

The Amazing List of Practice Techniques!

(In no particular order)

by Molly Gebrian

Intonation

- If an individual note is out of tune, start at the beginning of the measure, line, or phrase and stop on the note in question. DON'T ADJUST if it's out of tune: make a mental note of whether it was too high or too low and try again. Once you get it, try to get it perfectly in tune 5 times *in a row*.
- If a shift is out of tune, play the open string it's on and then try to play the note in question in tune without playing anything that comes before it. DON'T ADJUST if it's out of tune: make a mental note of whether it was too high or too low and try again. In between tries, drop your hand (continue playing the open string) so you have to find it from scratch each time. Once you get it, try to get it perfectly in tune 5 times *in a row*.
- Try singing the passage. If your voice is out of tune, your hand will be, too.
- Try singing the next note before you play it and then match your finger to your voice.
- Practice with a drone (a continuous pitch). To choose the drone note, pick "do" in whatever key you're in or the note that seems the most important or prominent in the phrase.
- Play the passage super slowly, making sure you can hear the pitch and its resonance in your head before you play it.
- Play any notes that come one after the other on two adjacent strings as a double-stop to check the intonation between them and to feel the hand shape.
- Record yourself and listen back, making note of where it's out of tune. Audio Stretch helps immensely with this.

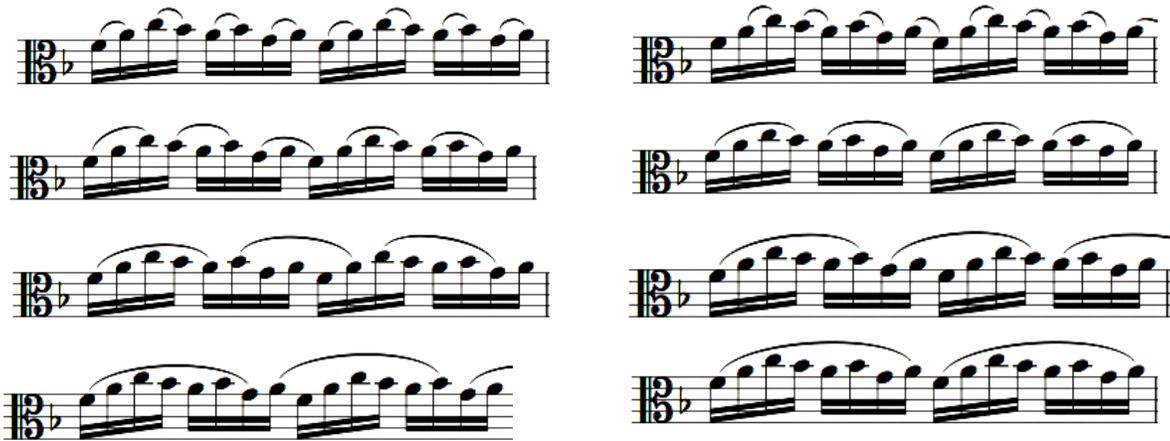
Rhythm

- Clap the rhythm.
- Sing your part and conduct along.
- Put the metronome on and walk in tempo with it while you play. Then turn off the metronome, but continue walking.
- Practice with the metronome on offbeats.
- Have the metronome click only on the downbeats.
- Have the metronome click only once every four bars.

Bow issues

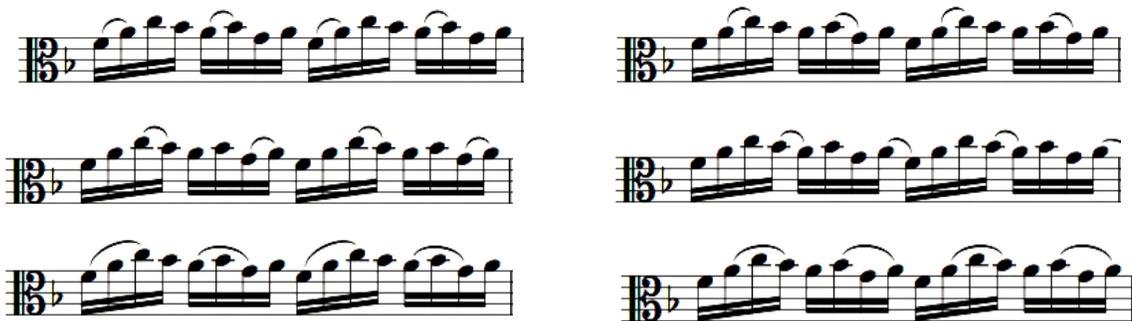
- Play open strings only. Make sure it is clean before you add your fingers back in.
- Play backwards bowing (if it started down, start up and vice versa).
- Play everything at the extreme frog.
- Play everything at the extreme tip.
- Play it all up bow.
- Play it all down bow.
- If there are slurs, play it separate bows.
- If there are slurs, play hooked bows.
- Practice with the following bowings:

- 2 through 8 slurred:



Eight musical staves in bass clef, organized into two columns of four. Each staff contains a sequence of eighth notes with slurs, illustrating various bowing techniques. The notes are grouped in pairs, and the slurs indicate the bowing direction and phrasing for each pair.

