simple instructions about it. Then I started to use self-recording as a way to help me learn to listen and learn about my playing, which I found very useful.

After three years of studying, I noticed a big difference, and the feedback from my teacher and colleagues concerning my progress was positive and motivational. Because of self-recording, my sounds improved, I learned new pieces faster and I felt more confident when performing and playing by heart. I have chosen music as my profession because I am passionate about it and I have the self-discipline to practice for several hours each day. My goal is to become a better musician by improving my practicing skills and practice more effectively.

1.3. Aim

The aim of this paper is to improve and provide useful skills to practice effectively. As mentioned earlier, no single strategy is guaranteed and suitable for all musicians. Therefore, the strategies that I will develop to elevate effective practice are memorization, self-recording, the three-minute exercise, mental practice and the importance of physical care.

As mentioned above, my experiences from my former bachelor studies have influenced me to focus more on the development of memorization and self-recording. In addition to this, I will try out three new strategies that I have not tried before.

I will be using material linked to the process of preparing for my master examination concert in spring 2020 from the Malmö Academy of Music. I will keep a diary where I make a note of the instances where I try both the old strategies, of memorization and self-recording, as well as the new strategies, of the three-minute exercise, mental practice and the importance of physical care. By using both the new and old strategies, I am hoping to speed up my working progress and I can use my paper as a guide when I become a teacher and provide my knowledge and help my students.

2. Sources

Previous studies on how to practice have been investigated from different angles, such as Gustafsson's (2010) research on how the practice process is perceived by students' views at ages seven to sixteen. The study focused on the student's use of self-regulated practice strategies and analysed the students' reflection on self-development as well as their playing. Gustafsson (2010) instructed the students to use a practice journal which followed by a series of interviews. Her results indicated that the students used conscious strategies and they were capable of describing their reflection, practice and learning goals.

In another study, Andreas Persson's (2008) research involved self-studying while practicing determining whether he was doing what he thought he was doing. He used a journal after each examined session, as well as video recordings. He concluded that he was aware of certain things

and unaware of other things, for example how he handles tempo when he practices. He often increased the tempo when he played, therefore, he had to decrease it. Many others have also discussed the benefits of using self-recording as the main tool. Matti Mietola's (2016) findings showed that using self-recording was a significant tool to build his interpretation of music.

A study conducted by Harris (2016) focused on music practice habits as well as trying to further understand current student practice and strategies. Several research questions were addressed, for example: What are students' reported practice habits and strategies? Similarly, Williamon (2004) sums up new reports on the efficacy of practice strategies and presents approaches for the tasks of memorizing, sight-reading and last but not least, the importance of physical well-being of the musicians to increase the effectiveness of the practice. After thorough research on these practice strategies, I want to investigate how one can practice more effectively. I plan my own practice schedule where I use the practicing strategies.

3. Process and results

3.1. The material

During 2019-2020 I worked with three pieces, Brahms' Rhapsody no. 1, Scriabin's Preludes op. 11 no.1-24 and Rachmaninoff Trio *élégiaque* no. 1 in g-minor. As mentioned above, I will be using this material to try out the strategies that I have chosen.

Johannes Brahms two Rhapsodies op. 79 in (1879) were his largest solo works for piano between 1871 and 1893. He had a student named Elisabeth von Stockhausen, who had studied with Chopin and Alkan. Brahms enjoyed her beauty, her confidence and her opinion of his music. Therefore, he dedicated his Rhapsodies to this woman. Rhapsody no.1 is in a sonata-rondo form with expressive and passionate middle sections ('Brahms', n.d.).

Alexander Scriabin wrote the 24 preludes op.11 in 1888 for each major and minor key. He was influenced by Liszt and Chopin; hence the preludes are in the romantic style (G. Henle Verlag, n.d.). The preludes highlight Scriabin's unique voice and each prelude is a small composition

and it can be played independently from the other preludes (Scriabin- Preludes, Piano Sheet Music, n.d.).

Sergei Rachmaninoff’s piano trio was written in 1892 in Moscow when Rachmaninoff was 19 years old. In the piano part, the composer shows his skill to cover a broad spectrum of sound colours. Most piano trios have three to four movements, but this trio has only one movement and is written in the classical sonata form. The theme is like a funeral march in the way that it is represented in the piano before it is passed on to the cello and violin (Thorsson, n.d.).

