



CGU

Classical Guitar University

Technique

I. Effective Practice



Technique

1. Practice Systems

Setting yourself up for optimum results

1. What practice system have you found to give the most effective and consistent results?

- For example: practicing technique in the morning, creating a formula for each practice session, limiting your practice time, etc.

2. How do you create and sustain motivation to practice?

- Are there any tools or resources you've used to boost your motivation? If so, what are they and why did they work?

3. Do you have any methods for increasing your self awareness during practice?

- Do you use any tools (recording, video, etc.) for increasing your self awareness when you practice? If so, what are those and how does it work?

4. Do you set goals for your playing and practice?

- Are your goals short term, or long term, or both? Do you find goal setting to help give focus to your practice? If so, in what way does goal setting provide focus to your practice?

1. The practice system I've used for many years:

One thing I find fascinating about our behavior towards practice is that **we very often know what we should do, but we don't do it.**

Basic fundamentals (chords, scales, shifting, etc.) are very often neglected in practice, even though we know they're some of the most important facets of playing.

I want to give you a system of practicing that can make working on the fundamentals an automated process.

This process will eventually turn into a habit, meaning that **practicing your necessary daily skills will be a natural and automatic part of your work.**

I want to share with you the system that I have used everyday for years. I've experimented with a lot of ways to practice and find this the most effective. I've given this to students and colleagues and they have testified that it worked very well for them.

Turn off all possible distractions (phone, tablet, computer, etc.)

Distractions suck and they happen very often in this age of digital machines that constantly beep. By taking these distractions away, it allows us to give our 100% attention to our given task/s. It gives us a peace of mind that we won't get led on to answering emails or taking calls or seeing what our friends posted on Facebook. Let's face it, do those really need to be addressed immediately? Will it really do any harm to wait 45 minutes max to answer that email or phone call or check that Facebook post?

Set a timer for 45 minutes

Setting a timer is honestly one of the most valuable habits I've learned in regards to practice. It makes us **value the time we have** and strive to make the most of it. I've found 45 minutes to be an ideal amount, it's not too long to create fatigue or lose concentration and not too short, which allows us to get into a flow, get warmed up and have enough time to work with ideas.

15 minutes to work on the basics

I've found that working on the basics for 15 minutes before I work on pieces to be golden.

This is akin to athletes who have routines or warm ups as a standard part of their training.

30 minutes to work on pieces and more advanced things

I have found this amount of time just right. It's long enough to get into a flow and get really involved in your pieces, but short enough so that you don't waste time or feel like your practice is aimless.

Once the timer chimes, stop practicing immediately

It's important to stop when the timer chimes so that **we don't get into the habit of playing past our allotted time.**

Reward yourself with a nice 5 - 10 minute break.

Rewarding yourself is more important than you might think. It makes you addicted to the thing you just did to reward yourself.

You want to get addicted to practicing, right? I recommend doing something fun, relaxing and non-music related.

All of these steps are important - taking one of them out or drastically altering them can take away the system's effectiveness.

I recommend doing this system at times of the day when you're less likely to get really important emails or phone calls. I also recommend doing this for general health reasons and happiness - set aside times during the day where you switch off all distractions; TV, phone, tablet - all of it. This will take away stress and make you a happier person.

Aim to practice at least twice a day

2 x 45 minutes = 1.5 hours

30 Minutes of technique

(15 minutes musical technique, 15 minutes physical technique

1 hour of pieces

(5 -10 minutes of memorization before or after you practice pieces on the guitar)

2. Five Methods for Manufacturing Motivation

Are you one of those people who have so much motivation to practice that it is on your mind almost constantly? Is practicing the first thing you think of when waking up and the last thing before going to sleep? Do you even dream of practicing while you're sleeping?

If like me you answered yes to all of the above, then you could probably be classified as unusual... I probably do obsess about practice a little too much. If you answered no to most or all questions, then congratulations on being a relatively normal person!