- Different combinations of slurred and separate:



Six musical staves in bass clef, organized into two columns of three. Each staff shows a sequence of eighth notes with a mix of slurs and separate bows, demonstrating different bowing combinations.

Playing Faster

- Play the section in dotted rhythms (original: )



The image shows three lines of musical notation. The first line shows the original passage in 3/4 time, consisting of a sequence of eighth notes. The second line shows the dotted rhythm equivalent in 3/8 time, where each eighth note is replaced by a dotted quarter note. The third line shows the dotted rhythm equivalent in 6/8 time, where each eighth note is replaced by a dotted half note. The fourth line shows the dotted rhythm equivalent in 9/8 time, where each eighth note is replaced by a dotted whole note.

- Change the rhythm in the following way:

- First note of each group long, the others fast



Musical notation for the first variation in 6/8 time. The first note of each group is a dotted half note, and the remaining notes are eighth notes.

- Second note of each group long, the others fast



Musical notation for the second variation in 4/4 time. The second note of each group is a dotted half note, and the remaining notes are eighth notes.

- Third note of each group long, the others fast



Musical notation for the third variation in 4/4 time. The third note of each group is a dotted half note, and the remaining notes are eighth notes.

- Last note of each group long, the others fast



Musical notation for the fourth variation in 6/8 time. The last note of each group is a dotted half note, and the remaining notes are eighth notes.

- Play the passage in different bowings (under “Bow issues”).
- Play 1 beat plus a note as fast as you can *cleanly*. Once you can do this with the whole passage, play 2 beats plus a note as fast as you can cleanly. Keep doing this, adding a beat each time.
- Click the passage up with the metronome:
 - Start at a tempo so slow you couldn’t possibly mess up (60 or slower).
 - Make it faster very gradually, going up by 5 or 10 at a time (no more). Don’t go up until you can play the tempo you’re at without mistakes.
 - Once you get to your goal tempo, go back to the starting tempo and work up to your goal tempo twice as fast (so, if you went up by 5s before, go up by 10s; if you went up by 10s before, go up by 20s).
 - Once you get to your goal tempo, go back to the starting tempo and work up to your goal faster (if you went up by 10s before, go up by 20s; if you went up by 20s before, go up by 30s).
 - Keep repeating these steps, always increasing the distance between metronome marks until you can play the starting tempo, a tempo right in the middle (so, if you started at 60 and your goal is 120, the middle tempo is 90), and the goal tempo.
 - Go back to your starting tempo and play the slow starting tempo immediately followed by the goal tempo.

Other Practice Ideas

- Play last bar of the passage as clearly as possible. Back up one bar and play the last two bars as cleanly as possible. Continue working backwards until you've gotten to the beginning of the passage.
- Record yourself playing a short passage. Listen back immediately and notice what you would like to be better. Play and record again. Keep doing this until you're happy with how it sounds.
- Mental practice: imagine yourself playing the passage as vividly as possible. Feel your fingers on the strings, feel the space between them, where you are on the string (which position, which string), feel what your bow has to do (bowing, which string), hear the pitch, hear the quality of sound, etc. As many things as you can imagine, the better. Once the passage is crystal clear in your head, then try to play it again.
- Sing how you want it to sound for phrasing and dynamics.
- Play the passage with hugely exaggerated dynamics.
- Pretend you are the teacher and are helping a student play the passage. What would you tell them? What would you have them do?

Good general practice habits

- Create a practice routine. Try to always practice in the same place at the same time for the same length of time so it becomes part of your day.
- **The WORST possible way to practice is to play from the beginning, play until you make a mistake and then either fix the mistake and go on or start over.** All this does is reinforce your mistakes. You need to locate where your trouble spots are, isolate them, and work on them using the suggestions in this list. Only once they have been perfected in isolation can you go back and put them in context.
- Playing through your piece is a LAST step after weeks or months of work, only to be done when you are getting ready for a performance. If you're running through your piece everyday (and it's more than 2-3 weeks before your concert), you're not practice well and are only reinforcing your mistakes.
- ALWAYS ask yourself, "Why am I playing this right now? What do I hope to accomplish?" If you're practicing, never just play. Always have a reason, especially if you are playing something again.
- Keep a practice journal. Write down your goal for each practice session. Never practice without a goal!
- At the end of your practice session, write down how well you achieved your goal so you can monitor your progress. Write down what worked and what didn't in solving the problems you hear in your playing.
- Make sure you practice at least a little bit everyday. It's MUCH better to do 10 minutes everyday than an hour once a week.