3.2. How to plan practice sessions

I used to practice without a clear picture of what I was actually practicing and what my goal was. As I started to think about how I want to plan and how I would organize my practice time I soon began to see a big impact.

I was inspired by the author Gerald Klickstein (2009) on how to plan my practice session. He motivated me to work efficiently when working on a large quantity of material. In his book, *The Musician's Way*, (Klickstein, 2009, p. 6-9) he mentions five practice zones, followed by a short definition in the table below (Table 1).

New material:	Developing material:	Performance material:	Technique:	Musicianship:
Divide into sections, slow tempo.	Increase tempo, memorize, refine interpretation.	Practice performing, maintain memory, renew and innovate.	Scales, arpeggios, diction.	Listening and studying.

Table 1. Five practice zones

I had a diary where I wrote down my schedule and my practicing sessions. When it came to the material, I would use Klickstein’s (2009) five practice zones as a guide. As table 2 shows, I

divided the five strategies that I wanted to use in the five practice zones. That way I had a clear focus on the five strategies that I want to develop. Firstly, I would put memorization, secondly, three-minute exercise, thirdly, self-recording, fourthly, mental practice and lastly physical care.

New material: Memorization	Developing material: Memorization	Performance material: Three-minute exercise and self-recording	Technique: Three-minute exercise	Musicianship: Mental practice and physical care
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Table 2. Five strategies divided into the five practice zones.

There is a reason why I chose this particular row. Ryan Levesque (n.d.) cites a psychologist named Jane Oakhill, in his article on Memory Improvement (n.d.). Jane has done a lot of experiments on how the time of day affects memory, she found out that there are two types of memory, namely declarative- and semantic memory. Declarative memory is greater in the morning, where the mind is more capable of remembering details, whereas semantic memory focuses on the new, based on the knowledge that we already know (Levesque, n.d.). Therefore, I can say that I am a morning person and it suits me better to learn memorization first, and then work later with other elements.

3.3. The five strategies of effective practice

3.3.1. Memorization

It is common in classical music for musicians to perform from memory, but it can be extremely demanding. The most common ways used when memorizing a piece are aural, visual and kinaesthetic. Aural memory enables musicians to hear the sound which can then be played by ear. Visual memory holds an image of the written page and other musicians' features, for example, a pianist may remember the look of the chords or positions of the hand and fingers. Kinaesthetic memory is a physical memory that enables musicians to play notes automatically.

For example, for pianists, it involves the movement and position from note to note followed by the sense of key resistance (Rink, 2002, p. 118-119; Hallam & Gaunt, 2012, p. 58).

As a classical pianist, I prefer to perform from memory because I feel more comfortable in expressing the music, I have greater freedom in performance, and I can connect more easily with the audience. The length of time required for memorizing music depends on the length and complexity of the music. It is important to use a mixture of the three principal ways mentioned above. As I start with new material, I begin my practice session with memorization. I analyse the music to better understand it, by listening to recordings of the piece I know how it sounds and have it in my mind, i.e. aural memory. Subsequently, I organize the sheet music and practice it in small sections, and lastly, I increase the size of the section as I become more familiar with the music. Here is an example of Rhapsody op. 79 no.1 by Brahms.



Figure 1. First four bars of rhapsody op. 79 no.1 by Brahms.

I would play the aforementioned piece at a slow tempo and practice hands separately. Firstly, I study the right hand and then the left hand. Later, when I feel comfortable in my memory, I play with both hands at the same time. I only work with small sections that I have already divided.

When it comes to visual memory, I can state that I often know where I am on the page but sometimes, I experience memory lapses. In order to lower the chances of memory lapses, I read the scores and focus on what I am reading.



Figure 2. Rhapsody op. 79 no. 1 by Brahms.

I use a lot of kinaesthetic memory, by practicing a bar, phrase or page until I can play it automatically. I memorize by practicing with my hands separately as well as together. I do this to ensure that I will be as secure as possible when it comes to performing it for the audience. By using kinaesthetic memory not only do I gain confidence but freeing my mind so I can monitor my performance, express myself as I want to without letting stress interfere and also communicate with my audience (Williamon, 2004, p.129).

