

Daily Practice Planner

by
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When going into a practice room, the first thing you should think is, "Why am I here?" You must have a specific goal in mind to make the practice session successful. Too many saxophonists merely practice as a habit and don't set daily, weekly, or monthly goals. This approach wastes hours of time and results in limited progress.

An example of a goal may be to improve a scale pattern in the next 30-minutes session. Once the player has spent the first few minutes selecting a good reed, warming up the embouchure and fingers, and establishing a good tone, the goal of practicing and improving the scale pattern can begin. The player should turn the metronome to a modest tempo and work a small unit of the scale with numerous repetitions. As that unit becomes mastered, the metronome tempo can be increased and the pattern extended to include more notes. This approach of increasing the tempo gradually, combined with the use of *segmentation* and *repetition*, should continue until the entire scale passage is clean and even.

Merely establishing a daily practice-session goal (or goals) is not enough for some people. To get the most out of practicing, one must keep track of the progress from one session to the next. I recommend that players specify what needs attention and keep accurate records of the daily improvements. The use of a practice "journal" may help organize the sessions better and make progress more obvious.

Use the attached *Daily Practice Planner* to map out your daily practice routine. Mark the specific sections that need special attention and indicate the tempo you can accurately perform them. Once a tempo is mastered, mark it out and post a new tempo goal. After a few days, your planner should look like this:

COMPOSITION _____ SONATA - John Jones _____

Measure	Tempo
Mvt. I: m.12-14	60, 72, 80, 92, 100, 104
Mvt. III: B - C	52, 60, 63, 69, 72

Remember these suggestions to make your practice planning successful.

1. “Practice what you can’t play.” – Larry Teal
2. Always use a metronome.
3. Don't waste time just *playing* music; *practice* it.
4. Be organized and manage your time wisely. Watch the clock.
5. A passage isn't *mastered* until you can play it three times in a row perfectly. (This refers to notes, rhythms, articulations, dynamics, and musical expression.) Only then can you increase the tempo.
6. Don't just move the tempo up one metronome marking at a time. Sometimes you can jump one or two settings to speed up the process.
7. Keep you body relaxed to perform at your optimum. *Tension is the enemy of speed.* (Use a mirror to observe yourself.)

This planner is geared primarily toward practicing difficult passages. Practice sessions must also include the basics (such as tone, vibrato, scales, and arpeggios), technical studies/etudes, repertoire, and *performance practice* (the art of performing without stops). Photocopy numerous copies of the *Daily Practice Planner* below and use this to guide your progress from day to day.

