

Timetables for Practice

Organization is a nasty word for those who believe spontaneity is a better approach. It makes sense to me that there be a balance between the two. Make sure that you know how to be spontaneous, but organize the things that you really want to get done or there's a good chance they won't get done.

If you're going to become skilled at whatever you do, you have to identify what it is you have to do to become skilled. Then organize your time to make sure it happens. It won't happen spontaneously unless it's all that you do. Most of us have more than one thing going on in our lives — music, friends, family, work, etc.

The following approaches should get you thinking about how you organize your time.

1. In College

The priority approach

This approach makes practice the number one priority. Every time you get half a chance to practice, you take it. This is also known as the obsessive approach. If your practice time is focused and productive, you can get a lot done with this approach. The problem is that the rest of your life suffers since you tend to do nothing else.

6 a.m. Get up at 5:30 to get the necessary stuff out of the way (shower, eat, etc.). Work on technique until 8 a.m.

8 a.m. Take the bus to school instead of driving because that way you can visualize scales, arpeggios, whatever.

9 a.m. Class

10 a.m. Practice sight reading

11 a.m. Practice tunes (memorize melody, chords, analyse for improvisation possibilities)

12 p.m. Lunch

1 p.m. Class

2 p.m. Practice improvisation scale use

3 p.m. Class

4 p.m. Practice improvisation arpeggio use

5 p.m. Bus home, errands

6 p.m. Supper

7 p.m. Homework

8 p.m. Practice improvisation on loops using discoveries made earlier (2 p.m. and 4 p.m.)

9 p.m. Learn transcription

10 p.m. Bed, visualize practice material until asleep

The do-it-when-it-feels-right approach

This seems to be a lot of people's preference. The attitude is that music happens from inspiration. Anything else isn't the real thing. This approach doesn't normally yield good results in terms of getting better on your instrument.

6 a.m. Are you kidding?

7 a.m. Sleep is good for me

8 a.m. Better get up, got a class at 9

9 a.m. Class

10 a.m. Hang out

11 a.m. Practice, just got an idea for something

12 p.m. Lunch

1 p.m. Class

2 p.m. Hang out, homework, maybe practice

3 p.m. Class

4 p.m. Practice a bit, gotta learn those chords

5 p.m. Drive home, TV

6 p.m. Supper

7 p.m. Homework

8 p.m. TV

9 p.m. Go out, usually back by midnight

The Procrastinating Approach

You may think that I'm trying to be funny here. I'm not. I know a lot of people like this. So do you. This isn't a plan they have. It just kind of happens to them.

6 a.m. Very funny

7 a.m. I should get up

8 a.m. I should really get up

9 a.m. Crap, I'm late for class

10 a.m. Chase down classmates to find out what you missed

11 a.m. I should practice...later

12 p.m. Lunch

1 p.m. Class

2 p.m. Hang out

3 p.m. Class

4 p.m. I should practice, I wonder what's on TV

5 p.m. Practice for $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour before supper

6 p.m. Supper

7 p.m. Homework

8 p.m. TV until 10

10 p.m. I hardly practiced all day. Oh, well. Tomorrow's another day. I'm going out.

The Balanced Approach

In the long run, this is the best approach for most people. You learn the most in the shortest amount of time using the priority approach, but you run the danger of burning out. You don't learn much with the do-it-when-it-feels-right approach, but sometimes you discover things about what you want to get out of music. The procrastinating approach means you should be doing something else. With the balanced approach, you can get three to four hours of practice a day and still have a life.

6 a.m. Sleep is good for you

7 a.m. Wake up, shower, eat

8 a.m. Practice a bit, just play around on the instrument

9 a.m. Class

10 a.m. Review class, hang out

11 a.m. Practice

12 p.m. Lunch, hang out

1 p.m. Class

2 p.m. Homework

3 p.m. Class

4 p.m. Whatever

5 p.m. Practice

6 p.m. Supper

7 p.m. Practice

8 p.m. Homework until 10 or practice if there's time

10 p.m. Bed or whatever

2. When you have a Job

The Priority Approach

In time, this approach will kill you. And if you're doing nothing but practicing and working, there will be no time to look for gigs and you'll start practicing less because there will be less reason to do so. Make gigs or teaching the reason to get better. When you have enough of those, kill your day job. Then you'll have more time to practice if you want.

5 a.m. Practice until 7 a.m.

7 a.m. Shower, eat, etc.

8 a.m. Work until 4 p.m., practice at lunchtime

4 p.m. Necessary errands

5 p.m. Practice

6 p.m. Eat and practice

7 p.m. Practice until 8 p.m.

8 p.m. Break

9 p.m. Practice until bed

10 p.m. Bed

The Do-It-When-It-Feels-Right Approach

This approach makes you feel like you're a musician when you're not. You're someone who's working a job and happens to have an instrument that you play once in a while. Start a band and you'll be closer to the truth.

7 a.m. Shower, eat, etc.

8 a.m. Work until 4 p.m.

4 p.m. Go for a beer

5 p.m. Pick up the guitar (maybe), noodle

6 p.m. Supper

7 p.m. Hang out, TV

10 p.m. Pick up the guitar (maybe), noodle

The Procrastinating Approach

Practicing is a dim memory.

7:30 a.m. Eat while getting to work.

8 a.m. Work until 4 p.m.

4 p.m. Errands

5 p.m. TV

6 p.m. Supper

7 p.m. TV

8 p.m. Hang out

10 p.m. Think about the guitar, TV

11 p.m. Sleep

The Balanced Approach

There's time here to practice and pay attention to important concerns like finding work as a musician. The schedule changes for the sake of gigs or rehearsal or any professional commitment.

6 a.m. Shower, eat, etc.

7 a.m. Practice for $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour or review contacts/performance opportunities

8 a.m. Work until 4 p.m. Use a part of lunch and breaks to phone/email/research potential performance opportunities

4 p.m. Errands

5 p.m. Practice or networking

6 p.m. Supper

7 p.m. Practice or networking

8 p.m. Hang out, whatever

10 p.m. Bed