Subsequently, I would practice memorization with the developing material. My aim would be to clarify interpretation and increase the tempo. However, I would still work within small sections and then add to it.

1. The first step is to play it slowly with closed eyes. That way I can see how much I remember and then work on the memory.
2. Secondly, I would increase the tempo and play it faster.
3. Lastly, I would play with the dynamics and think about the interpretation.

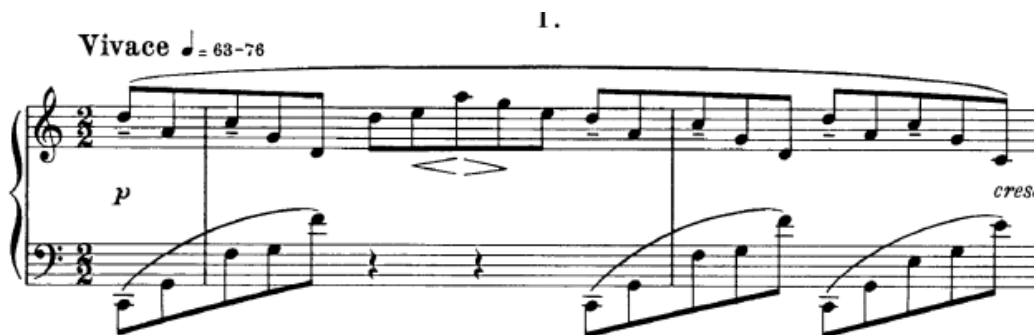


Figure 3. Opening of prelude no. 1 by Scriabin.

3.3.2. Three-minute exercise

A three-minute exercise is where musicians can practice specific intervals in three minutes. Musicians can use a small alarm clock or their phone to time each repetition. The goal with the three-minute exercise is to focus specifically on a few bars at a time with higher concentration. In those three minutes, musicians can practice passages in different rhythms, dynamics, and play each hand separately. This leads to a more effective and goal-oriented practice (Carter, 2013). I use the three-minute exercise on performance material and when I am working with technique in the pieces. Therefore, it is important to use the three-minute exercise on a material where musicians have already studied the score and are not reading the notes for the first time.

The picture below is an example of how I used the three-minute exercise on my chamber piece, Rachmaninoff Trio *élégiaque*. I would divide the piece into small sections and write down how many bars I play during the three minutes, as shown below in table 3.

Material to practice	Length
A (4-8)	3 minutes
B (8-12)	3 minutes
C (12-16)	3 minutes

Table 3. Three- minute exercise.

In those three minutes, I would play using different dynamics, rhythms, legato, staccato, different tempos, etc. Next, I would choose a bar or multiple bars that I work on specifically with the same technique. I divided the technique into smaller parts and focused on one to two bars at the time. I would sometimes do another three minutes in the same bars if I needed more time to work.

A (70-71)	3 minutes
B (72-73)	3 minutes

C (74-75)	3 minutes
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Table 4. Three-minute exercise by focusing on smaller parts.

3.3.3. Self-recording

Self-listening has an important role to musicians and is vital to all musical activity and excellence. By listening, musicians have a greater musical understanding (Hallam & Gaunt, 2012, p. 132-133). Self-recording enables musicians to hear how they sound and pinpoint flaws that musicians might be missing. Musicians can then rework any passage that does not sound good (Klickstein, 2009, p. 56 and p. 126). Gerald Klickstein (2009, p. 16-17) discusses the five benefits of self-recording in his book, *The Musician's Way* can be shown below in table 6.

1. Sharpens musicianship:	Listen with an analytical ear
2. Prevents distorted perception:	Evaluate and correct without being reliant on a teacher
3. Heightens practice efficiency:	It boosts the musician's accuracy from the start
4. Enhance lessons:	Musicians can review their lessons and take notes, so the advice is not forgotten
5. Promotes objectivity:	Musicians appraise work objectively

Table 6. Five benefits of self-recording.

