



THE PRACTICE DOCTOR IS IN!
Cure your bad practice blues!

Ailment: Where did the time go?! I didn't get any better in my practice session!

Prescriptions:

- Plan your session! Whether you have 5 minutes or 5 hours to play, you can ALWAYS get something done in the practice room! Write out what you plan on doing AHEAD of time.
 - Pick ONE thing to work on. It is better to fix one thing, than to try working on everything at once. If you do the latter, you'll end up fixing nothing.
 - Think about it: if you choose to focus on improving just one little thing about your playing every month, after one year, you'll have improved twelve issues in your playing!
 - Be realistic about what you can accomplish today/tomorrow/this year.
 - Use your metronome/mirror/recording device! These tools really do help!
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Ailment: Ouch! My neck/shoulders/arm/hands hurt!

Prescriptions:

- Practice in front of a mirror. Observe your posture. Is one shoulder higher than the other? Are you slouching? See if you can locate where you are holding your tension.
 - Take a deep breathe! Are you holding your breath while you play? MANY PEOPLE DO THIS!
 - Left hand tension: Are you pressing too hard on the frets? Are you holding the instrument up with your hands (*playing the viola da thumb-a*)? Are you clenching your hand?
 - Right hand tension: Are you gripping the bow for dear life?
 - Practice hands separately so you can truly focus on the task at hand. Remember, gravity is your friend! Let it help you!
 - Practice slowly, and patiently build up your technique.
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Ailment: I can't play those fast passages!

Prescriptions:

- SLOW practice! The slow way is the fast way!
- Build up with the metronome. Start at half tempo, and go up a few clicks every few days.
- Practicing the fast notes with varying rhythms
- Practice hands separately
- Make sure your left hand fingers aren't flying everywhere! Keep them pointing down!

Ailment: I'm struggling with string crossings!

Prescriptions:

- Practice in front of a mirror. Pay attention to your bow angles.
- Observe the tip of your bow. Is it following the general curve of your bridge, or is it moving in every direction?
- Practice string crossings with a variety of bowings and speeds

Ailment: Yuck! I don't like my sound!

Prescriptions:

- You are likely playing with too much tension. Practice long tones, and work on keeping your bow speed even and connected.
- BOW PLACEMENT, SPEED, WEIGHT: Try adjusting one of these variables at a time.

General malaise:

- The most common problem I see with students is TENSION! Remember, this is supposed to be an enjoyable activity! Keep your breathe steady, your posture relaxed and upright, and let gravity help you play your instrument!
- The next most common problem I see with students is how they organize their practice sessions. See below for help!

THE PRACTICE SESSION

Regardless of the amount of time you have in a given day, your practice session should **always** include some warming up. Always have an etude book to work out of, and practice those exercises both hands separately and hands together.

- Keep in mind that this warm up time is not an excuse to turn off your mind and ears! Use this time to warm up *both* your head and your hands!

Pieces:

- Something old:** You should have an older piece that you know well and can work on more polished playing. These pieces will help you improve your ability to play with finesse.
- Something new:** You should also have a newer piece that challenges you in different ways. Learning something new helps you to avoid practicing bad habits.
- Ensemble music:** Try to play with others as much as possible! Not only is it fun, it is a great way to push yourself to play in a different manner from the practice room. Also, you get to play some of the best music we have as gamba players!
- FINALLY:** Be intentional about your problem solving! For every ailment I listed, there are countless etudes out there created to fix these issues! Find one, and work on it diligently!