

Quickly scan the article. Write down questions that come into your mind as you scan it.

## **What Deliberate Practice Looks Like**

There's a conventional view of what practicing should look like. Let's look at it first, in the context of playing an instrument.

When you think of what a "practice" session is supposed to be, chances are that you imagine warming up on some scales, mindlessly playing through some finger exercises, and then beginning to work on a piece of music you want to improve.

Maybe you'd start playing a new piece from the beginning, as fast as you're comfortable doing, until you come to a part where you make a mistake. Then, you might tread back over that mistake a few times until it starts to feel right. Then, you'd move on until you get to the next mistake and back over that one a bit until it smooths out.

This style of practice is common, it's intuitive, and it's almost exactly wrong. It has very little to do with the kind of deliberate practice that top performers engage in.

Based on the research, here are five hallmarks of what good practice looks like, on any instrument, or in any field.

### **#1 Focus On What Needs Improving**

One of the key differences is that great performers *don't spend much time practicing things that they can already do*.

When learning an instrument, too many people "practice" by playing the things they're already good at. Great performers on the other hand, spend their time working on only the things that need work.

Ineffective performers will often practice whole pieces at full speed, hoping they'll improve the weak sections by mere repetition, or perhaps, osmosis. Unfortunately, this kind of practice can even *reinforce* mistakes, rather than ironing them out. There's even a saying among teachers in the know: "Practice doesn't make perfect; Practice makes permanent."

But you can't just jump into the hardest section of a piece and just start flailing around. Instead, you need to:

### **#2 Break The Work Down Into Manageable Sections, Keeping The Goal Within Reach**

Although great performers tend to put in the most hours, they don't measure their practice sessions in mere time. They measure it in accomplishments.

For instance, if you wanted to master a new and challenging song on the piano, a bad idea would be to jump right into the hardest part and go at it at full tempo and with both hands, hoping that enough repetitions would make it gel.

Instead, you'd want to break the piece down by focusing on just the right hand, then just the left hand, and then both hands together, but at a very slow tempo. Only once you've mastered all three of these stages (and I mean *really* mastered them) is it time to move on.

Before playing any faster, you should start to feel so bored by how easily you can do it. Then, make your task more interesting by clicking up the tempo just a notch, always keeping just one step ahead of boredom, so that you are always just barely reaching, straining, and striving to get over the next hurdle.

When learning an instrument, one of the most common problems is that students will rush too far ahead after a few hasty and half-realized successes, thinking “I’ve got this. It’s different. I’m *talented*.” Inevitably, these students end up hitting a wall that they can’t surmount with this ultimately futile method. Then, faced with a level of difficulty for which they are completely unprepared for, they become endlessly frustrated and simply give up.

That type of futile approach is responsible for more half-learned pieces and stalled careers – in any field – than almost anything else.

Answer the following questions using complete sentences.

1. Briefly describe the type of practice most people do.
2. The article says that this type of practice is ineffective. If that is true, why do so many people do it?
3. How fast should you play something when you first start to practice it?

4. Improper practicing often leads to failure. What would be the likely result of *no* practicing?

5. What do you think Mr. Follum was hoping to accomplish by having you read this article?

6. The article mentioned *five* hallmarks of good practice, but what you just read only had two. This is because Mr. Follum purposefully only gave you part of the article. What do you think the third hallmark would have been if Mr. Follum had chosen to include it?

7. Briefly summarize the main points of the article concerning practice technique.