

Five tips for effective organ practice

Virtual Mini Super Saturday Organ Workshop
Utah Valley Chapter AGO
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Things we already know

- Playing through is not practicing (but it will make what we play permanent)
- In a performance, you will play like you practiced, only worse
- To improve, we need to identify what we are doing wrong, and stop doing those things
- To improve, we need to identify what we could do better, and start doing those things

Things we already know (and know we should do)

- Break it up and slow it down
- Work on weaknesses
 - Specific spots in a piece of music
 - Etudes for specific skills
- Do not repeat mistakes
- Practice all aspects of performance
- Set goals

Tip #1: Get feedback

Personal teacher:

- Will give you personal instruction
- Will provide accountability
- Will provide practice performance
- Will teach you to teach yourself

Practice partner or practice group: weekly/monthly
time to listen to each other

Tip #1: Get feedback

Ask a musician (at church) to give you feedback

- Ask how well you played on a scale of 1 to 10
- Then ask how you could get to a 10

Record yourself

- You will be surprised at the (other) mistakes you hear

Tip #2: Practice performances

Performing is difficult; it is a skill to be learned

Create performing experiences (see #1)

Record yourself **and post it**

- Knowing you will post it will make it like a performance

Tip #3: Make it easy

Be nice to yourself:

- Write in fingerings and pedal marks
- If you make the same mistake twice, write something in to help you avoid it

Be nice to your future self:

- Write in your registrations
- Write in the places that will require attention if played again

Tip #4: Use a metronome

Keeps you honest, prevents bad tendencies:

- Play fast in easy spots, slow in hard spots
- Rush in the difficult spots

See progress:

- After breaking up and slowing down, speed up gradually

Tip #5: Distribute practice

Cramming is ineffective: spread out your practicing
What can you do off the organ bench?

- Study music/text
- Practice the manual parts on the piano (and write in fingering)
- Write in the pedal marks
- Listen to others play

What will you change?

Look at your current practice routine:

1. Get feedback
2. Practice performances
3. Make it easy
4. Use a metronome
5. Distribute practice

Annotated References

Jerry Davidson. 2021. Making Your Own Editions. *The American Organist*. March: 34-39.

[Helpful suggestions on how to mark up your music.]

W. Timothy Gallwey. 1974. *The Inner Game of Tennis*. Random House.

[Separating your practicing self from your performing self. Better than *The Inner Game of Music*.]

Gregory Hand. 2016. Writing It All In. *The American Organist*. March: 56-58.

[Writing in the music encourages thoughtful musical decisions, builds muscle memory, makes it easier to relearn pieces and identify problems]

Harald Jørgensen. 2004. Strategies for Individual Practice. In Aaron Williamon (ed.), pp. 85-104. *Musical Excellence: Strategies and Techniques to Enhance Performance*. Oxford University Press.

[Practicing as self-teaching]

Annotated References

Gerald Klickstein. 2009. *The Musician's Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, and Wellness*. Oxford.

[Emphasizes "artful" and "deep" practice, similar to "deliberate" practice; more emphasis on performance. Especially for full-time musicians.]

Barbara Kraus. 2012. *Practising the Organ: The Shortest Connection Between the Hands and the Feet is the Ear*. MKH Medien Kontor Hamburg.

[Practical exercises to solve common technical problems on the organ, translated from the German 5th ed. (2009)]

Shane Parrish. 2021. The Ultimate Deliberate Practice Guide: How to Be the Best. *Farnam Street*. At <https://fs.blog/2021/04/deliberate-practice-guide/>.

[If you wish to get better at anything, you should use deliberate practice. But deliberate practice is difficult. This guide brings together research on deliberate practice. If you want to study something more in depth, it provides the links to Ericsson (*Peak*) and Colvin (*Talent is Overrated*) and others.]

Paul Salmon. 1991. A Primer on Performance Anxiety for Organists, Part I. *The American Organist*. May: 55-59.

[Why organists are especially vulnerable to anxiety, and how to address it. Part II is in January 1992.]