



SLOW PRACTICE

Dr. Keri McCarthy, Washington State University

What is Slow Practice?

- Slow practice provides opportunities to focus on a scale or passage at significantly slowed tempos, to allow the player to focus on fundamentals (posture, smooth fingers, embouchure shifts, support, etc.)
- Slow practice is a great time to practice a passage in new rhythms or meters, with the metronome voicing the "ands", or in different note groupings (think 5s, 6s, or 7s)
- Slow practice gives your brain time to forge new connections, to coordinate fingers, air, embouchure, and tongue smoothly and with decreased tension and motion, making you playing more efficient overall.
- Slow practicing of one passage can change habits, and improve your playing in other passages. This method can greatly improve your technique, articulation, and CONFIDENCE!

Technique (Fingers)

- Pick a scale or short (2-3 bar) passage to memorize.
- Play the passage slurred, with eyes closed, focussing on the motion in your fingers. Can your fingers remain on or near the keys without tension throughout?
- Now change the rhythm to "long-short" or "short-long" again focussing on the smooth motion of the fingers. Change rhythms and groupings to add interest and challenge.

Metronome Fun

- Challenge yourself to play your passage exactly with the metronome at a slow tempo (QN=45 or less). Use smaller subdivision to anticipate the next pulse or articulation.
- "Ladder practice" with various tempos. Start by increase speed 2 "clicks" at a time, then return to starting tempo and jump "rungs", add 4 for one playthrough, then subtract 2 to check your fluidity and comfort.

Suggestions

- Enjoy the process- slow practice provides time for you to scan your body for tension and better understand how your fingers, tongue, and embouchure coordinate. *Through slow repetition you have many opportunities to successfully perform challenging passages.*
- Develop an action plan. Once you are able to focus on a particular element (fingers, air, etc.), you should add a metronome, assess your current "successful" tempo, and plan future practices methods to raise the tempo over time. It is essential to prioritize slow "fully-focussed" tempos over faster ones that cause bodily or mental tension.
- Slow practice can uncover unconscious tendencies- observe passages in which you rush, get frustrated or angry, or feel uncomfortable, and recognize and celebrate your accomplishments as you progress. *We achieve deeper personal awareness as we develop on our instruments.*