The self-recording device that I used was my iPhone 7, and the app called Voice Memos. Voice Memos has a built-in microphone to record. In my opinion, it was very convenient and easy to work with. Having it on your mobile device makes it accessible and portable. The sound quality is good, I get an accurate representation of the sound as well as a better understanding of it. It can differentiate what type of phone device is used when self-recording is applied, hence, in some cases, the phone quality does not meet the ideal requirements needed. Professional devices are preferable where it is easier to hear dynamics clearer than on the phone.

I used self-recording in my practice session, chamber rehearsals and lessons as well as individual and group lessons. I would use self-recording on performance material, pieces that I could play by heart and feel comfortable playing and expressing. I used self-recording in two different ways:

1. Recording sections of a piece. Here I wanted to listen to my own interpretation and see if it met my standards. Below is an example of prelude no. 4. I recorded myself playing these four bars.



Figure 4. Prelude op. 11 no. 4 by Scriabin.

I would ask myself questions after I listened to the recording. How was the dynamic? Did I play as the composer wrote it? How should it sound? After analysing and answering these questions I, therefore, had a clear image of how I wanted to play it. Then I would play it again, and I would yet again ask myself the same question. That way I slowly got closer to my goal.

2. Recording the whole piece as I was performing it for an audience or a teacher. My goal is to get an overall picture of how the piece sounds and how I can make it sound better.

I would use the same example as mentioned before but now I would play the whole piece. In accordance with Klickstein's theory (2009), I would ask the following questions: "Is each

passage and phrase doing its part to dramatize the musical landscape? Does your performance embody the essentials of artistic interpretation?" (p. 72). Additionally, I would ask: Did it sound the way I wanted it to sound and the way the composer wrote it? What would I like to change and what did I like? Often after listening to the first recording, the answer would most often be negative. As I analysed it and got a clearer image, each recording started to sound better, and I got closer to my goal.

I would often listen to various professional recordings to hear different interpretations and they would inspire me in different ways of playing the piece. The deeper I get into a piece the more details I notice, and my understanding improves (Klickstein, 2009, p. 72).

3.3.4. Mental practice

Mental practice is the process of rehearsing music mentally without actually playing it. It stimulates brain activity the same way as actual physical practice and is therefore effective. Mental practice enables one to enhance, clarify and organize ideas for interpretation as well as to understand and make difficult rhythmic or tonal passages easier. It can also enhance memorization of music for performances (Hallam & Gaunt, 2012, p. 54). Therefore, mental practice is a fundamental tool for memorizing, learning and performing music (Klickstein, 2009, p. 34).

I use mental practice on performance material. It strengthens my musicianship as mentioned above. I do this often at the end of my practice session. I mentally practice an entire piece from start to finish as well as only selected sections from a piece. I concentrate better if I have my eyes closed and can visualize the score in front of me. I can further hear how it should sound like when I play. In my research I used two different kinds of mental practice:

a) One is where I am sitting in front of the piano. I put my hands on the piano but do not physically play it.

b) The second one is where I am nowhere near my piano. I do it in a relaxed environment, such as at home, the library or an empty room in the school. It takes around five till fifteen minutes to do the exercise depending on what I am doing.

I had to prepare for a lunch concert, and I used the mental practice to help me feel more confident before the performance. I played Brahms Rhapsody op. 79 no.1 and did the two aforementioned methods. I started by sitting in front of the piano, closing my eyes and visualizing the music in front of me while going through the piece in a slow tempo. I found it hard especially in the beginning, but it got easier every time I did it. Later I tried again but this time I had my hands on the piano and visualized the score. This one went faster and better because I could feel the notes and lasted around 15 minutes. Later I tried the other method at home in front of my table. That was extremely hard because I was not in my comfort zone. I only did this one time at home with this certain piece. It lasted around ten minutes.

3.3.5. Physical care and breaks in between practice sessions

The importance of health and well-being is essential to maintaining your skill level as well as becoming a more talented musician (Williamon, 2004, p. 163). To be a great performer, musicians need to be in good physical shape, eat nourishing food and get good sleep. Hallam and Gaunt (2012, p. 147) define why well-being and health are important for musicians.