But maybe you do want to increase your motivation, so that your practicing is really consistent? Maybe you want to be inspired to practice as soon as you wake up? Maybe you wish to cherish some special moments you had practicing earlier in the day before you go to sleep?

If you do want more motivation, then I believe these habits can help you as they've helped students and myself personally.

Manufacturing Method #1: Make your practice space comfortable and easy

1) Make your practice space a place you enjoy being in

Make it comfortable for you. Maybe the acoustics are better in another room, so you enjoy practicing there more. Perhaps there's a particular smell, charm or aesthetic about one particular room that makes you feel comfortable and stress-free there.

Sometimes changing our practice locations every now and then can be really refreshing!

2) Make sure the room you are in has all the tools you require within easy reach.

This includes but is not limited to your timer, metronome, coloured pencils, scores, music stand, guitar rest, guitar, guitar stand, recording device, nail files and buffers, etc. etc.

Manufacturing Method #2: Be patient

It's often said that patience is a virtue; I believe it's a habit.

Think of practicing like planting a garden. No matter what you do, the plants will grow slowly, never from seed to tree in an instant. So in music, no matter what new information or habits you acquire, no matter how life changing and amazing it is, your garden will always take time to grow. Think of all the new things you acquire as new seeds for your garden. Tend to your garden with love, kindness and discipline and those seeds will slowly but surely grow into wonders beyond your imagination.

Manufacturing Method #3: Study and listen each day

A little bit of reading and listening each day can go a long way. It could be new or old. I often find myself re-listening to my favorite albums and re-reading my favorite books fairly often. Make them easy to access so you won't have excuses for not reading or listening.

Manufacturing Method #4: Enjoy practicing

Try to keep note on how you feel while you practice. Are you stressed, worried or angry? If you feel negatively towards practice, chances are you will slowly begin to detest it. Here's my suggestion:

Every time you feel a negative thought emerging, replace it with a positive thought.

This could be non-music related. For example, if you start to feel angry because you're practicing something and it's just not working, think of a happy memory you had with a loved one. Or think of an inspirational recording of the piece you're working on. How did you feel during those moments? Once you change your thinking, your actual practice habits should improve too.

Enjoyment helps you learn deeper and more effectively.

Manufacturing Method #5: Give your practice a goal, even if it's an illusion

Now, we're not all concert artists giving hundreds of concerts throughout the year. But we can pretend to be if we wanted to. When I don't have a solo concert coming up for a while, it can be easy to drift around and practice without a clear goal. One day I'd be practicing one set of pieces and another day brings another set of pieces. Not too long and we can be led far astray. Remember the garden analogy - we don't want to be growing different gardens all over the place.

Create a mock program and stick it on your fridge

Usually the goal of practice is for a performance (though this certainly doesn't have to be the case). So when I don't have a real concert coming up soon, I make a mock program and print it out as though I were really going to have a concert.

- You can really get the creative juices going in thinking about how your repertoire would work best as a program.

- Don't be afraid to aim high if you want to. Go ahead and write Carnegie Hall as the venue on your program if you like. Your imagination has no limits.

- Another plus is that if a concert opportunity does come up unexpectedly, you're prepared for it!
Or you could turn this illusion into a reality yourself and book an actual venue, date etc.

Write down your practice goals everyday and reflect on how it would feel to achieve them

- Writing and reflecting each day helps you keep track on what you need to focus on.
- Writing and reflecting helps you change your identity. As you're writing and reflecting, imagine that you are already accomplishing your goals - visualize how it feels.
- Share your goals with fellow CGU members

3. Increasing your self awareness

Self awareness is an extremely important ingredient for healthy practicing. Without it, our progress. And the quality of our practice suffers.

When I think of self awareness, I think of dancers practicing in the studio. Have you ever been in a dance studio before? What do you always see there?



Mirrors!

Dancers always practice while surrounded by mirrors.

