

TECHNICAL PRACTICE APPROACHES

Dr. Shelley Martinson, Fall 2013

Before You Begin Observe Posture, Breathing & Balance

- Good technique begins with a healthy and tension free relationship between the flute and the body

Important Thoughts

- Tone through Technique: Everything you practice is a tone study. Imagine the sound you want to hear before you begin to play.
- Choose Anchor Notes: Not all notes are created equal – choose one or two notes to focus on in each technical run. These notes will serve as your “anchor.” Not sure where to anchor? Repeat the passage, changing your focus (anchor) note each time.
- Set Daily, Weekly & Long Term Goals: What do you hope to achieve in each practice session? Don't just play through pieces and etudes!
- Make it Easy: Set yourself up for success by practicing slowly and accurately. Use woodshedding techniques. Break difficult passages into small, easy chunks. Don't increase the tempo if you're making mistakes because...
- Practice Makes Permanent, Not Perfect: What/how you practice imprints itself onto pieces and *deeply* impacts performances. If you've only practiced a technical passage with great sound, correct notes and rhythms and no tension, you'll likely perform that way!
- LOVE Your Scales: Daily scale and arpeggio practice will develop technical proficiency. Recognizing scales within solo works will accelerate mastery of difficult passages.
- Repetition: 10 (or 5) Penny Practice: Repeat a difficult passage. With each successful repetition, give yourself a penny until you have a stack of ten (or five). With each mistake, return previously earned pennies and begin again from penny one. Save your pennies. Go to Braum's. Buy an ice cream.
- Record Yourself: Listen in layers.
 - Am I playing the correct notes?
 - Are the rhythms accurate? (If not, subdivide!)
 - Is this my best sound and intonation?
 - What is the musical character of the selection? Does my playing match this mood?
- Practice in Front of Mirror: Isolate the cause of technical problems. Is one finger moving too slowly or too quickly? Focusing on slowing down the faster fingers rather than speeding up the slow one(s).

Creative Practicing for Technical Challenges (Aka: Wood Shedding)

Choose one, two or three of these tactics in a given practice session. Practice EACH method with a metronome, beginning slowly and gradually increasing the tempo. Return the next day. Choose several more. Return the next day and repeat. Smile. Return as needed each day. Pat yourself on the back and use the pennies you've "earned" to purchase a treat.

1. **Slur** the entire passage at a variety of speeds. Begin slowly (mm= 60 or less) and gradually increase the tempo. Increase the speed only if fingers/arms are tension free, notes and rhythms are correct and fingers are even and smooth.
2. **Alternate rhythms.**
 - a. 8th notes
 - b. Triplets
 - c. 16^{ths}
 - d. Long-short (dotted 8th and 16th)
 - e. Short-long (16th- dotted 8th)
3. **Off Set Rhythms.** Repeat the above rhythms but start on...
 - a. The note before
 - b. The second note of the grouping
 - c. The third note of the grouping
 - d. Etc.
4. **Additional Articulations.**
 - a. Slur in groups of two
 - b. Slur two, tongue two (and tongue two, slur two)
 - c. Off Set Slur: Tongue one, slur two, slur two, slur two, etc.
 - d. Single tongue all notes with a "La" articulation. Is the air continuing between notes? If so...
 - e. Shorten the articulation
 - f. Double tongue or triple tongue if applicable
5. **Practice with Extended/Alternate Techniques.**
 - a. Sing it in style and in rhythm with metronome! Imitate on flute.
 - b. Wind over (or into) tone hole
 - c. Flutter tongue
 - d. Sing and play in unison (great for tone and resonance)
 - e. Sing and play a stationary pitch (notes move, voice continues on the same pitch doesn't)
 - f. If high register, use harmonic fingerings at the octave
 - g. Practice on "Hah" pulses (three pulses per note, then two, then one)
 - h. Practice on undertones
 - i. Visualize
 - j. Kick out a foot. Does it sound better? Imitate the same support while standing on both feet.
6. **Chunk it.** Begin slowly with the metronome...
 - a. Begin with one group of notes or one beat. Pause. Repeat.
 - b. Move to the following group of notes
 - c. Add the two groups together
 - d. Smile. Continue this additive approach.
7. **Practice Backwards.** For example, in an 8 note run, begin on note 8, then 7, 6, 5, 4, etc.
8. **Create Your Own Exercise.** My personal favorite: A "Technical Mastery" (compliments of George Pope). In a three note passage, reorder and repeat notes to create new exercises.
 - a. Example: If the difficult notes are ABC, play and repeat the following:
ABAC (start slowly, insert breaks, repeat with metronome for each pattern)
BABC
CACB

Think of the below options as your musical toolbox of woodshedding techniques. Just as you don't need to use every tool in the toolbox to put together a cabinet, you don't need to use every technique listed below to achieve technical success. Experiment with different approaches and discover what works best for you!