

Plan Your Work and Work Your Plan

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One cold, overcast February day, a young horn student with professional aspirations, from outside the big city, is standing on a Manhattan street corner, case in hand, completely lost and intimidated by the enormity of New York City. As the young hornist looks around in awe at skyscrapers and the sea of racing humanity, this student ventures to ask someone for directions. "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?" the student asks. Without blinking an eye, the native New Yorker responds, "Practice kid, practice!"

Yes, "Practice kid [of any age], practice!" is the punch line to this variation on a familiar proverbial tale. One does not learn to play the horn by reading a book, even the best of books, or merely dreaming about playing the horn. All who love music and have accepted the challenge of studying this beautiful instrument realize that successful practice is the key that unlocks the door to our musical opportunities. Yet, one of the skills taught and studied least of all is how to make the most efficient use of those hours when one is alone in a practice room. How does one make the most of one's available practice time? I propose that all hornists who succeed in realizing the role they wish horn playing to have in their lives, professional or recreational, have two traits in common: productive learning styles and efficient time management skills. These two topics will form the basis of all ideas and suggestions that follow.

Before the horn is taken from its case, numerous goals must be clearly defined. Goals must be established for each component of every practice session, for each day, for each week, as well as for the short and long terms. These goals should be challenging and realistic, understanding that the journey to become an individual's ideal horn player is a long journey made up of many small steps. At times, creating incentives to reach a specific goal can be helpful. For example, a player who wants to develop a great double tongue could set a recital date six months into the future to perform second horn in Beethoven's Sextet, Op. 81b. Clearly defined goals always precede realizing one's potential.

The serious student has little control over whether one will ultimately realize the larger goal of performing on Carnegie Hall's stage, but the chances of doing so are greatly increased by paying attention to the smaller goals required to reach one's full potential as a musician. Patience, perseverance, periodic adjustment of goals, and the ability to work through those periods of frustration everyone experiences are required along the way.

Furthermore, a performer cannot be satisfied that a goal has been reached with one correct execution: "When, finally, that perfect run-through is accomplished, then, and only then, is the performer ready to start practice of that passage. The previous run-throughs only demonstrated the many ways of how not to play the passage. Now, after finally achieving one perfect performance, the repetition pro-

cess actually starts. Now is the time to practice the passage time after time, each time as flawlessly as the time before."¹

Each hornist must navigate toward one's ideal performance by an inner concept of the music one wishes to produce, before air fills the lungs and the embouchure is set. In the same way that a painting can be produced only with as much clarity as the painter's inner eye can behold, our musical product can be only as fine as our inner ear can hear. This crystal-clear imagery is developed primarily through in-depth ear training and by listening to tremendous numbers of fine performers of all instruments and schools of thought. We live in a world of wonderful musical diversity, which is accessible to everyone through global dissemination of CDs and myriad concert tours. While no horn player would be advised to switch constantly from one particular style or school to another (like a rudderless ship at sea), everyone develops when they take what can be appreciated and learned from hornists world wide—incorporating admirable aspects into their own performances, and guarding against parochialisms that inhibit artistic growth. There are many satisfying ways to make great music, and much can be learned in the process of deciding how one does and does not want to sound.

Beyond listening to great hornists—or even great orchestras—perform, musicians can deepen their inner musical concepts by listening to great singers. "Sing on the horn!" is a frequently heard phrase. In his outstanding little book, *The Composer's Advocate*, Erich Leinsdorf writes, "The broadest possible exposure to music, on the other hand, can under-gird and inform the conscious knowledge of the specialized performer. In particular, instrumentalists and conductors need, if not actual singing experience, at least the curiosity to dig into the vast vocal literature."²

All musicians can benefit from learning to deliver a musical phrase like Callas or Melchior, to name only two legendary singers of the past. An understanding of the essential Mahler comes from learning his song cycles, and a performance of *Auf dem Strom* will be superior following an acquaintance with Schubert's many lieder. In a similar manner, performances of operatic and programmatic repertoire are enhanced when performers come to an understanding of a work's plot and characters. Further broadening of a person's musicianship can also come from crossing into other genres, such as jazz.

Before moving into the actual practice session itself, I want to put forth just a few thoughts about mental attitudes that are very positive and productive. First of all, the musician's mind needs to be focused entirely on musical sound, not filled with words. Translate words into sound images. Instead of saying to oneself that a passage should be played legato, hear this passage being played legato. Eliminate words and fill the mind with music performed precisely as desired.