Dancing is a physical art and so it's important for the dancer to observe themselves.

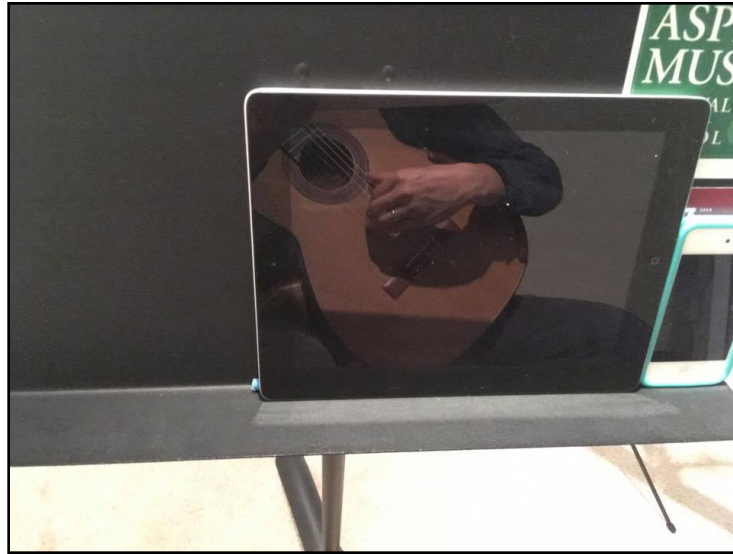
Music is physical, aural, and analytical: we must find ways to observe our physical selves, the sounds we're producing and the thoughts that we have.

Visual mirrors:

A mirror is one of your best teachers

Now, mirrors are not always the most portable things to carry around. However, in this digital age there is almost always access to a screen. Yes, you can use those distracting devices for good use!

I often use my Ipad (with the screen switched off) as a mirror when I'm traveling. Just put it on the music stand and angle it to see one of your hands. I can also use it to record myself and it sounds pretty decent, so two birds with one stone! You can set it to the 'do not disturb' mode or turn the wi-fi off if you are prone to checking those emails and things.



But nothing beats a good old full body length mirror. These are light and portable enough to move around the home or studio. You can just lean it against a wall or door. If you don't have one yet, go get one!



Video

It's so easy in this day and age to record yourself! You'll have to do this a lot during your time in CGU, so please get used to it. Just a smartphone or tablet camera will usually do the trick.

Try and record yourself at least once a day. You will have lots of comments for yourself that will seem obvious when you watch the video back.

Another suggestion: keep on recording yourself playing the same thing until you're fully satisfied with it. Are there changes you want to make after the first take? Record again and make those changes. **It sometimes takes me 30-50 takes to get a small piece sounding just as I want it to!**

The biggest advantage about video is that you can also watch your body language and posture while you're playing. **Is it helping or hindering your musical communication?**

Aural mirrors:

Audio

You can also just use audio recordings as a tool of self assessment. What I like about this is that you can quickly make yourself sound better by adding some reverb. There are many free apps out there - I use Garageband for audio recording.

If you end up with something you're happy with, you can add a painting or picture to the recording and post it online. You can watch one I made [here](#).

Deep Listening

When practicing, we often spend so much time in analysis mode that we forget to just listen deeply to what we're doing. **It can help to close our eyes and take away the visual stimulus.**

Listen very carefully to the finest nuances in your playing:

- Tone: quality, timbre, contrasts, dynamics, attack, touch, phrasing
- Rhythm: rubato, timing, pacing, groove, articulation, accentuation

4. Setting Limits

One of the most common problems I've encountered as a teacher is that students practice too many things. Limit what they practice and they start to make huge progress.

Try to limit what you practice until the pieces become second nature for you to play. A great way to do this is to write a list of pieces that you want to play to your absolute best standard.

Setting limits helps you stay focused, progress faster and make the most of things. It encourages you to dig deeper, be creative and leave a lasting impression on yourself.

