

PRACTICE LIKE A PRO



10 TIPS TO TAKE YOU
FROM BEING A GOOD
PERFORMER TO A
GREAT PERFORMER

BY
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Anastasia Hronis is a concert pianist, music teacher, psychologist and performance coach. She has performed on stages around the world including the Sydney Opera House seven times, and the internationally renowned Carnegie Hall in New York.

Anastasia has completed a Bachelor of Psychology Degree with First Class Honours and a Music Major at the University of Sydney, and a Master of Clinical Psychology Degree from the University of Technology Sydney.

She combines her two great passions, music and psychology, to help musicians perform at their absolute best. She also works as a psychologist, helping individual with mental health concerns overcome their difficulties and live life to the fullest.

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10 TIPS ON HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR PRACTICE AND MASTER YOUR ART

Below are what I believe to be the TOP 10 most crucial things that every musician and performer should be incorporating into their practice. These will help you refine your technique, speed up the rate of your progress, help you develop your sound and take you from being a good performer to a great one!

1. SLOW PRACTICE

This is key! So often I see students practicing much faster than they should be. This leads to them becoming very good at learning to play with mistakes and poor technique. Slow practice can be difficult and tiresome, and we often feel the urge to want to speed up. In the long run though, it gives us greater clarity and precision in our playing.

2. PRACTICE SMALL SECTIONS

Find the sections of the music that you are having difficulty with, isolate them, and practice them over and over again! You should not focus too much on playing your entire piece through repeatedly. Real progress comes from focusing on a small section and mastering it. A great performer makes the most difficult passages sound as fluent and effortless as the easy ones!

3. PRACTICE CONSISTENTLY

Hopefully this is one you've heard before! It is much better to be practicing a small amount every day or every second day, rather than one long practice session once a week. This is key for strengthening muscles and technique, as well as consolidating your progress.

4. PRACTICE EYES CLOSED *(my favourite!)*

This is my practice mantra: If you can do it with your eyes closed, then you can do it with them open! I absolutely believe in practicing with your eyes closed (especially if you're a pianist). This comes from the idea that you should practice in a way that is more difficult than the piece actually is. For pianists, we can increase the challenge for ourselves by playing with our eyes closed. For singers, you can create a challenge for yourself by holding your breaths for longer when practicing. Find the way to make your practice more challenging, so that when you then return to playing the piece as required, it seems easy!

5. PRACTICE UNDER PRESSURE

Great performers are comfortable playing with the feelings of pressure and nerves in front of large audiences. One way to get more comfortable with this, is to frequently perform for friends, family, neighbours etc. Sometimes, simply putting the video camera on and hitting play can produce some nerves, so you can always use that as a starting point. As with anything, the more we practice, the more confident and comfortable we get with it. The same goes for performing. Don't just practice your music – practice performing. (Note: if this is something you struggle with, I offer consultations, coaching and workshops specifically aimed at overcoming nerves and anxiety as a performer).

6. USE THE METRONOME

The metronome can be used in so many ways! Often it's used to help maintain consistent timing with a piece and help prevent rushing. However, I also love to use the metronome to master particular passages. If there's ever a hard passage I'm working to perfect, I'll put the metronome on a really slow speed and work my way up. I don't move onto the next metronome speed until I can play it five times in a row with no mistakes! (If you don't have a metronome, there are a lot of free apps and websites you can use.)

7. LISTEN TO RECORDINGS

This is something I find many musicians early on in their career forget to do. Listen to as many different recordings and versions of the piece you are learning as possible, and listen to them often. You'll get ideas and inspiration about the way to interpret the music, dynamics, tempo etc. Think of it also as a type of mental practice and rehearsal, and a way of strengthening the mental muscles.

8. RECORD YOURSELF AND CRITIQUE

Record yourself as much as possible., and then watch the videos back and critique yourself. Ask yourself, “what am I doing well?” and ‘what needs more work?”. I know that personally, I pick up on a lot of points by reviewing my videos which I don’t quite notice when I’m playing (for example, when playing, I may think my tempo is up to the speed I want, but upon listening back I realise it’s actually slower than what I thought it was). I also suggest you keep your old recordings and look back at them to review your progress as you get better at the piece you’re working on. Reminding ourselves of the progress we have made can give us a helpful boost of enthusiasm!

9. SEEK A VARIETY OF GUIDANCE AND MENTORSHIP

Music is an art, not a science. Most of the time, there is no “right” or “wrong” interpretation when it comes to music. I encourage musicians to have lessons and masterclass sessions with a range of performers and teachers. Each musician will have something different and unique to offer, and by gathering these opinions, you’ll be able to develop your own style, interpretations and sound.

10. LEARN ABOUT THE COMPOSER AND THEIR LIFE

Finally, take some time to read and learn about the composer who has written the piece you are working on. Get to know about the instrument they used when they were composing and how this may have influenced some of their musical choices. Find out what their inspirations were when writing music. Listen to pieces written in the same style as the composer’s (i.e. listen to other classical sonatas if that’s what you are working on). Listen to their other compositions. Learn about the stylistic characteristics of the music that this composer liked to integrate into their music and why. Having an understanding of the person who wrote the music and their life, will help you understand the music and refine your musical interpretations.