It is interesting to draw an analogy here to candidates attending American police academies who are learning sophisticated driving skills, among which are techniques to evade hazardous situations. These candidates are taught to keep their eyes trained on a selected escape path, not on the objects they are attempting to evade. Each officer knows that the car will follow the eyes. Musicians, likewise, are

well advised to keep their inner ears focused on the music they wish to produce, not verbal judgments or what they are afraid might come out of their instruments.

Second, while musicians can be extremely competitive, the most beneficial form of competition is self-competition. A person's only control is within oneself, and no control whatsoever exists over another player's performance. Transform the other player's outstanding performance into a challenge for further personal growth, as opposed to giving in to destructive attitudes. Success will follow when self-competition brings a person to his or her full potential.

Most important, be as objective and non-judgmental in personal evaluation as humanly possible. "Be clear about this: letting go of judgments does not mean ignoring errors. It simply means seeing events as they are and not adding anything to them ... But judgmental labels usually lead to emotional reactions and then to tightness, trying too hard, self-condemnation, etc. This process can be slowed by using descriptive but non-judgmental words to describe the events you see."³ For example, missing too many notes in a certain study does not make a horn player an idiot. The horn player simply missed too many notes and needs to work at correcting this problem. It is dangerous to link one's self worth to one's performance, good or bad.

Moving into the practice room, I want to call attention to what I call tools of the trade. For the horn player these include a metronome, a tuning device with pitch generation capability, recording equipment, dictionaries, recordings, scores, and respected colleagues.

Horn players, as all musicians who wish to succeed, must be able to perform with correct rhythm and intonation. Musicians have electronic metronomes readily available to them that not only provide a steady beat but will beat subdivisions. Also available are electronic tuners with meters to show pitch according to equal temperament and, more important, produce any pitch so that just intonation intervals can be learned by ear. While better than no tuner at all, a musician who takes advantage only of the tuner's meter might end up with much more perfectly tuned eyes than ears. Consistent daily use of a metronome and pitch-producing tuner pays extremely high rewards.

Tape, or the new mini CD, recorders are ruthlessly objective, truthful feedback devices. These machines play back exactly what is put into them, with the possible minor exception of sound quality. Many years ago, the old style reel-to-reel tape player was a fantastic tool in the way it could record at a fast speed and replay at a much slower speed. It was then possible to listen in very minute detail. Whatever equipment is used, self recording can be a powerful learning tool.

"Mastering the technique of score reading obviously requires recognition of the symbols peculiar to music—notes, clefs, and a few other curious marks. But scores also contain words ... It is impossible to follow the composer's wishes in such works without a precise knowledge of what his words mean."⁴ This is why language dictionaries are a necessary supplement to music dictionaries. In the beginning of the scherzo movement of his Fifth Symphony, Mahler pens the descriptive word "keck" for the horn soloist. Following "Andante cantabile" in the first horn part

of the second movement in Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony are the words "con alcuna licenza." Percy Grainger enjoyed coining new English terms such as "louden" in his compositions. These composers' words tell a performer how to make music from the notes they have composed. Only language dictionaries can inform a musician of their meanings.

Scores and recordings go hand-in-hand as the horn player comes to understand their role in a symphonic, operatic, chamber, or solo work. Horn parts do not generally reside in a vacuum. Scores and a variety of recorded performances can help give the performer a more complete understanding of his or her role in a musical composition.

The perceptions and advice that can come from respected colleagues should not be overlooked. Since it is, unfortunately, impossible to perform and hear oneself from a distance at the same time, practicing and performing for those whose opinions are respected can be invaluable.

"Plan your work and work your plan" is a phrase I heard many times from my father, a successful salesman—not a musician. His advice to me was simple, logical, and very helpful. For all who want to make the most of their potential, these seven words are important. Minutes and hours of practice will be most powerfully used when they are thoughtfully planned. In any endeavor, the worst plan is no plan at all.

Practice session length and frequency are determined by our goals and available time. A serious horn student looking toward a career in music needs to consider his or her preparation to be equivalent to that of an athlete working to become an Olympian, not merely a good college athlete or even a collegiate champion. Olympic dedication and discipline are required. For this hornist I recommend three evenly spaced hours during the course of every day, with the exception of those times when ensemble rehearsals are so heavy that a full three hours of practice might cause more harm than good. In addition, I propose that another minimum of two hours need to be spent on ear training and repertoire study away from the instrument. For the busy music teacher or person working full time in an unrelated field, finding an hour during most days is a minimum amount of time to maintain relatively good muscle tone. The active professional hornist should find time to cover all the registers and technical elements on a daily basis, and to prepare specifically for the repertoire being rehearsed or performed on any given day.

