



Mindset: 12 Really Useful Practice Tips

Whether you are a professional or play for fun the key to getting the most out of music lies with what goes on between your ears. This can mean anything from how you approach practice, your stage presence, earning money as a working musician to what gear you buy and use.

What is the best practice routine?

I think the answer is simple: **it's the one you stick to.**

Ever felt guilty when you hear of people spending 6-8 hours practising a day? Or even an hour? You think there's no way I could do that...

The truth is we are all different and your practice routine will depend on many factors such as age, professional/amateur level, upcoming gigs, family commitments, spare time etc.

So here are some tips to get you thinking about the way you practice. There is no one 'correct' way and you must find what fits in with you, your life and what you want to get out of music.

If you're a pro or aspiring pro then obviously it would benefit you to spend more time with the instrument. If you have a busy job but desperately want to improve then finding 20 minutes per day (perhaps by sacrificing or 'borrowing' that time from TV or computer game time) will help you build the momentum you need to build the habit of regular playing.

- **Know the difference between playing and practice.** Playing bass in your bedroom and practising in your bedroom are different things. Both are valid. Practice should be deliberate; meaning you are working on something you

need to learn whatever that may be. Mindlessly playing or 'messing around' on the instrument can be extremely beneficial but not where growth tends to happen. It's more where ideas spring from which is incredibly important and fun. Songs, riffs, solo ideas and what you really need to work on will come from these ideas.

- **Aim for consistency.** Ten minutes every day is better than one hour once a week.

- **Make it super easy to practise.** Have your bass on a stand out of its case. Have a setup that is easy to access. When you get to your instrument you should be ready to go without having to find your laptop, music stand, strap, pedals and so on. Create an



environment that you

love going to and that inspires you to play. Here's mine:
I only have to switch a couple of buttons and I'm good to go.... No excuses!

- **Don't practise mistakes.** If you hear a dodgy note or sound or can't play something very well stop. This actually takes a lot of discipline. Find out what is going wrong and try and fix it. It may be a technique issue or a gear issue. As you get more experienced you will know what the problem is and you can fix it. Being a good musician is about getting hundreds of tiny things working well at the same time. Isolated these things are usually fairly easy. The trick is putting them all together. That's why you're practicing by the way....
- **Join a band.** If you are not in a band, join one! It could even be you and one more musician. That will make you accountable to someone else which is the best way to get good quickly. No one wants to look or feel rubbish in front of other people. Of course when you start off you probably will not sound great or feel confident but the only way to get past that barrier is to just...start.
- **If you want to play fast, slow it down!** This sounds like pure crazy talk.

However your brain needs to get round a fairly complex relationship between your fingers and hands and the instrument. Muscle memory is the process by which you learn to do anything mechanical automatically. The best way to approach this on the bass is playing very slowly whilst making sure you are doing everything correctly. From there you build the tempo up. It is so common to see people playing as fast as they can, desperately blundering through a passage that they can't play well at a slower tempo. Patience is involved with playing slowly because, of course, everyone wants to play fast because it sounds great. Real precision and accuracy comes from playing slowly first.

- **Use a metronome.** Or play to drum loops or a drum machine or - even better - with a great drummer. Your sense of groove, time and feel is perhaps *the* most important skill you can develop as a bass player. Prioritise this above all other things especially if you want a career out of playing bass.
- **Relax.** Very much easier said than done especially if you are just starting out. This is huge though. Spend some time consciously focusing on relaxing your hands, wrists and shoulders whilst breathing properly. When tense (as is often the case when playing) breathing tends to change and this can affect your performance and your quality of practice. Learning to relax helps immensely on sessions and gigs too.
- **Immerse yourself in music.** Learn the history of the bass guitar and music - the key players and bands, the trends and the gear side of things (who doesn't love gear??) and you will keep your passion fueled and be constantly inspired. Read books and magazines, watch documentaries, concert films, get a lesson from a player you admire.
- **Split up your practice time.** If you do decide to practice for even an hour or more, divide your time into specific slots. Warm up with an exercise that works on technique and arpeggios (for example), do 10 minutes theory, 20 minutes reading, 20 minutes learning bass lines. This can be completely tailored to where you are on your musical journey. Doing this actually makes a few hours of practice seem very manageable. Follow the blog at onlinebasscourses.com for tons of ideas.
- **Be honest about the 3 or so things you're not good at.** Work on those things. It's tough because...well you're not good at those things (yet). Real progress comes from this discipline. Most people want to hear themselves playing something that sounds great. But they can already play that thing! No improvement comes from that. It comes instead from the things you find

tricky. **Nothing is difficult. Just unfamiliar.**

- **Use the Will Lee method.** Will is one of the greatest session bass players of all time and he never practises. How does he get away with that??? Well he plays all the time - recording sessions and gigs. Playing a lot keeps you in fine form and if you do play fairly regularly then that can take the place of a dedicated practice routine. Practice in that situation will usually mean learning songs for the next gig.