“The interrelationship between physical and psychological dimensions is particularly important in any practical music-making that requires fine-tuned motor control. There are profound interconnections between posture, quality of movement, breathing, concentration, listening and interpersonal awareness, creativity, presence in performance, and responding to internal and external feedback”

With physical fitness, musicians improve both concentration and quickness of mind. They manage stress and increase willpower. There are numerous strategies available for musicians that can help to maintain their best well-being.

a) It is important to stay hydrated and drink a lot of water, avoid caffeine and alcohol.

b) Consume healthy food that boosts energy levels and avoid heavy meals, especially food that is rich in carbohydrates because it tends to slow down the body (Hallam & Gaunt, 2012, p. 147-150; p. 170).

Furthermore, sleep is very important for me and I make sure that I on average get at least seven to eight hours of sleep. I have noticed that on days where I do not get as much sleep, I become slower at memorizing the piece in the morning and I am not as focused as I know I can be. Overall, I do not get a good practice session from it. I drink a lot of water in between my practice sessions which leads me to be more focused. It is also good to stand up from the piano regularly and move your body. When it comes to physical exercise, I enjoy walking. I often take walks in between practice sessions.

Breaks are important to musicians because they help prevent injuries and recharge your energy. There are three types of breaks: active, diverting and restorative breaks. An active break is when you are not playing but you are engaged with the music. For example, when a pianist is mentally reviewing a page of the music. Diverting breaks are when you take your mind off what you are doing and go out of the practice room. These breaks can include going for a walk, having coffee or snacks. Such breaks can often act as rewards after you have completed your tasks. Restorative breaks are ideal to rest or do gentle movements. There are six restorative poses and movements: arm circles, arms overhead, arms behind back, forward bend, constructive rest and total rest. Musicians can decide how many they can do in between practice sessions (Klickstein, 2009, p. 75-76).

I take an active break at the beginning of my practice and it lasts from two to four minutes. I would sing a phrase of a line of a piece and think how it should sound and I would look at the score and sing it. For example, I would sing the melody on the right and think about how I would sing it and that's how I would play it.



Figure 5. Prelude op. 11 no. 8 by Scriabin.

Diverting breaks are important to me because it takes me outside of my practice room and I rest from the instrument. I take these breaks and schedule them accordingly, I have a one-hour lunch and then 10-30 minutes coffee break in the afternoon. I meet my friends and it takes my mind off my practice session. I attempt to be mindful while I take these breaks and do not stay too long. These breaks are very consistent, and I always take them around 12 o'clock until 13, and then another break from 15 till 15:30 or 16.

Restorative breaks are short breaks in between practice sessions within the practice rooms. I do not take them all at once and not in the same order as Klickstein (2009) advises in his book. It depends on how I feel and what my body and mind need.

a) Arm circle:



Figure 6. Arm circle (Klickstein, 2009, p.77).

I do this break for two minutes. I would stand with my feet apart and take a deep breath while I raise one arm over my head and then exhale as my arm descends. While my arm rises, I spread my fingers.