Efficiency of practice is increased when each session is limited to a moderate amount of time, perhaps ordinarily a maximum of an hour in duration. Three one-hour sessions are more productive than two one-and-a-half hour sessions or one three-hour session. Dauprat's Method advises, "Practice little and often is the precept of every good teacher—it should therefore be the rule for students. But since, on our instrument, one cannot practice a long time at one sitting, one must occupy oneself during the breaks with other studies ... aspects of musical art." In addition, "[He (referring to the influential pedagogue Heinrich Domnich) also criticizes] the exaggerated zeal with which students, in prolonging their practicing sessions beyond a reasonable length of time, hinder their ability to play again each day, and even

[their ability] to increase the duration [of the sessions]; their potential increases gradually by habit of practice."⁵ Modern educational psychology has come to a similar conclusion in relation to learning. Robert Lundin, in *An Objective Psychology of Music*, writes, "Practice that is distributed over a period of time rather than performed all at once is likely to be more economical, particularly when relearning is involved."⁶ Note that these two authors were writing their thoughts almost a century and a half apart.

Regarding what I like to call armchair practice, Lundin writes, "A period of mental rehearsal placed midway in any practice period is an effective aid to learning a score."⁷ Along this same line of thought, Leinsdorf states, "That the instrumentalist and the singer must 'practice' on their instruments has bearing only on the training of the muscles involved in playing or singing, not on the process of learning the music. There are still musicians who sit at a desk or in a park, learning their score by reading it."⁸ Personally, I have found that tricky fingering passages are most quickly learned by singing these troublesome passages while simultaneously fingering the notes. From the above remarks it can be seen that productive practice time can take place even when a mouthpiece is not on the horn player's face.

I am a firm believer in a thorough warm-up to begin each day. No athlete would think of performing at a high level without warming up the muscles. Musicians use athletic means to reach artistic ends. It has been my experience that any horn player who neglects his or her warm-up is taking an inordinate and unnecessary risk of injury. A brief twenty to thirty minutes of scales, arpeggios, long tones, etc., will go a long way to maintain the health and high performance level of any horn player's embouchure. This personalized warm up should include exercises that cover the horn's entire register, are both legato and staccato, and leave the player ready to perform at one's best.

From this point, a day's practice will be quite different for the serious student, the music teacher, the amateur, and the professional hornist. Considering the needs of a serious student first, build each practice day from work on technical fundamentals progressively toward the practice of musical works. (i.e., Eat vegetables before dessert.) Divide work aimed at learning new technical skills between two or three sessions. For example, instead of spending thirty minutes on multiple tonguing at one session, practice fifteen minutes on this area during two sessions. Place the most strenuous work in the middle of a practice session. Doing so ensures that a player's muscles are ready to work and that the embouchure will not become tight as a result of putting the horn in its case immediately following extremely strenuous work.

One caveat is warranted here. The highly structured schedules about to be presented are designed as an aid for students to organize their time in order to reach musical goals. They are not intended to create "clock watchers" whose goal is to follow each schedule to the precise minute. Time can sometimes be set aside just to play favorite repertoire or to sight read. Each student being unique, schedules are created for the students, not students for the schedules.

Below is a hypothetical schedule of three practice hours

for a moderately advanced university-conservatory horn student who is learning multiple tonguing and lip trills along with etude, solo, and orchestral repertoire.

First session:	
warm-up	20 minutes
lip trills	5 minutes
multiple tonguing	15 minutes
exercises with tuner	10 minutes
Kopprasch No. 24	10 minutes

Second Session:	
warm-up	5 minutes
exercises with tuner	10 minutes
Kopprasch No. 24	10 minutes
Gallay, Op. 27, No. 26	15 minutes
multiple tonguing	15 minutes
lip trills	5 minutes

Third Session:	
Mozart Concerto No. 2	30 minutes
orchestral Excerpts	30 minutes
brief cool down with arpeggios and soft scales	

As this student develops, more musical works will fill the hours. The above schedule serves as an example to put flesh onto the conceptual bones that have been presented in the preceding paragraphs. This particular outline, of course, is only one of countless possible schedules that can be created to fit a student's individual needs. In my experience, study time is used to greatest advantage when students set up such schedules for each day of the week. Students who have difficulty organizing their time can also keep practice session diaries to analyze with their teacher.

