

7 Habits of Excellence

1. *Ease* ~ A Habit that has to be fortified at every turn

When practicing technical material, no goal ranks higher than ease. To create ease, however, you must go to the core of the way you produce music. In essence, easeful technique flows from efficiency of thought and action; it depends on clear self-direction and the dissolving of useless tension. As you practice an exercise, image ahead, and use your awareness to withdraw effort. Also enliven your sense of touch, movement, and posture to simplify the physical elements of your execution: minimize pressure, strive for a feeling of weightlessness in your limbs, and balance supplely as you sit or stand.

2. *Expressiveness* ~ An Art that comes from the Heart

With an expressive technique at your command, you're able to hear musical nuances in your mind and simultaneously perceive how to execute them. As a result, you can be both secure and flexible on stage. To promote expressiveness, bring meaning to all that you practice – shape your lines, no matter how modest the material. Musicians who ignore expressiveness in their technical work implant habits of blandness that can infect every phrase that they perform.

3. *Accuracy* ~ Precision of thought and action

Aim for accuracy that surpasses “correct” and ascends toward the sublime. Execute timing with atomic precision; tune your intervals until they shimmer. Choose short enough segments of material and slow enough tempos that you instill all-embracing exactness.

4. *Rhythmic Vitality* ~ The internal drive that gives music life

Generate lively forward motion and a terrain of undulating emphasis. Even when you're repeating a three-note morsel, initiate a pulse, and steer one note into the next note. With scales, enlist your metronome, and group pitches meaningfully, often driving toward downbeats.

5. *Beautiful Tone* ~ The Crowning Element of Quality

Tone, maybe more than any other feature, drenches music with emotion. By insisting on beauty of sound in your technique practice, you'll find that your tone becomes exquisite by default. Craft a primary tone that's powerful and rich, and then experiment with diverse tonal hues until you amass a palette of colors to compliment any composition. Over time, draw on exercises and etudes that traverse the full range of your voice or instrument, thereby enabling you to burnish your tone at all registers and volume levels.

6. *Focused Attention* ~ The Discipline of Defined Goals

When you integrate multilayered objectives into technique work, practice becomes engrossing. And by focusing on small, definite tasks, you can efficiently accomplish your goals. In contrast, the musicians who mindlessly run through exercises ingrain lax mental habits that suffocate artistry and sap motivation.

7. *Positive Attitude* ~ A Chosen Mindset

Technical progress can't be rushed. Like that greenery in a garden, you can nurture your technique, but the flowers will blossom in their own time. Infuse your practice with patient optimism. If your technical skills aren't as advanced as you'd like, carry on, confident that your agility will improve and the music you produce will add beauty to the world.

*Footnotes from The Musicians Way, Copyright © 2009 by Gerald Klickstein

Practice Quality Graph

This graph is to help you know how satisfied you are with your daily practices.

- 0.0 is the lowest or worst

- 5.0 is the highest or best

Circle the dot on the day you practice that best describes how you feel about your practice that day. Then draw a line to the previous day's circled dot. See the pattern start developing!

