

**Mastering the Music**  
*Practice Hacks for Success in Performance*  
Dr. Adam Davis

*Practice does not make Perfect... Practice makes Permanent.  
Only Perfect Practice makes Perfect!*

**What does good practice involve?**

1. A Plan
2. Mental and Physical Focus
3. Critical Assessment
4. Problem Solving

**Five Steps to a Successful Performance**

**1. Research**

- Listen/Watch Recordings
- Look up words (titles, tempo markings, musical terms, etc.)
- Brief history of the piece and the composer
- Understand the form of the piece

**2. Learn/Memorize**

- Map out the hardest and simplest parts of the piece
- Learn what you can away from the instrument
  - Sticking
  - Roll Skeletons

*Practice Hacks for the Learning Phase*

Problem: Amount of Notes

Solution:

- Block Chords

Problem: Can't get past the first page

Solutions:

- Learn the music backwards
- Learn from the hardest music first

Problem: Memorization

Solutions:

- Subtractive Looping
- Mental Practice

### 3. Polish – Record – Polish

- Mental vs. Physical Problems
- Use your time wisely
- Keep a practice journal
- Work on the things that you can't play yet
- Record yourself and listen back

#### *Practice Hacks for the Polishing Phase*

Problem: Timing/Rhythm

Solutions:

- Rhythmic Permutations
- Remove notes in a permutation
- Time Guru/Metronomics Apps

Problem: Accuracy/Technique

Solutions:

- Slow Practice
- OHAT – One Hand At a Time
- OHOP – One Hand On a Pad
- Soft mallet/Hard mallet
- Work backwards from the problem
  - Add one note each rep
- Reverse the problem
  - If you are aiming for F and keep hitting E, aim for G

Problem: Tempo

Solutions:

- 3 strikes you're out, 4 hits you score
- Alter the Rhythm
  - Swing/Anti-Swing
  - Triplets into 16ths
  - 16ths into Sextuplets

### 4. Mock Performance

- A Test run
- Listen to your peers and seriously consider their criticism

### 5. Performance

- Forget it all and focus on the music
- Good preparation is the best way to avoid nerves

*The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step*

- Lao Tzu

Additional Resources on Practice:

Colin Hill – The 10,000-Hour Threshold: Interviews with Successful Percussionists  
(Dissertation)

The Bulletproof Musician  
(Website and Blog)

David Kish – Practicing with Purpose  
(Book)