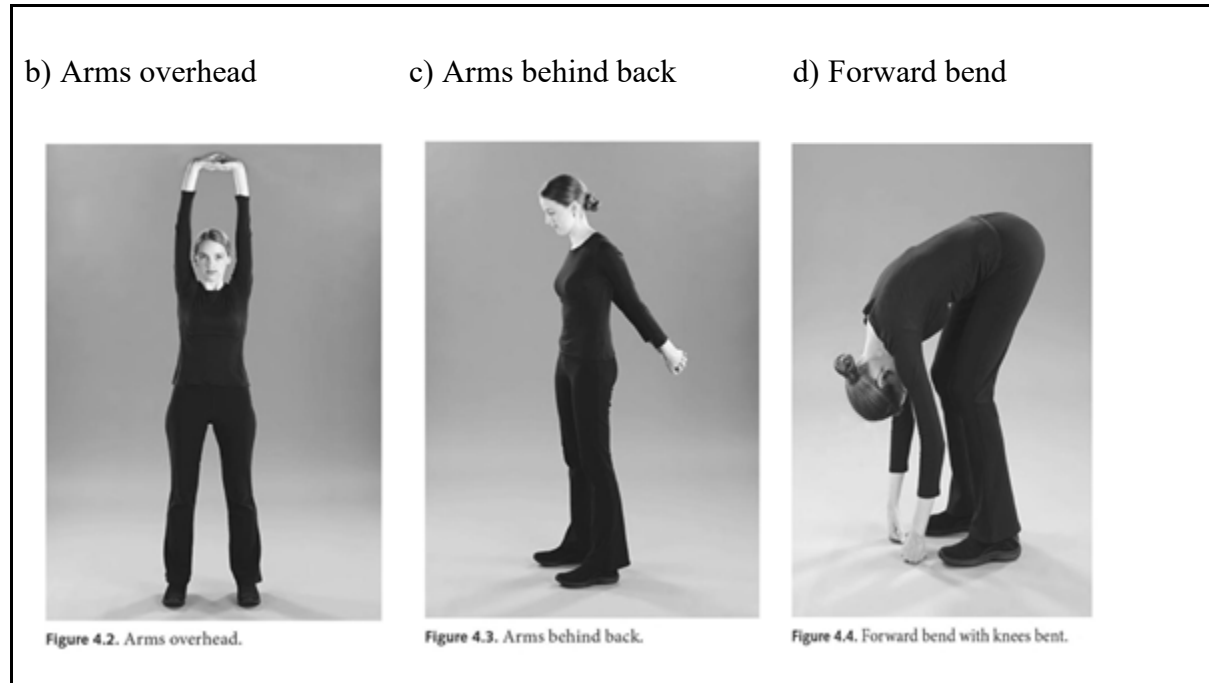


Figure 7 (Klickstein, 2009, p.78-80).

I do this for three minutes. I would stand with my feet wide apart and gently hold my arms above my head.

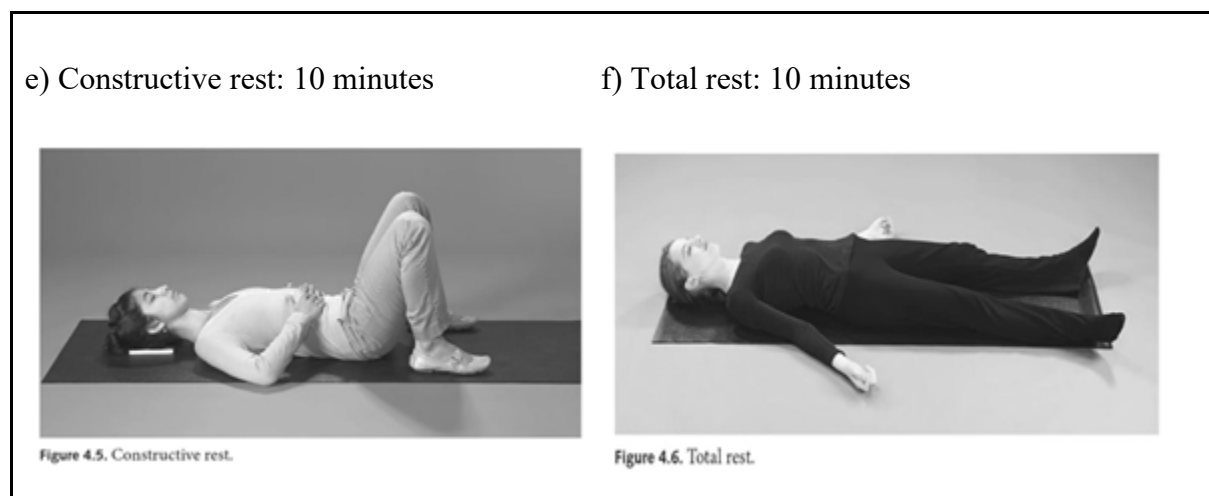


Figure 8 (Klickstein, 2009, p.81).

I have noticed that taking effective breaks leads to success. I feel recharged and fresh in my mind, rather than spending my break looking at my phone where my brain is more likely to get tired of the screen time.

4. Discussion and conclusion

This paper described how to improve and provide useful skills to practice effectively. In order to give an in-depth understanding, previous literature of effective practice was applied in the context of a specific repertoire. Hence, the research question: I want to improve my practicing skills and practice more effectively by developing two old strategies and by trying three new strategies. With the research question in mind, the framework consisted of five strategies: memorization, three-minute exercise, self-recording, mental practice, and physical care.

