

Practice Techniques

Repetitions

Isolations- indicate clearly the group of notes, phrase or section to be practiced with repetitions, brackets are helpful for this, encourage isolation of difficult passages rather than always starting at the beginning.

Specific purpose- correct notes, rhythms, bowings, fingerings, left hand organization, intonation, tone, fluency, dynamics, expression, are all possible goals, tackle one issue at a time and prioritize (getting the right notes, rhythms, bowings would be a higher priority than dynamics)

Number of reps- assign a specific number/day (discuss the resulting total/week), assign a range (3-5X/day), introduce element of chance (use playing cards or dice)

Vary the repetitions- this helps keep repetitions from becoming too mechanical. Variations should not be random but should have their own purpose and value.

Ex. Isolated finger patterns in Etude can be practiced with a twinkle rhythm or 4 martelé or 4 détaché per note. Up bow staccato passages in Country Dance (Bk V) can be practiced down bow staccato as an opportunity to strengthen that bow stroke.

100X total- try this on a specific song after the student has learned and memorized the song, do not wait to pass the song, just do this on the side as they go on and learn the next song, the purpose is fluency.

I do 100X Total with Perpetual Motion. The rules are: singles and doubles consecutively count as 1X. The student needs to make tally marks in their book as they do the song or use a "repetition chart" (no going back at the end of the week and marking what you remember, marks need to be made the day of practice). They can play it in either A Major or D Major and they get a tally mark for each time they practice it at home and each time they play it in the lesson. I try to run through it 3X at the lesson as they are completing this project.

3 "good ones" in a row- This is basically a concentration game and a way to encourage quality in the practice. The goal is three good repetitions in a row. A good repetition is one that accomplishes the specified goal (if the goal is to remember to play f sharp instead of f natural, you might discuss an incorrect bowing but only consider the correct accidental in deciding whether or not a rep. counts toward three in a row). When a rep. is deemed "not a good one" the score goes back to zero. Who decides what is "good"- sometimes the teacher, sometimes student and teacher together (in this case, both the student and I have to agree, if I think it was "good" but they don't or vice versa then it doesn't count) This can be used with one specific goal or when you are trying to encourage the student to integrate 2 or 3 issues.

Repetitions are essential.

The trick is keeping them from becoming sloppy, mechanical and mindless.

Isolate right and left hands- practice bowing and rhythm for a given passage on open strings for bow division, tone, articulation, bow arm, finger and wrist motions, to reinforce rhythm or bow directions. Finger silently to increase awareness of finger patterns and to encourage a rhythmic feeling in the left hand.

Finger Before the Bow (FBB)- an essential life-long practice technique first introduced when learning Perpetual Motion in Suzuki Bk I (and less formally in the Twinkle Variations). Encourages right/left hand coordination and organization.

Uneven Rhythms- Commonly notated with a dot and dash system as follows:



Used in 16th note passages to promote speed, fluency and coordination and to keep the mind engaged through varied repetition. Can be used in slurred or separate passages and scales and passages. Can be modified to practice triplet passages. Enables combined slow/fast practice. Fast element needs motions of right and left hand to be grouped together. Be mindful of the articulation and the FBB aspect when practicing separate bows.

For slurred passages- Practice with "stopped bows" (up bow or down bow staccato)

Practice to strengthen the end of a piece- Practice the last phrase (or measure) X number of times. Back up to the second to the last phrase (or measure), practice from there to the end X number of times etc.

Practice to reinforce memorization- Practice a given passage, section or piece with the music 2x then 1X without, repeat as needed.

Add a note game- useful for fast runs but, can be used on any passage. Play 1st note, then 1st two notes, etc. Can also be practice from the end of the run or passage.

Isolate finer patterns- take a challenging group of notes and make up permutations of the finger pattern.

Isolate Shifting- narrow it down to two notes, last note in old position, 1st note in new position

- Most shifts will be "old bow, old finger"
- Shifting on old finger helps maintain the "frame of the hand"
- Analyze shifts S√1, Sπ3 etc
- Shifts happen in 3 stages- release finger weight, shift, reapply finger weight
- Shifts originate in the upper left arm
- Bow and left arm should move at the same speed (general rule... there are exceptions)

These are some of the basic and essential practice techniques. Many practice techniques are specific to the passage or piece and the technical demands contained therein. Creative analysis and synthesis is required. For more ideas consult the Suzuki Association website or individual Suzuki programs, StringPedagogy DVD, Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching by Ivan Galamian, Teaching of Action in String Playing by Paul Rolland, Playing the String Game by Phyllis Young, The Suzuki Violinist by William Starr