

[Log in](#) or [Register](#) using

September 6, 2013

The Art of Deliberate Practice: How to Get More Done in Less Time

BY [YOKO ROSENBAUM \(/AUTHOR/YOKO-ROSENBAUM\)](#)

Rumor has it that as the great violinist Jascha Heifetz was walking through the streets of New York, he was stopped by a pedestrian, and asked, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" Heifetz replied, straight-faced, "Practice, practice, practice."

Sadly, simply practicing is not the answer to perfection. Heifetz himself practiced three to four hours per day, even stating, "I do not believe in practicing too much — it is just as bad as practicing too little." Practice can be done mindlessly, and in doing so, a musician drills the wrong things into her memory.

Ignoring Heifetz's warning, many young musicians consider practicing as many hours as possible a trophy of sorts, as if vast quantity corresponds directly to overall quality. But concentrating on the work and honing in on concise, focused practice can ultimately yield a more polished and rewarding result while drastically cutting down the number of unproductive hours. There are several key techniques that ensure a productive practice.

Firstly, when starting a piece, it is easy to get over-excited and rush in headfirst without stopping to study the score. Learning new music takes time — it is nearly impossible to get things right on the first try, especially as the difficulty of the repertoire increases.



In order to get the sound of the piece in my ears, one of the first things I do is listen to recordings. People may tell you that listening to another's interpretation affects your own, but listening to great musicians is most definitely not a bad thing. Listening gives you the groundwork to build from.

Secondly, take it slow. Detail work is crucial in this stage. Study the score — both in front of and away from the instrument while paying close attention to the composer's markings.

Of course, learning the right notes seems like a rudimentary bit of advice, but when taken too fast, the wrong notes will become ingrained in your muscle memory. A coach at Music@Menlo told me that a wrong note takes one time to learn, and ten times to correct. Therefore, it is much easier to put in the work now rather than after the piece is learned. Metronome work is also crucial not only to help get the right notes but also to aid the future performance, as sometimes young performers tend to rush on stage due to adrenaline. Slow and steady wins the race, even if it takes more time.

Thirdly, I find it helpful to keep a schedule for myself by outlining approximate time slots for each piece. Keep your schedule flexible to allow more time for some pieces if that proves necessary.

For this, a journal can be helpful as it enables you to keep track of what has been worked on and what is still to come. Organization is a crucial element of deliberate practice. Too often practice can be chaotic, which leads to hours of wasted time. Though it might at first seem like a hassle, once you get into the routine, the pace at which you learn pieces increases considerably.

Lastly, recording yourself can help you identify your errors. Not only an audio recording, but a visual one as well can help you hear your mistakes, and see them as well.

My teacher, Robert Thies, has a page in my practice journal in which he keeps a list of all my technical issues, ranging from a high wrist to too straight a thumb. Referring back to the list as I watch myself on video provides a fantastic reference

as to what I need to watch out for and work on.

Practice can make perfect, but it must be thoughtful and deliberate. Yes, beginning the process can be painstaking, but the end results are well worth it. Just remember to keep your mind focused, analyze the score, collect and organize your thoughts, and the rest will follow. The road to Carnegie Hall will be smooth if you not only practice, practice, practice, but do so deliberately.

***Yoko Rosenbaum** (<http://www.sfcv.org/author/yoko-rosenbaum>) is a 14-year-old pianist and writer from Los Angeles who has participated in the Young Performers Program at Music@Menlo for the past four years.*

