

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.

Before you start

Using scissors, 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.

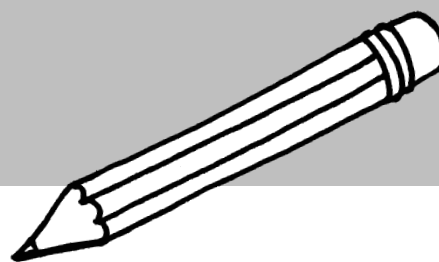
5 You choose

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.

Explore your piece



1 Title

2 Composer

3 Period



4 What does the title tell you about the music?

**5 What key is the piece in? Are there any modulations in the piece?
Which keys does it travel through?**

6 Are there any scale and arpeggio patterns (including dominant and diminished 7ths) in the music? In which bars do they occur?

7 Are there any sequences in the piece?

8 Explain the time signature. Does it change? What will you count?

9 Write down all the markings (e.g. articulation, accentuation, ornamentation etc.) and their meanings:

- 10** Write down all the dynamics. Ask your teacher if there are sufficient markings to give a stylistic performance. You may consider adding more of your own.

- 11** How would you describe the character or mood of the piece? Does it remain the same throughout? How will you communicate this in your performance?

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

- 13** Can you find another composer who writes in the same style?

- 14** Are there any particular rhythms or repeated rhythmic patterns in the piece? Write them down here, and then clap them:

- 15** What are the technical challenges in the piece?

- 16** Which bars will require special practice?