

What is practicing?

First, you need a concept of what practicing is. This is how I define it:

Practicing is the absorption, mastery and maintenance of skills.

Let's examine that more closely. Skills are things we use to create music. Skills can be techniques, concepts, rhythms, melodies, etc.

You can divide skills up into new, unlearned skills, and old, learned skills. Many people learn a few skills and continue practicing those same skills over and over. In order to advance, it is important to keep a balance of new and old skills in your practice routine.

Only working on things you can already do will take you nowhere.

The trap is you play old skills well and it is gratifying. Practicing new skills can be frustrating. People often keep playing the same stuff to make themselves feel better about their playing. Don't tread water only reviewing things you can already do. Work on old and new skills.

Absorption is a process. *Absorption* means learning how to play and apply those new playing skills. Absorption is the art of practicing; it is how to learn. There are a number of ways to learn skills. The other articles in this section list many ways to learn new skills.

Often times students are asked "Do you know [something they were supposed to learn]?" And they reply, "Oh, yes. I learned it." But when they play it back they fumble through it, get stuck, or need to look at something for a reference. They are *familiar with it*, but they have not yet *mastered* it.

Mastery is a result. *Mastery* means absorbing a new skill so well you have access to it whenever you need it. Some skills can be mastered in an hour; other skills take decades to master. If someone were to shake you awake you at 3 a.m. and asked you to play something and you could, you probably have it mastered. If you need to play through something once or twice before you can make it through it, you haven't mastered it yet.

Mastery means being able to execute at will. You will know when you really have something mastered. It will feel effortless. Keep in mind it is possible to play an instrument fairly well without having hardly anything mastered at all.

Maintenance means to review those skills you have mastered. Many learned skills need to be used consistently if you want them ready at will. It's very easy to forget skills like reading, fingerings, techniques, and the like if you don't use them.

To practice is to absorb, master and maintain skills.