

1 “Practicing” Is a Practice

We all want to play better. We’ve all, at some time, experienced practicing as drudgery. Even though we love the music, love the instrument(s) we play, love playing, and may even love practicing itself, there are many times when sitting down to do it feels like swimming through glue.

It may be hard to find the time, or hard to focus our attention. It may feel frustrating or unrewarding that we seem to make little progress. It may seem like there’s so much to do that it’s overwhelming. It may just feel like we’ll never achieve our goals, or that we have no idea what steps to take to approach them.

Many players, even though they’d love to become better, put their instruments away until they can summon up good feelings again – in a day, a month, or a year. For some musicians, the word “practicing” is so psychologically loaded that they use a different one.

None of these negative associations is necessary. You *can* look forward to practicing, and you can incorporate techniques that help you improve faster and make playing music itself an enjoyable activity. You can look forward to practicing and even bring joy to the time spent practicing.

The first step is to *let go of the idea of practicing as a means to an end*. Practicing is not something you need to “get through” to get to the good part. Instead, begin thinking of practicing *as a practice*, an activity you engage in for its own sake.

The “practice of practicing” can be valuable time when we learn more about our instrument, our musical “voice,” and even

ourselves as human beings. When we look at it this way, we can approach practice with focus, deliberation and even respect.

Put It into Practice

Here’s how to begin making *practicing* a *practice*.

Use just a small portion of your practice time to engage in some musical exploration. Set your metronome at a slower tempo than you usually play. When you find a trouble spot, pause. Play the spot again. Identify the problem as clearly and deliberately as you can.

You may have thoughts about how long it may take if you always go at this rate, or how many other mistakes remain after you address this one. Especially if you find you’re focused on the outcome, see if you can stay with whatever you’re working on. Be patient, curious, even playful.

Today I’ll try to think about practicing in a new way. Instead of a means to an end, I’ll begin to think of it as a valuable time in which I learn more about my instrument, my voice, and myself as a human being.