

## CONCEPTS AND TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

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- I. Accountability
  - A. Accept responsibility to develop your organ skills and talents.
    1. Your opportunity to learn to play the organ and to serve.
    2. Plan what is needed to learn and develop these skills in a logical and methodical way.
    3. Be consistent in your effort. (Some people wish for their goals, while others work for them.)
  - B. Setting of goals (short-range, intermediate, long-range).
- II. The Practice Period
  - A. Daniel L. Kohut divides the practice period into four types of practice:
    1. Warm-up time: a time for preparing the muscles and the brain for the needs of the practice period.
    2. Building time: a time for the development of performance technique.
    3. Interpreting time: a time for the development of the expressive elements of a musical composition.
    4. Performing time: a time for performing the entire piece without stopping.
  - B. Concentration
    1. Through variety in the music
    2. Through variety in practice methods
    3. Through 25-30 minute practice periods, followed by breaks of five minutes.
    4. Through mental practice
    5. Through analysis of the music
- III. Warm-up Time. Preparing Physically and Mentally to Practice.
  - A. Warm-up Exercises – Relaxing and Stretching
    1. Deep breathing
    2. Stretching exercises from the National AGO Class for arms, hands, and upper body.
    3. Exercises from a health professional for your back and a regular exercise program.
    4. Exercises for your legs and feet.
    5. Relaxation
  - B. Posture at the Organ
    1. Shoulders, back, arms, hands
    2. Relaxation and posture
  - C. Getting ready to practice
    1. Set a time of day for regular practice.
    2. Piano practice is important to good organ playing. (It is suggested that you spend 15% of your time at the piano.)
    3. Always have a plan for your practice period.
    4. Have your notes from your last lesson and from previous practices.
  - D. Adjust the bench to your best height; position the bench at the best distance from the manuals.
  - E. Reducing tension in your body
    1. Sit quietly and become still and relaxed.
    2. Inhale slowly and deeply, then exhale. Feel the tension leaving.
    3. Quiet your mind by repeating a word or thought such as "relax, relax. . ."
    4. Relax each muscle group, one at a time.
- IV. Preparing the music before physical practice
  - A. Acquire a concept of the work
    1. Listen to a recording or a performance of the work
    2. Play through one of two times in entirety.
  - B. Analyze the work
    1. Form and structure
    2. Difficulties
  - C. Planning
    1. Plan and write in fingering and pedaling
    2. Plan how to execute manual changes.
    3. Plan stop changes and mechanical assists
    4. Plan use of expression pedals
  - D. Plan your physical practice
    1. Time for your priorities
    2. Other technical studies, music, and hymns

V. Organizing the Practice Period.

- A. What are my priorities?
  - 1. Hymns for the Sunday service, preludes, postludes, choir accompaniment
  - 2. Organ technique—building your organ skills
  - 3. Practicing your assigned lesson material for your next organ lesson
- B. New music and hymns
- C. Music in progress
- D. Reviewing music previously learned
- E. Choose variety in the music you are learning

VI. Building Time: a time for development of performance (organ) technique

- A. Begin slowly – do not start out with exercises in speed or dexterity.
- B. Always stretch and warm-up before playing. Be sure to stretch and warm-up gently so as to not damage the muscles.
- C. Warm-up hands and arms before playing. Hands and fingers must be physically warm to touch before playing.
- D. Take frequent breaks at regular intervals during practice. Breaks may be 5 to 10 minutes in length.
- E. Before learning a piece, notice the clef signs, meter, key, tempo, form, character of the piece, or any specific problems.
- F. Before learning a piece, write in fingering and pedaling. Be thorough so that it is clear, but do not mark every note. Mark beginnings of scale passages, finger crossings, substitutions, glissandos, or other difficult passages.
- G. Clarity is important, so use clear quick-speaking stops such as 8' and 4' principals.
- H. "Slow practice is the golden key that unlocks the door to success. Play slowly enough to play each note accurately.
- I. Use the seven-step method. Practice each hand alone, the feet alone, and then together.
- J. Practice each measure alone, repeating until it is comfortable and then the next measure, until all measures in the section can be played accurately.
- K. Counting – Vary your approach to counting – create interest and attention to reinforce the pulse and strengthen the rhythm.
- L. Build your organ technique, your organ skills, so you can perform hymns and organ literature with ease. Manual technique, pedal technique, and coordination of hands and feet should be systematically developed and constantly reinforced so you can execute the church service with ease.
- M. Make a plan for your practice periods. Think about long-range goals, intermediate goals, and daily goals. Some important basic goals are accuracy of notes and rhythm, accurate attack and release, evenness of notes, steady tempo, phrasing, articulation, coordination of manual changes, good posture, relaxed and controlled playing position, continuity in performance, manual and pedal technique.

VII. Making your practice more effective through variety and concentration

- A. Rhythms
- B. Shifted accents
- C. Silent practice
- D. Slow practice
- E. Repeating notes
- F. Spoken rhythms
- G. Mental practice
- H. Varied touches
- I. Seven-step method
- J. Blocking of intervals and chords
- K. Singing
- L. Conducting
- M. Registration
- N. Alternate physical and mental practice
- O. Small unit practice
- P. Touch but do not play (play on surface of the key)
- Q. Metronome
- R. Power of example practice (for example: the RH plays the pedal passage, then the feet play it).
- S. Record yourself and listen
- T. Dance along and conduct along with it
- U. Play for others
- V. Stop, Think, Place routine
- W. Freeze and Set Practice
- X. Repetition
- Y. Using a drill strip
- Z. Visualizing
- AA. Analysis
- BB. Silent Score Study
- CC. Linking

*Bibliography:*

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