

# Nineteen Principles of an Effective Practice Routine

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This is a list of key ideas and concepts that I want you to bear in mind when practising. Keep this list near you. Refer to it often.

These recommendations will help improve your playing, maximise your practice time and get the most from my lessons.

## POSTURE

1. **Use a full-length mirror** to monitor your technique.
2. **Balance the bass against your body** so your hands are free to play the notes. Don't hold the weight of the bass in your left hand.
3. **Use the weight of your arms when playing. Use the weight in your left arm to help keep the strings down and in your right arm to help sound the notes.** (This is a tricky concept to execute; be sure to view my lessons on left and right hand technique in the lessons library).

## SCALES AND ARPEGGIOS

4. **Vocalise (or at least think of) the names of the notes as you practise scales and arpeggios.** (This accelerates memorisation and is particularly important with arpeggios).
5. **Spell the note names correctly** to vastly reduce the total amount of information you need to learn; e.g., F# in the G major scale and not Gb.
6. **Sing what you play.** It's an easy way to add ear training to your routine.
7. **Learn all available fingerings for each scale and arpeggio** from the lowest possible note to the highest. This is a big task so start by focussing on the primary fingerings presented in my lessons. When you are ready, start extending the exercise.
8. **Use the cycle of 5ths/4ths to learn arpeggios.**

- 9. Use the bow when practising scales and arpeggios** to help you hear your pitch more accurately. Don't be discouraged if your technique is poor; the bow's main function in this context is to articulate the pitches more clearly.

## TECHNIQUE

- 10. Use a metronome** to help monitor your timing, but also to stop you from speeding up through the exercises.
- 11. Use my three step tuning method.** To play in tune, all you need is a consistent hand shape, accurate shifting and a good ear. (For more details, check out my free ebook in the Bass Player Toolbox). Problems with intonation are generally related to your left hand shape and/or shifting, so monitor both closely. Careful listening is critical.
- 12. Train your ear to hear the correct tone.** This will help improve your shifting. You need to hear the note you are aiming for.

## IMPROVISATION

- 13. Practise improvising bass lines and solos with arpeggios only.** Explore the different positions in which you can play these notes throughout the fingerboard.
- 14. Shape everything you do, from the whole piece to individual phrases.** Music needs dynamics, articulations and interaction between musicians to bring it to life.

## STUDY PIECES

- 15. When learning new music, work hardest on the challenging shifts,** not the bits that you are able to play easily. Practise what you find the most difficult to play and use your time effectively.

## PRACTICE ROUTINE

- 16. Implement an effective practice routine.** This is the best way to improve your playing. You need the right study materials and a regular routine. Working in an organised fashion will maximise your time.
- 17. Keep a practice journal to track your progress.** Achieve your bigger goals by breaking them down into smaller tasks.

## MISCELLANEOUS

- 18. Take a few lessons with a private teacher if you are a beginner** to help refine your technique. Private music lessons are a great way to get feedback and guidance on your playing and you will improve a lot faster with this help.
- 19. Always be open to constructive feedback from any source**, but bear in mind that no two musicians will develop in the same way and you need to find your own path. Follow your gut, and don't be seduced by what seems the easier path.

**Geoff Chalmers**

To learn more about practising, check out the "How to Practise" mini-course, which is included with the [Discover Double Bass Study Guide](#).