You can also be stringent about your technical and other work (sight reading for example.) Set yourself clear limits of what you will practice. This will help you think about why you're practicing them too - doing the same thing everyday with no purpose will lead you to feel something is amiss.

I will often create a package of pieces, technical exercises and studies for myself and my students. I suggest you do the same!

Guitar Recital

INTERVAL

Sample of what I give students Physical Technique

SHIFTING EXERCISES

Shifting is one of the most difficult technical aspects of guitar playing. Therefore it is important to practice shifting systematically so that our left hand and arm are ready for any situation.

The exercises here are taken from Carlevaro's Serie Didactica.

- *Ensure that the connection between each note is as legato as possible*
- *Use your arm to guide the hand (lead with your elbow)*
- *Use the minimum amount of pressure to fret each note*
- *Practice with a mirror*
- *Practice with dynamics*
- *Use a metronome for consistent tempo*

Adjacent Fingers

repeat on remaining strings



repeat on remaining strings



repeat on remaining strings



Musical Technique

C Major

“A pure, certain and decisive manner, full of innocence, earnestness, deepest religious feeling.”

“Completely pure. Its character is innocence, simplicity, naïvety and children's talk.”

“State of nature, virginal chastity and purity, lovely innocence of youth.”



L'Innocence - William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905)

Musical notation for C Major, showing various chord voicings and fingerings. The notation is presented in four staves, each containing several chord diagrams. The first staff includes two instances of an VIII³ chord. The second staff shows a variety of voicings with fingerings like 4-3-2-1 and 3-2-1. The third staff features chords such as III⁶, III⁴, and VIII³. The fourth staff includes chords like VIII³, VII⁴, and III⁴. Each diagram shows the placement of fingers (1-4) on the strings and the specific notes of the chord.

