

For Musicians

6 STEPS TO IMPROVE YOUR PRACTICE ROUTINE AND REACH YOUR GOALS



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Introduction

6 Steps To Improve Your Practice Routine And Reach Your Goals

Here is a truth you probably already know: there is a lot of stuff to learn in order to become a musician (but try to be a surgeon, you will have much more to learn and someone's life in your hands!). It's easy to feel confused about what to practice, or overwhelmed by the amount of topics to learn.

If you feel like you fall short of actually accomplishing anything, it's probably because of a lack of organization in your practice routine. This comes down to the way that we set goals.

I am going to show you 6 steps you can take **TODAY** to have a clear path of what you need to do to have a more efficient practice routine in the short and long term. If you follow these steps I can guarantee you that it will have a dramatic impact on your learning curve and efficiency.

I have written this book and designed these steps focusing on improving your practice routine as a musician. However, you can apply these steps to other areas of your professional or personal life.

It is my hope that you will find in the next pages clear actions you can take right away to increase your practice routine efficiency and reach your full potential as a musician.

Step 1: Define Your Goals

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Be precise in what and when you want to achieve. Deadlines keep you focused and engaged.

“I want to learn more standards” is a good goal but “I want to learn 20 standards this year” is a clear and defined objective. You create a frame in which you have a precise goal and a deadline. By the way, you can check out my [lists of standards](#).

Click [HERE](#) to get my monthly goals template.

List your goals and set a deadline for each one:

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.
4. _____.
5. _____.

Examples:

1. I want to get stronger rhythmically in 2 months
2. I want to improve my intonation in the next 2 months
3. I want to do 10 transcriptions this year
4. I want to improve my swing feel in the next 6 months
5. I want to improve my technique over the next 3 months
6. I want to improve my ear training this year

Step 2: Identify Habits

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Results-only-oriented goals often turn into daydreaming and wishful thinking. Changing the things you do each day (your habits) is the only way to actually reach your goals.

Note: studies show that when people focus on changing a single behavior at a time, the likelihood that they'll retain their new habit for a year or more is around 80%. Those who try to change two or more behaviors at once? Success rates drop as low as 20%.

Identify the habits that you will need to change to reach your goals. List these habits:

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.
4. _____.
5. _____.

Examples:

1. I will need to spend less time studying harmony
2. I will need to invest more time in my practice session on intonation exercises
3. I will change my weekend schedule
4. I will focus on swing feel, play along recordings, spend time listening
5. I will spend less time on technique exercises

Step 3: Define New Habits, Create A Plan

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Simply wanting something really bad isn't enough and trying to wing it and rely solely on willpower is a recipe for failure. You need to identify a specific strategy, create new habits, design your practice routine. By doing this, you set parameters and you draft a plan. In order to move forward it's crucial to know what's your next step.

List the habits you'll create and the strategy you'll use to achieve your goals:

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.
4. _____.
5. _____.

Examples:

1. Twice a week I will practice a lesson from the [Rhythm Mastery Series](#) and complete one lesson per week.
2. Every practice session will start with an exercise from the [7 Exercises To Improve Your Intonation](#) for 10 minutes during 2 months.
3. I will do one [transcription](#) per month for one year.
4. I will study the [Jazz Articulation Guide](#) and practice these [exercises](#)
5. I will practice the [Kirk Whalum Challenge](#) and complete a lesson each week for 3 months
6. I will practice the [Ear Training Series](#) 3 times a week for 12 months

Step 4: Process

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Things are never 100% within your control. What is completely in your control is how disciplined you are in implementing your strategy and following your practice routine plan. Don't focus only on the results you're getting, pay attention to how well you are implementing your habit changes.

For each strategy/habit in step 3, list how you will track your implementation:

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.
4. _____.
5. _____.

Examples:

1. I will write in my notebook the exercises I've practiced and the tempos
2. I will write in my schedule my practice sessions and check my intonation with the tuner
3. I will create a list of transcriptions I want to do and have a book dedicated to these transcriptions
4. I will record myself each week to listen and check my improvement
5. I will document my progress in my notebook
6. I will document my progress in my notebook and challenge myself sight reading and singing

Step 5: Proficiency

6 Steps To Improve Your Practice Routine And Reach Your Goals

If everything has to go perfectly according to the plan for you to reach your goals, you're done before you start. You need to incorporate failure into the equation, have some flexibility, and get your results despite all of it.

Identify an acceptable range of failure and define what you are going to do when you do fail.

It's better to implement your strategy at 90% throughout the designed timeframe than be perfect for the first 2 weeks and give up because you missed or failed once.

For each goal in step 1 and each strategy in step 3, list an acceptable range of failure and how you will proceed:

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.
4. _____.
5. _____.

Examples:

1. If I practice only once a week but feel comfortable with the exercises, I will move on. Otherwise I will repeat that lesson the following week. The timeframe is 7 weeks, I allow myself to go to 8 weeks, 9 top.
2. I will see in my calendar if I practiced following the plan, if I miss a practice session I will move on. If I miss 2 I will start over the following week.
3. At one transcription per month, I cannot allow myself to miss one. If I do, I will do 2 transcriptions the following month.

Step 6: Accountability

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You don't get credit for simply having a goal and a plan. If you don't actually implement, nothing changes. Don't share your goals to get praise, share them to be held accountable.

List the names of people you can approach who will hold you accountable:

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.
4. _____.
5. _____.

Examples:

1. My teacher. Each week (or month) I will play the exercises for him
2. A school mate, each week we will practice together for intonation
3. A fellow musician

Conclusion

6 Steps To Improve Your Practice Routine And Reach Your Goals

Go through these steps for each of your goals.

Write everything down to materialize your goals, practice routine and progress.

Come back to this book in a couple months and check how you've been doing.

- Have you changed the habits you identified and implemented the new ones?
- Have you followed your strategy?
- Have you tracked your progress?
- Have you kept your mind focused on the proficiency and not solely on the results?
- Do you feel you can share the results with the person you chose to hold you accountable?

One final suggestion: during your practice time, you need to be focused entirely on what you are doing. Multitasking does not work. Turn off all devices, you have to be alone and dedicated. Emails, Facebook and such can wait. Time is your most valuable asset, once it's gone, it's for ever, don't waste it.

Between what's important and what's urgent, choose what's important.

Each and every day, I learn something or improve something. It's been like that since I was 15. If you even just slightly improve one thing each day, constantly, you will do wonders.

Check out the ebook "Typical Day vs Ideal Day, Dreams, Fears And Hopes"

Your Action Plan!



Goal:

Habits to change:

Plan:

Process:

Proficiency:

Report to:



Photo: Jon Brown

Alex Terrier is a French artist living in New York. He has worked with the Mingus Big Band, Kenny Barron, George Garzone, Pierre De Bethmann, Manu Codjia and many others.

Alex is a very gifted and expressive saxophonist. He has shown in performance a very strong developing concept as a composer and as a soloist

Joe Lovano

Get to work!

Let's identify together your goals and make your plan.

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