Classical pianists have to perform from memory; therefore, memorization is important. My findings show that by developing memorization I feel more secure and succeed better when performing without the scores. However, it was hard to practice memorization on certain days because of, for example, lack of sleep or stress that has a negative impact on memorization. I was aware when these factors occurred, therefore I would reschedule my goal for memorization that day. I would divide the sections that I had already planned to practice into an even smaller section. That worked well for me because I accepted the fact that I could not memorize as much as I wanted to, instead I settled for less and achieved a part of my goal.

The study of the three-minute exercise by Christine Carter (2013), is proposed to have an impact on effective practice and to be goal-oriented. This strategy influenced a lot of my practice skills. Practicing specific intervals in three minutes did a lot for me because I was more focused on small parts in those three minutes. Rather than before where I would play the whole piece through without focus and not know exactly what I was doing while I played. The problem of the three-minute exercise is that it has not yet been researched to a greater extent on musicians. Therefore, this strategy cannot be generalized for all types of instruments. Future research can be done on this strategy for different instruments. Problems can occur such as chopping up parts too

much or dwelling longer on the divided parts. This strategy worked well for me and it led to success. By using the three-minute exercise I challenged myself to focus. The reason why it worked well was that I organized the piece and divided it into small sections where I focused on it for three minutes. I achieved faster and more precise results.

As proposed by Hallam and Gaunt (2012), musicians have a greater musical understanding by listening. By listening to the recordings of myself, I challenged myself to be my own teacher and listen with a critical ear. When I listened to the recordings of me playing, I could always hear what I did well and what I could do better. For example, I heard that I could phrase better and listen more carefully where the melody leads, and I would get a clearer image of how I wanted the piece to sound. The downside of self-recording is that the phone quality is not as good as other professional devices, you cannot hear the dynamics clearly and you can be focused on only listening to the negative sides. However, self-recording has become an essential practice strategy in my daily practice routine, it gives me great insight into what I do well, but also gives me the opportunity to reflect on how to improve.

Klickstein (2009), stated that mental practice is a fundamental tool for memorizing, learning and performing music. This strategy challenged my memorization and my focus. I found this strategy most challenging out of all of them because it took a lot of patience to practice without actually playing the piano. I found it hard to concentrate while not playing, and only focused on picturing the score in front of me and imagining what my hands were playing. I had to concentrate, note by note, phrase by phrase, in my head and imagine the sound. Even though this strategy is challenging, it is important in my practice routine because I was more confident when I performed the pieces without the score, I could visualize the score in front of me.

Finally, according to Williamon (2004), physical care is vital to maintain in order to become a better musician. Musicians, like all people, have to manage their sleep and strive for a healthy lifestyle. I managed to stay hydrated in between my practice sessions and take short breaks. Breaks are important between your practice sessions to prevent injuries and refresh the mind as it helps to recharge musicians' energy. Practicing the three types of breaks, active, diverting and restorative, led to a more effective practice overall (Klickstein, 2009). This had a positive effect

on me personally, as I could organize my breaks and change between the three types of breaks over the day. Whereas before I only applied the diverting break, where I got my mind off the actual practice. Now, I have organized my breaks and am conscious of what I am doing when I take them, therefore it has improved my practice.

Regarding the practice schedule, the biggest challenge was to follow the schedule every day. For the most part of the practice sessions, I could follow the schedule and practice with the goal I set for each day. However, some days I did not get as much done as I expected to achieve, and the reasons varied. Some days were long, with a lot of rehearsals and classes, therefore I had not much time to practice all the strategies. For example, if I could not do all the strategies in one day, I focused on what was most important. On those days I would practice memorization and the three-minute exercise and then skip the mental practice.

To conclude, the contribution of this study was to present findings in music psychology on effective practice and evaluate them through personal testimony. Results from this study revealed that finding your own strategies and maintaining them led to positive results. This study has also greatly inspired me as a piano teacher. In the future, I will look into how to use these strategies and possibly adapt them for children. I have gained a wider knowledge of how practicing an instrument can become more efficient and what strategies I use to enhance results and practice effectively.

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