

Training for Excellence

Factsheet: Deliberate Practice

Music performance and development are best predicted by the amount of **deliberate practice**.

Deliberate practice entails:

- Highly **structured practice** aimed to improve on a well-defined task
- **Self-regulation** of practice sessions.

Structured practice

Due to our limited brain capacity, practice time at maximal concentration is limited (15-25 min.).

Time spent over 25 minutes is generally not efficient. Short breaks between practice (5 min.) can reset our focus and help store skills in our long-term memory.

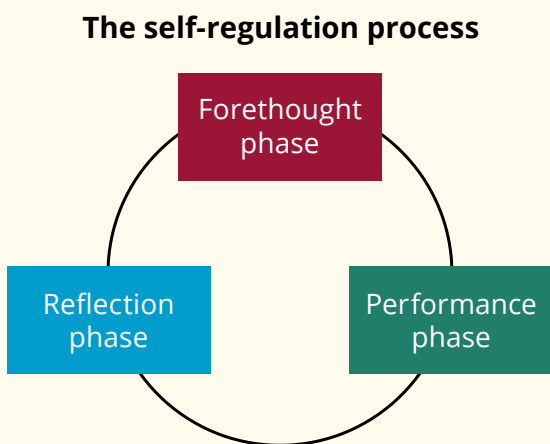
Learning is more efficient:

- When structured in relatively short practice blocks
- With short breaks in between practice blocks.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation implies that musicians are actively involved in their own learning process, constantly monitor their progress, and evaluate where and how minor improvements can be made.

This involves a circular process as shown below:



Phase 1. Forethought (before practice)

Knowing where to go and how to get there: this involves clear goal-setting and planning. Goals can be formulated over a longer period of time, or subdivided into smaller goals for each day, practice session, or practice block.

Phase 2. Performance (during practice)

Bringing the goals and plans into action: it is crucial to continuously monitor and track one's own progress, and where necessary adapt personal goals.

Phase 3. Reflection (after practice)

Linking performance/progress back to original goals: this involves explicitly evaluating and reflecting on one's own performance. 'Did I reach my goals?' 'What can I do better?' 'What are my goals for the next practice session?'

When setting goals for your practice, efficient goals should be formulated **SMART**:

S

Specific

Who, what, when, where, why?

Define the goal as much as possible, without any ambiguous language.

M

Measurable

How will I know?

Can you track or monitor your progress? How will you measure the outcome?

A

Adaptable

Can I change my goal?

You should be able to adapt your goal as you go, based on your reflections.

R

Realistic

Can it be done?

Is the goal reasonable and attainable? Not too difficult, not too easy?

T

Time bound

When?

Your goals should have a time limit. 'I want to achieve this step by ...'

Deliberate Practice in practice

Guidelines for Deliberate Practice

We encourage you to try out the following principles during your daily practice for at least a couple of weeks.

1. Set explicit goals

Determine what you want to achieve over a longer period of time (long term goals) and more specific practice goals (short term goals) to reach them. Make your goals SMART.

2. Structure practice in relatively short blocks

Explore how long you can stay focused to determine your optimal time block. 20 minutes can be a good starting point.

3. Use breaks

Use short breaks (5 min.) between practice blocks. Always take a short break when you feel you are losing concentration or before you start something new. During a break, give your brain time to process the new information. This means no use of your phone.

4. Monitor your progress

Different approaches are useful here, depending on your goal. Some examples can be: working with a metronome or recording your practice. Try to think of more possibilities.

5. Reflect on your progress

Look back on your goals after practice sessions. Think of what went well and what you could do better. Use this reflection to formulate new goals for the next practice block or session.

Tip #1

Use a timer to structure your practice sessions. It is easy to lose track of time during practice.

Tip #2

Write down your goals. This makes it easier to make them explicit and to monitor them. You might use a logbook or smartphone app: www.logboekapp.nl

Tip #3

Formulate goals for different aspects of practice. Try to make technical, musical, mental and performance goals.

A simple example of how you might monitor your progress in a logbook

Activity	My Goal (SMART)	Did I reach my goal?/ What can I do better?	My Goal for next session

