

Introduction

You've probably heard the expression 'practice makes perfect'. But it's not just the quantity of practice that's important; it's the quality. With the aid of *Improve your practice!*, you will begin to develop ways of making the most out of your practice sessions – however long they are. What's more, you'll also find that your wider musical skills of aural, theory, sight-reading, improvisation and composition develop alongside. And the fun playing cards are guaranteed to liven things up no end! So good luck, and let's get started ...

Here's what you do:

Before you start

Get out your scissors and cut each playing card to size. As you work through each grade, add the new cards to your deck so you have even more to choose from.



1 Be a musical detective

When you begin a new piece, first complete *Explore your piece*. You may want to fill in all the boxes in one go or spread your detective work over a week or two.



2 Warm up

Begin each practice session with some warm-ups. Your teacher will write some down on the warm-ups page for you to choose from.



3 Without music

Choose the piece you are going to focus on in your practice and deal yourself two to three cards from the 'Without music' pack. Work through the activities without looking at the music.



4 With music

Now (using the same piece) deal yourself between two to four cards from the 'With music' pack and work through those activities with the music open.

5 You choose

Complete your practice with a further activity of your own choice – playing one of your other pieces, some other scales, doing some sight-reading, composing a piece – and always be thinking about what the week's special feature might be (see page 20).

important

You may want to concentrate on just one piece in a practice session, or perhaps work at several. Deal yourself different cards for each piece.

- 10** Write down all the dynamics that occur, including *dim.* and *cresc.* List them in order of soft – loud:

- 11** Write down any other markings (such as staccato, slurs, accents etc.) and their meanings:

- 12** How would you describe the character or mood of the piece?

- 13** How will you communicate this in your performance?

- 14** Find out something interesting about the composer:

- 15** Are there any difficult rhythms (or repeated rhythm patterns) in this piece? Write them down here, and then clap them:

- 16** Is there anything particularly challenging in the piece? Which bars will need special practice?

Useful stuff

Bear in mind that these dates are intended as a guide only.

<i>Composer dates</i>	<i>Period</i>
c.1425–1600	Renaissance
c.1600–1750	Baroque
c.1750–1820	CLASSICAL
c.1820–1915	<i>Romantic</i>
c.1915–2000	20th Century
2000 +	21 st Century

Notes

Too tired to practise?

Then do one of the following activities instead:

1. Practise away from the piano – just sit down with the piece you're learning and hear it through in your head. Think particularly about the character.
2. Listen to some music – another piece by the same composer, a piece by another composer living at the same time, or some music in the same style. Your teacher will help.
3. Do a **PEP** analysis on the piece you are learning:
P is for *problems* – decide what problems you still have to solve, technical or rhythmic for example. Make a note of them.
E is for *expression* – what will you be trying to convey in your performance?
P is for *practice* – the next practice! What in particular will you practise in your next session? Write your intentions down.