

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.

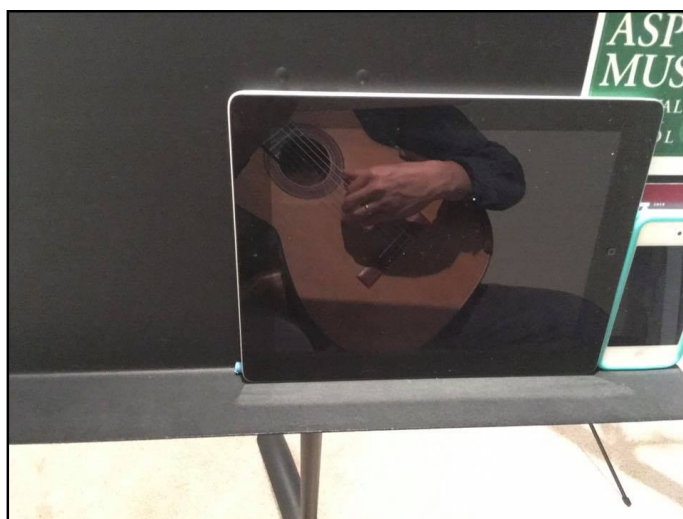
Music is physical, aural, and analytical: we must find ways to observe our physical selves, the sounds we're producing and the thoughts that we have.

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

The score is your journal: A mirror for thought

Write thoughts in your score

During a good practice, we may have many thoughts about the music: fingerings, dynamics, analysis, phrasing, story, etc. etc. etc.

If we don't write these in at the moment of inspiration, then it's very easy to forget about those details.

Use colored pencils and keep a written record on the score of every thought and intention you have.

A Closed World of Fine Feelings and Grand Design
andante teneroso Graeme Koehne
sim.
Guitar
p rubato espr.mf
p

The image shows a handwritten musical score for guitar, titled "A Closed World of Fine Feelings and Grand Design" by Graeme Koehne. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked "andante teneroso" and the dynamics include "sim.", "p rubato espr.", "mf", and "p". The score is heavily annotated with handwritten notes and markings in various colors (red, blue, green, pink). These annotations include fingerings (e.g., "1 2 3 4", "2 3 4", "4 2 4 2"), phrasing slurs, and other performance instructions. The score is divided into systems, with measure numbers 6, 11, 16, 21, and 25 clearly visible. The overall appearance is that of a personal practice journal where the composer or performer has recorded their thoughts and intentions during the practice process.

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.

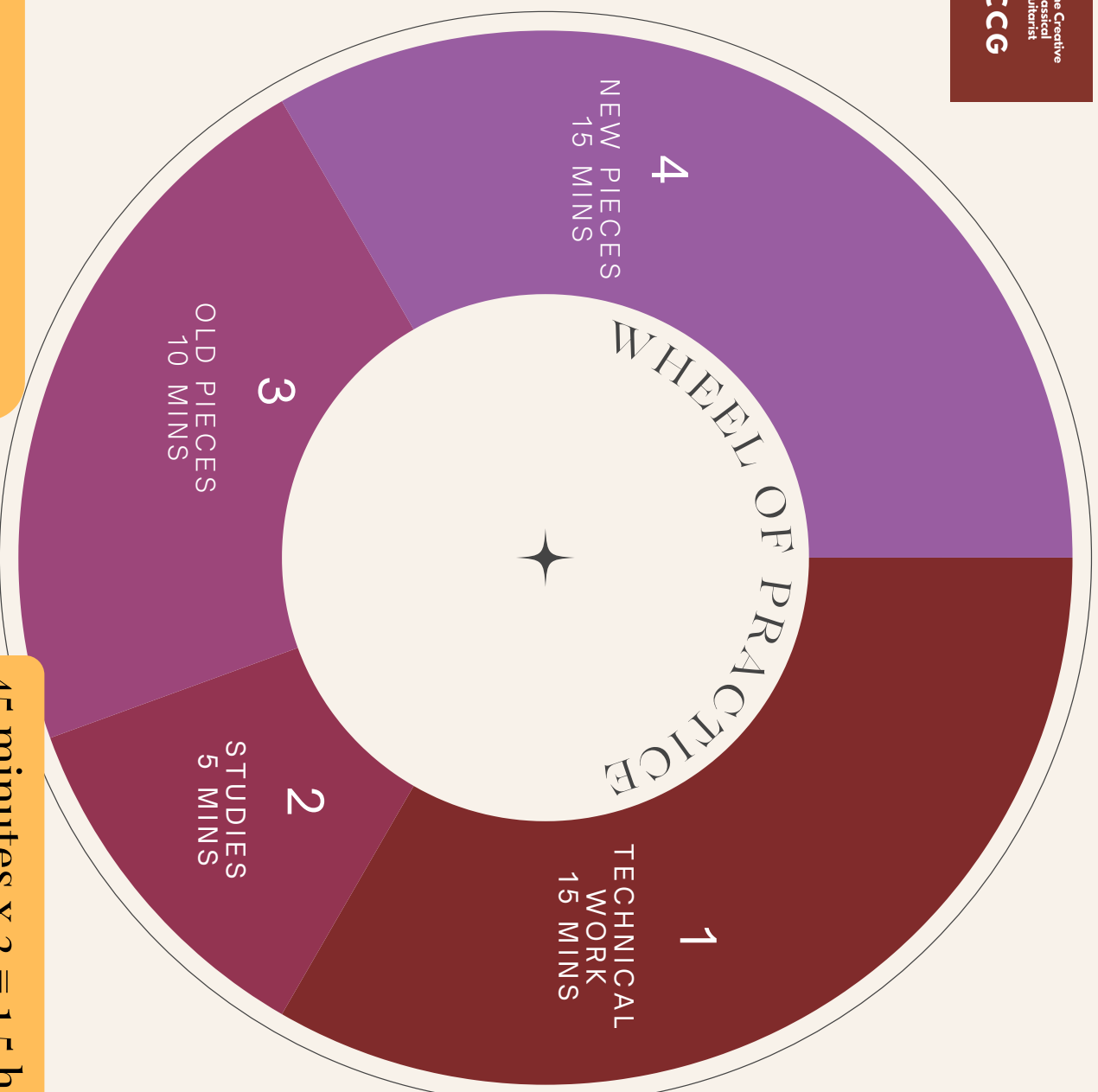
I will often create a package of pieces, technical exercises and studies for myself and my students. I suggest you do the same!