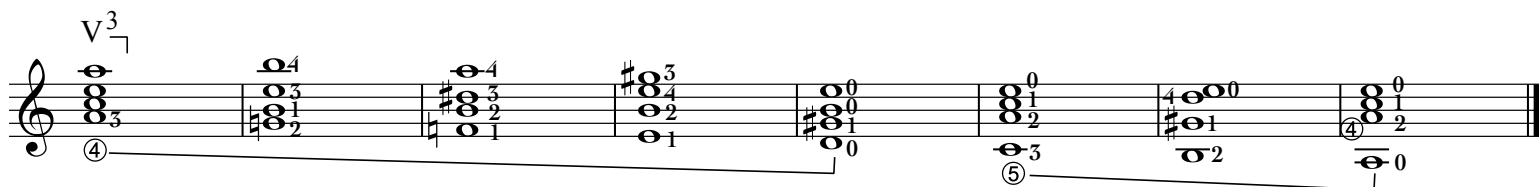
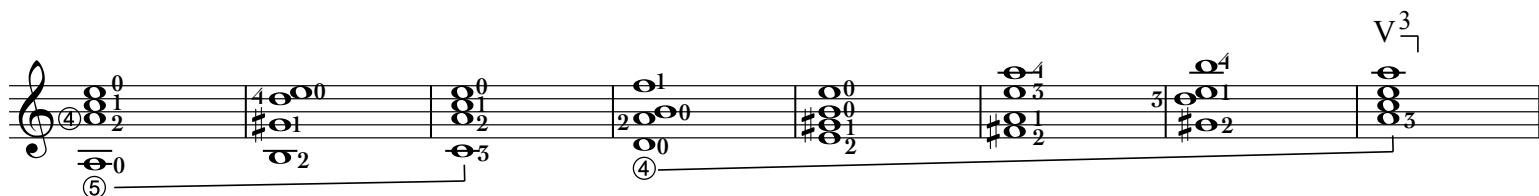
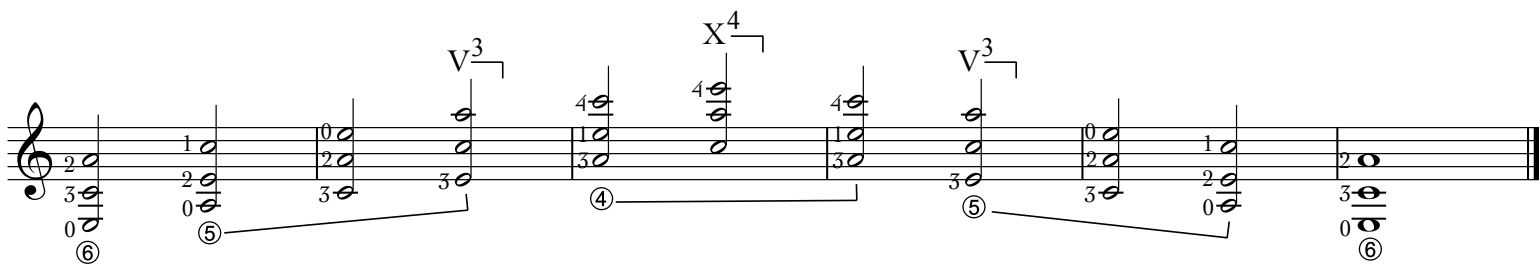
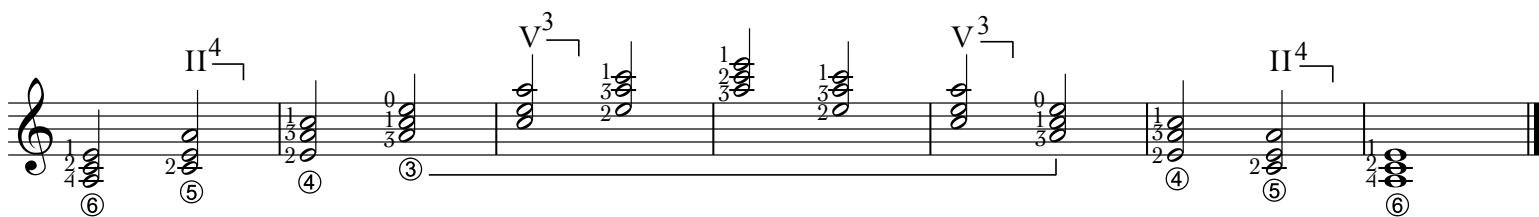
A Minor

"Pious womanhood and tenderness of character"

"Expressive of tender, womanly feeling. Most effective for exhibiting the quiet melancholy sentiment of Northern nations. A minor also expresses sentiments of devotion mingled with pious resignation."



The Mourning Virgin - Hans Memling (c. 1433-194)



SCALES IN MAJOR AND MINOR KEYS

By J.K. Mertz

(Edited and Formatted by Daniel Nistico)

“Use the same right hand fingerings as the C Major and A Minor scales for the remaining keys”

or use

Standard Fingerings

i m i m
i a i a
m a m a
and reverse all

Non-standard Fingerings

p i p i
p m p m
p a p a
p c p c

i c i c
m c m c
a c a c
and reverse all

C Major

Right Hand

Left Hand

Cadence

A Minor

Cadence

D Major

Musical notation for the D Major scale in treble clef. The scale consists of the notes D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#, D. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 below the notes: D (0), E (1), F# (3), G (0), A (1), B (2), C# (0), D (1). The scale is repeated twice with a repeat sign at the end.

Musical notation for the D Major cadence in treble clef. It shows four chords: D major (D, F#, A), E major (E, G#, B), F# major (F#, A, C#), and D major (D, F#, A). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 below the notes. The cadence ends with a fermata over the final D note.

Cadence

B Minor

Musical notation for the B Minor scale in treble clef. The scale consists of the notes B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 below the notes: B (2), C (4), D (0), E (4), F (0), G (2), A (0), B (1). The scale is repeated twice with a repeat sign at the end.

