

COMMON QUESTIONS MUSICIANS ASK

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I'm starting out my practice routine. How can I play very well?

It is admirable to take the first steps to improving your skill level of playing. Let's translate the words "skill level" to "ability" - possession of the means or skill to do something. Like anything you do, it requires time and applying/refining your ability.

Do's

- Be Detailed in your study.
- If you can, take lessons from a teacher.
- Take on your teacher's guidance seriously and apply it with total "buy-in" both mentally (focus) and physically (actions to produce the sound).
- Practice daily. The more time and detail you put into your practice, the better you will become.
- Be patient.

I practice and practice, but I do not improve. Why?

You are not alone. Many times, students will hear what a teacher is requesting, but:

- will not quite follow the teacher's guidance;
- is not practicing enough time and does not practice consistently;
- only applies the instruction during practice time and/or does not remember to transfer the new learning to performances/rehearsals, and/or;
- all the above.

When you learn new/improved skills to play your instrument, they should be applied to all aspects of your playing – not only in your lessons or your practice session.

No matter what I do, I cannot play this passage. What am I doing wrong?

This is true with any musician. It happens. In most cases, the simplest explanation comes down to breaking down the passage into smaller (and maybe even smaller) parts.

The first thing that comes to mind is posture. Every movement made on your instrument is posture. It isn't enough to say, "I have a good bow hold" or "my violin is held correctly". These are static positions.

When you play your instrument, you are in motion. The problem passage may require that you isolate where your posture needs to be at the right time both for the left hand/arm or right hand/arm. It could be related to how you prepare your fingers both mentally and physically.

Equally important, mental preparation is crucial when learning passages. If you stop playing and analyze the passage visually, you may find that you have been making aural assumptions instead of reading the notes.

I think I play very well, but my recordings never sound right. Is it a bad recording?

We have all been down this path. Instead of dismissing what you heard, listen carefully to the recording. What doesn't sound right? Is it related to intonation and/or bowing, counting, or something else?

Do not become discouraged. The fact you performed is a great accomplishment. However, you now have the option to improve on your accomplishments.

You may need to re-train your ear to become more critical (constructively) about your intonation and textures. Also, understanding how to interpret what you think you hear in your head and how to physically produce that sound expectation. In many cases, I find it is the ear that needs to be re-trained. Practice Scales.

At this point, it is time to talk with your teacher to help define your areas that need TLC. Again, your improvement increases based on how detailed you are in your practice and daily practice.

Intonation and/or Bowing Issues

If any of these questions do not make sense, talk with your teacher to discuss the next step to help you get on track with your playing. As a quick reference guide, click [here](#) to learn a bit more about posture.

Check your posture while practicing scales.

Take small steps toward success.

As you get use to the new training, you can combine methods to improve your ability.

Always, always, always play with correct (dynamic) posture...always.

Do I have to practice bowing technique and fingering exercises to improve my playing or is it just a waste of time?

No, it is not a waste of time. Yes, you will improve faster than attempting to figure it out only by feel. I would strongly challenge you to try what is said in this guide to the letter.

To show improvement or increased ability, it requires:

- mental focus on detail work for both the aural and physical aspects of playing
- a mental focus on the research of musical style and phrasing.
- applied methods through consistent daily practicing

There are no short cuts to anything that is quality. Once you have achieved a new quality, you own it.