Guitar Recital

INTERVAL



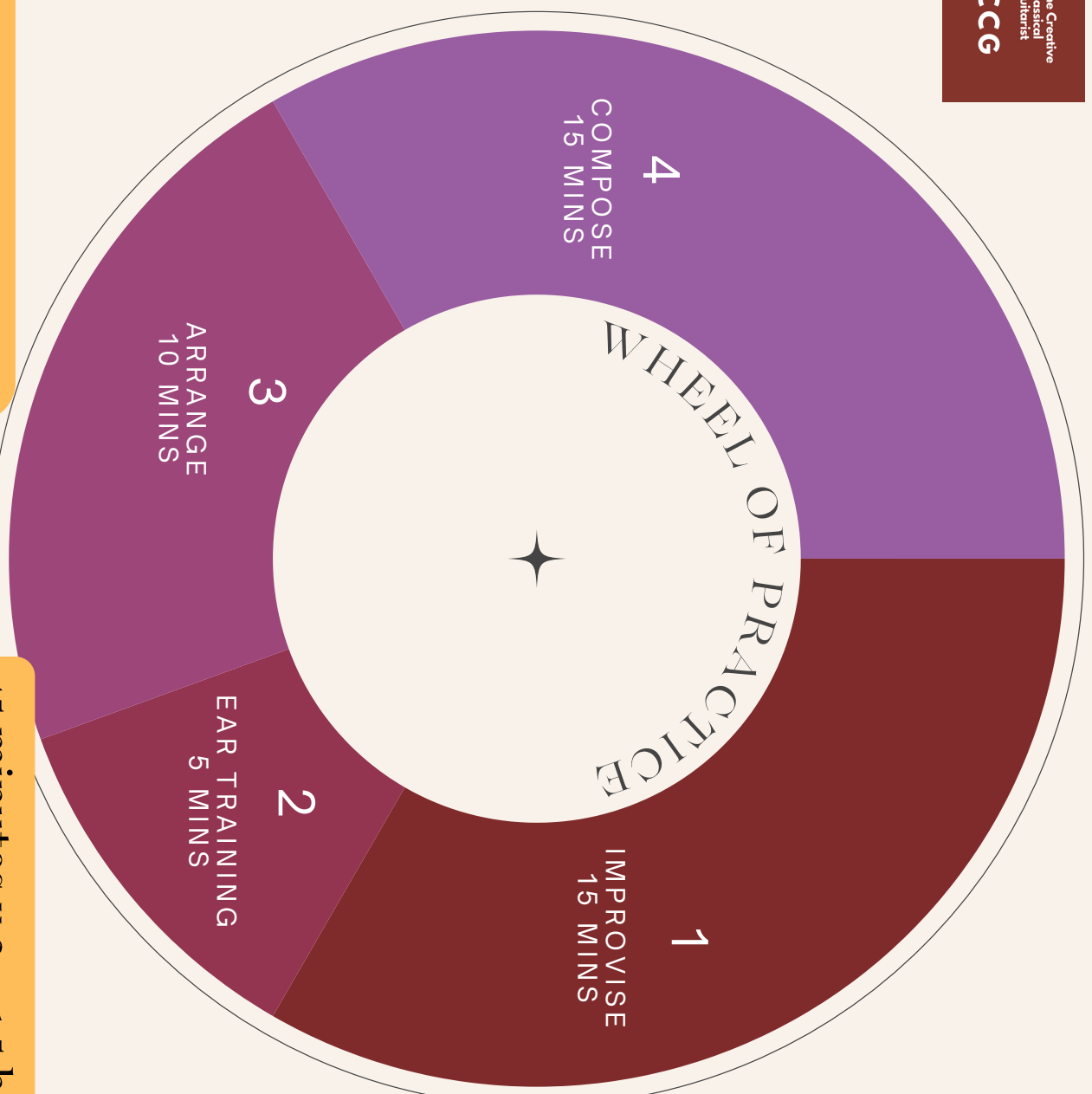


45 minutes

45 minutes x 2 = 1.5 hours

45 minutes x 3 = 2.15 hours

45 minutes x 4 = 3 hours



45 minutes

45 minutes x 2 = 1.5 hours

45 minutes x 3 = 2.15 hours

45 minutes x 4 = 3 hours

Golden Routine

This simple, yet effective routine ensures you get a balanced practice while also giving you a sense of accomplishment as you go.

Aim to practice the materials you put into this routine for a minimum of 3 months and then create a new one once all categories are mastered.



1. Technical Exercises (fretboard knowledge)

2. Studies

3. Old Pieces

4. New Pieces



YEARLY PRACTICE PLAN

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
Technical _____ Piece _____	Technical _____ Piece _____	Technical _____ Piece _____
APRIL	MAY	JUNE
Technical _____ Piece _____	Technical _____ Piece _____	Technical _____ Piece _____
JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
Technical _____ Piece _____	Technical _____ Piece _____	Technical _____ Piece _____
OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
Technical _____ Piece _____	Technical _____ Piece _____	Technical _____ Piece _____

