

Practice ideas:

Practice is really important as a musician as it's the main area for ourselves to improve and get better. It's often difficult to find time every day and it can even be quite intimidating to hear about how much professional musicians practice. The point of this is that I'm not expecting that we all need to play for hours every day (unless you want to!) but that we should be doing *some* kind of practice during the week if we want to get better as musicians. It's this practice, however regular, that should involve all of these four elements, even if it's not all in the same session. If you feel you've neglected one of these areas don't worry, just try to include it in your next lot of practising but it's important to understand each and the role it has in improving what we're doing. Here are the four areas:

1. **Non creative:** Something that you need to get better at but doesn't involve intense thought processes (usually technical exercises). Scales, chord voicings, strumming patterns, pitching or breathing exercises, drum rudiments or beats, programming new keyboard sounds etc. These are technical things that you can repeat and repeat to improve but are not very "musical".

Pros: These are the building blocks to your playing. They allow you to master new skills and refine old ones incredibly well.

Cons: It's very boring! They also underpin everything you do and without this area of your practice, you're going to be stuck playing the same things again and again without really improving.

2. **Creative:** Take a technical exercise that you've been working on and try to practise it in a creative way. Use a new scale or drumming pattern or chord in a song and learn how it works in real life when you apply it to a piece of music. It's probably important to mention that this is the 2nd stage of really *knowing* something musically. If you learn a new way of playing a chord, for example, in your 'non-creative' time, you then move on to trying to play it in your 'creative' time by playing it in a chord sequence or in a song (the 3rd stage is playing in band practice and the last stage is when you manage to incorporate it playing live on stage).

Pros: 'Creative' time is where you really start to see some improvements as you learn to musically apply the things you've learned in your 'non-creative' practise. This is often the time when you see the most improvements in your playing.

Cons: It's very hard sometimes to get from 'non-creative' to 'creative' with a new skill. It's easy to get frustrated when you can't quite nail that new technique and very easy to just give up, but stay strong!

3. **Main focus:** *The* main thing that you're motivated to learn at the moment. It could be a new song you need to learn, a lick or a groove that you just have to learn or some other thing that really excites you to work on. If you start something new but you're not enjoying it, feel free to move onto something different that you will enjoy. It can be a real negative experience to try and force

something just because you mentally decided on it a while back and you don't want to change your mind.

Pros: This can be really fun as it's simultaneously something new that will improve your playing but it's also something that excites you to learn (unlike yet *another* new scale...).

Cons: Even though you are learning something new and pushing yourself, this doesn't quite match up to the first two areas above for really knuckling down and improving your technique.

- 4. Musical application:** Take time to get back to playing along with the songs you love and that inspired you to play in the first place. If you're playing along, try to imagine yourself *in* the band and practice performing as if you have an audience. This is where you can let off some steam if learning new things has fried your brain.

Pros: This is a great stress reliever and can really help to remind you how fun playing music can be. If you get stuck in a rut, this can usually jolt you back into enjoying practice again.

Cons: This is a really, *really* easy place in your practicing to get stuck. It's important to have fun but sometimes we can indulge in this area a little too much to avoid the other, more difficult, areas of practicing mentioned above.

It's difficult to find time to practice, especially if playing at church is about as much playing as you do, but even a bit of time here and there will help improve your playing. It's also important to mention that improving as a musician isn't a steady thing. Sometimes we'll be practicing for weeks and weeks but don't feel like we've improved. Keep at it and one session things will 'click' and you'll find yourself improving loads, seemingly overnight.

Performing together is an incremental thing; if we all get a *little* bit better each, the band as a whole gets a *lot* better. So, try something new, get excited about improving your musicianship skills but, most importantly, have fun!

What to do next:

1. Try to jot down what you've been practicing recently and see how it measures up to the four areas mentioned. Are there any areas you've been neglecting?
2. If you have noticed that you've been skipping one area, just try to work on it next time you sit down to play at home.
3. If you need ideas, YouTube is a great place to find inspiration and there are plenty of free lessons on there to point you in the right direction.
4. If you're struggling to find time to play at home, even just listening to songs can really help your development. When you listen to music, try to concentrate on the person playing your instrument in the recording. What are they playing? How does their part interact with the rest of the band? How do they develop their part as the song progresses? How do they use dynamics or even drop out

in places? Understanding your instrument is a valuable skill and there are more ways to develop knowledge than just sitting down with your instrument.

Some useful youtube channels:

Paying for instrumental lessons is expensive but there are many, many useful youtube channels offering free lessons out there. Here are a small sample of good ones that I've found but, if they don't particularly work for you, keep digging and you'll find someone's videos that you enjoy. What kind of teacher works for one person might not work for another but here's some to start you off:

Bass

Scott's bass lessons - <https://www.youtube.com/user/devinebass>

Guitar

Marty Schwarz - <https://www.youtube.com/user/martyzsongs>

Keys

Jeff Schneider - <https://www.youtube.com/user/JSchneidsMusic>

Drums

Mike Johnson - <https://www.youtube.com/user/drumteacher76>

Vocals

4 good youtube channels - <http://www.kevinhabits.com/my-4-favorite-singing-and-voice-coaches-on-youtube>

If you stumble across another great channel, don't forget to share it with the group!