Musical notation for the B Minor cadence in treble clef. It shows four chords: B minor (B, D, F), C minor (C, E, G), D minor (D, F, A), and B minor (B, D, F). Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 below the notes. The cadence ends with a fermata over the final B note.

Cadence

A Major

Musical notation for the A Major scale, ascending and descending, with fret numbers indicated below the notes.

Musical notation for the A Major cadence, showing a sequence of chords and a final whole note chord.

Cadence

F# Minor

Musical notation for the F# Minor scale, ascending and descending, with fret numbers indicated below the notes.

Musical notation for the F# Minor cadence, showing a sequence of chords and a final whole note chord.

Cadence

E Major

Musical notation for the E Major scale, ascending and descending. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The ascending scale is: E4 (0), F#4 (2), G#4 (4), A4 (5), B4 (4), C#5 (3), D5 (2), E5 (0). The descending scale is: E5 (1), D5 (2), C#5 (3), B4 (4), A4 (2), G#4 (1), F#4 (4), E4 (5), D4 (6).

Musical notation for the E Major cadence. It consists of six chords: E4 (0), F#4 (2), G#4 (4), A4 (0), B4 (1), C#4 (3), D4 (5), E4 (6).

Cadence

C# Minor

Musical notation for the C# Minor scale, ascending and descending. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The ascending scale is: C#4 (4), D#4 (1), E4 (2), F#4 (4), G#4 (3), A4 (2), B4 (1), C#5 (4). The descending scale is: C#5 (3), B4 (2), A4 (1), G#4 (4), F#4 (2), E4 (0), D#4 (3), C#4 (4).

Musical notation for the C# Minor cadence. It consists of six chords: C#4 (4), D#4 (2), E4 (0), F#4 (1), G#4 (3), A4 (5), B4 (3), C#4 (4).

Cadence

a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p a m i p

Musical notation for staves 7 and 8. Staff 7 is a treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 6/4 time signature. It contains a melodic line with eighth notes and rests, with accents (>) under the first, third, fifth, and seventh notes. Staff 8 is a treble clef with the same key signature and time signature, containing a melodic line with eighth notes and rests, ending with a double bar line and a fermata.

Musical notation for staff 8 with lyrics. The staff is a treble clef with a key signature of three sharps and a common time signature. The lyrics are *a m i a m i a m i* above the notes. The notes are quarter notes. Below the staff are four pairs of beamed eighth notes, each pair corresponding to a note above.

Musical notation for staff 9 with lyrics. The staff is a treble clef with a key signature of three sharps and a common time signature. The lyrics are *(i) a i a (i) a i a* above the notes. The notes are quarter notes. Below the staff are four pairs of beamed eighth notes, each pair corresponding to a note above.

Musical notation for staff 10 with lyrics. The staff is a treble clef with a key signature of three sharps and a common time signature. The lyrics are *a m i m a m i m* above the notes. The notes are quarter notes. Below the staff are four pairs of beamed eighth notes, each pair corresponding to a note above.

Musical notation for staff 11 with lyrics. The staff is a treble clef with a key signature of three sharps and a common time signature. The lyrics are *a m i m a m i m* above the notes. The notes are quarter notes. Below the staff are four pairs of beamed eighth notes, each pair corresponding to a note above.

Musical notation for staff 12 with lyrics. The staff is a treble clef with a key signature of three sharps and a common time signature. The lyrics are *(i) a i a i a i a (i) a i a i a i a* above the notes. The notes are quarter notes. Below the staff are four pairs of beamed eighth notes, each pair corresponding to a note above.

Musical notation for staff 13 with lyrics. The staff is a treble clef with a key signature of three sharps and a common time signature. The lyrics are *a m p i m i m i m i a m p i m i a m p i m i a m p i m i p i p i p* above the notes. The notes are quarter notes. Below the staff are four pairs of beamed eighth notes, each pair corresponding to a note above.