Below are just a few guidelines that make practice time fruitful:

- a. Avoid procrastination. Directly challenge areas of weakness while strengthening one's gifts.
- b. Rather than only practicing run-throughs of study material, isolate difficult passages for improvement. Once these are improved, put them into context.
- c. Practice difficult technical passages slowly, increasing tempo only as the ability to perform them cleanly is acquired.
- d. Realize that a musician's inner ear drives the horn. When accuracy is poor in a particular passage, sing this music, then buzz it on the mouthpiece. Like computers, the product a horn produces is only as good as the information it receives.
- e. Focus intense concentration where you have control, the present—not on notes already, or yet to be, performed—with attention to the music's every detail.
- f. Subdivide rhythms to ensure correctness, and make regular use of a tuner.
- g. Especially when working to make changes in playing technique, move gradually from what can be done toward what is desired. No matter how small a step can be successfully accomplished, use that step to move toward the desired goal. Progress by tiny steps and be

patient.

- h. Use the wonderful gift of kinesthetic memory when developing physical skills. People duplicate feelings with incredible accuracy, much greater accuracy than people duplicate concepts. When a desired musical result has been achieved, remember how it felt to produce that result, rather than conceptualizing about what was done.

Many members of our horn playing society involved in teaching or other professions don't have the luxury of several hours' practice time. Someone might ask how to fit three hours of practice time into fifteen minutes. Although that is obviously a tongue-in-cheek question, it is possible to use efficiently a very limited amount of time. A warm up routine can be constructed which touches on all registers and techniques in a concentrated twenty to thirty minutes. Using the remaining available time to play through concerti or extended etudes helps endurance and keeps the fun in horn playing. Establishing realistic goals (learning one particular work or technique, gearing up for a special performance, being able to play specific examples for students, etc.) and practicing favorite repertoire keeps one's love for the horn alive.

Veteran professional hornists have all found their own particular practice routines that work. Addressing the young professional who is new to these ranks, I would like to mention a very few things. Personal artistic integrity and job security both rely on the hornist's ability to perform at the highest possible level, requiring dedicated practice. "Use it or lose it!" is a reality. Any technical skill that is neglected will atrophy very quickly. Prepare all ensemble parts in advance of rehearsal as thoroughly as if they were horn concerti. Tailor warm-up and practice time to the specific requirements of each day's repertoire. And, finally, everyone needs occasional physical and mental rest. You won't forget where to place the mouthpiece after a day, or even a week, of rest when professional requirements lighten.

Visualization is the final, and very strong, skill I wish to present. A person's body will react to an imagined stimulus as if it were reality. It is possible to experience an audition or performance hundreds of times before actually putting a foot onto any stage. When a musician practices with the same intense concentration as she or he performs, and at the same time clearly visualizes a given performance situation, she or he is greatly increasing the odds that the performance will meet personal goals. "Practice like you perform and perform like you practice" is good advice. Practicing in a totally dark room is a great way to eliminate all non-aural stimuli while visualization is being used. In the mind's eye, any musician can get to Carnegie Hall.

This article has presented ideas that have worked for me, my students, and numerous other hornists. Although necessarily incomplete, the ideas mentioned have been presented in as comprehensive a fashion as one brief article on practice methods allows. Musicians at all levels of accomplishment are life long students who will always practice. In the words of Philip Farkas, "we musicians are all students and will remain students throughout our entire lives—or else we have stopped being musicians!"⁹ We are

all on the same road, moving one step at a time, practicing as we go.

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Notes

¹Philip Frakas, *The Art of Musicianship* (Bloomington, IN: Musical Publications, 1976), 48.

²Erich Leinsdorf, *The Composer's Advocate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 35.

³Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979), 28-29.

⁴Leinsdorf, 5.

⁵Louis-François Dauprat, *Method for Cor Alto and Cor Basse*. Ed. Viola Roth (Bloomington, IN: Birdalone Music, 1994), 321.

⁶Robert Lundin, *An Objective Psychology of Music* (New York: Ronald Press, 1967), 144.

⁷Ibid., 145.

⁸Leinsdorf, 20.

⁹Farkas, 5.



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