

HOW TO PRACTICE

To most people, playing their instrument is considered the same as practicing. There is, however, a great difference between playing and practicing. Many people never learn HOW to practice.

Practicing is a very concentrated and disciplined playing in which one follows certain pedagogical methods in dealing with the technical and physical problems encountered. Such training requires the guidance of a teacher, especially during the early, formative years.

An important responsibility of the teacher is to ultimately teach the student HOW to practice, so that he may continue to improve and progress without further guidance of a teacher. Unfortunately, most concertina players have not had the opportunity to study with a competent teacher. (I should interject that there is often considerable difference between taking lessons from an excellent performer and from an excellent teacher.)

Playing compositions on one's instrument should be fun and enjoyable, however, practicing one's instrument is hard disciplined work, and usually not enjoyable.

The following is an outline for HOW TO PRACTICE.

1. Practice the Chromatic Scale a few times every time you set down to play. This exercise helps very much to relax your hands. A famous piano virtuoso once told me that he practiced the chromatic scale just before going on stage to relax his muscles.
2. Practice only the most difficult passages. Many people play the whole piece over and over, even though there may be only a few difficult measures. This is a great waste of time and energy.
3. Practice the difficult passages very slowly, many times each day. When a difficult passage becomes easier to execute, then gradually increase the tempo. Also, try playing it as fast as you can. The important passages will be much more even and clean if they can also be played slowly at first. When practicing slowly it is important to use a metronome so that the rhythms are accurately spaced or

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subdivided within the framework and time of each beat. Keep reminding yourself to keep calm and relaxed, and keep the hands relaxed. Take short breaks, and then return to the difficult passages. Do not spend many minutes on one passage; instead, practice other passages, alternating between them.

4. Initially, analyze and study each difficult passage to determine the nature of the problems, and the reasons for them occurring. One cannot begin to find a solution to a problem until the problem has been located, isolated, analyzed and studied. This procedure also continues during one's regular practicing as new problems arise.
5. When one has analyzed and studied the problems, then one must decide on solutions that seem the easiest and most comfortable or natural, and one that seems will work best at final performance tempo.

If a particular solution does not solve the problem at performance tempo, then one must choose another solution, or make modifications and begin practicing slowly again. Attempting to play a passage as fast as possible will give an early indication as to whether or not a particular solution will solve the problems at performance tempo.