

DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME PRACTICING !!!

*How To Get The Most Out
of Your Practice Time*



DRUM LESSONS IN LA.COM

Stefano Ashbridge



Enjoy The Journey

What do you dream about being able to do on the drums? Is it playing a mind blowing drum solo? Is it making people bob their heads to your drumming? Whatever it is, you can make it happen working on the right things consistently.

The time you spend practicing your instrument determines how well you'll play it. The best drummers in the world got there by practicing and you can get there too.

It all starts with your attitude. You won't want to do too much practicing if you think of it as boring or really difficult, but you can make it **fun**. Your enjoyment and motivation to practice will keep growing when you learn to get consistent results from your efforts.

With that in mind, here are some guidelines to help make your practice time efficient, effective, and hopefully inspiring. The intent here is not necessarily to tell you *what* to practice, but *how* to practice.

It's worth noting that although this guide is geared towards drummers, the principles here apply to practicing any instrument, not just the drums. Some of these guidelines may seem obvious but make sure you are actually implementing them. Here we go.

What Do You Want?

What do you want to achieve with your drumming? Do you want to be a professional jazz musician? Do you want to play heavy metal just for fun? What kind of a drummer would you like to become? Once you're clear on that, work backwards to figure out the specific things you need to practice to get there. That way you'll make sure that what you practice is moving you closer to your goals. Certain exercises develop your timing and some develop your technique. Other exercises develop your creativity and sense of musical styles, etc.

Each day's practice is a piece of the puzzle that makes up the big picture of your long term goals. Knowing what to practice and why you're practicing it will help you to stay focused and to continue to make progress. I recommend finding a qualified teacher to help you create and implement an efficient practice routine.

Keep Track

Keep a list of the things that you are planning to practice on specific days. Use a [practice log](#) to write down when and what you practice. Write down metronome settings and other info about your practice sessions. This will tell you what needs attention and will show you your progress over time. If you revisit something you were practicing months ago, it will help to have notes about where you left off. (Vary your routine slightly to keep your practicing from getting stale.)

Over time, keeping track of your progress will show you how far you've come in your playing and give you motivation to keep going.

For the same reasons, record audio and video of your practices. It is very difficult to objectively critique what you are playing while you are playing it. Watching or listening back to even part of your practice can point out things that need work that you may not have noticed otherwise. (This is also good practice for when you go into the studio to record.)

A quick note about making mistakes: Although they can be frustrating, the mistakes you make when practicing are part of your musical growth. Expect to make them. Working to fix those mistakes is what is going to make you a great player.

Having the right mindset about making mistakes when practicing will have a big effect on how fast you master your instrument.



Organize

It's a good idea to keep your practice space and materials organized so you know where everything is located. It will save you time and will also make it easier to get started if you don't have to do too much just to get going. I recommend keeping a tool kit with spare parts close by, in case something breaks and needs to be replaced. (You should also take this tool kit with you when you perform).

Quality AND Quantity

It's obvious that the more you practice, the better you get, but the *quality* of time is just as important as the amount of time spent practicing. You can get more out of a 20 minute *focused* session than four hours of scattered playing. Also, it's important to practice consistently. Don't let too much time go by between your practice sessions. Three 20-minute sessions in a week are better than one 1-hour practice session per week.

Be honest with yourself about how much you practice. An hour practice session can turn out to be 20 minutes of actual practicing because of disruptions, phone calls, and snack breaks. There is nothing necessarily wrong with any of these things, just don't include them as practice time.

Playing vs. Practicing

There is a difference between *practicing* your instrument and *playing* your instrument. Many drummers start their practice session practicing for a little bit and then spend the remainder of time playing what they already know how to play well. Although time spent just playing your instrument is a good and important thing, you will improve most through focused, consistent, measured, and specific practicing.

Generally, the point of *practicing* is to improve the things you can't play well and *playing* is using what you know how to do to make music. That is not to say that you should never include playing your instrument as part of your practice time. There is great value in just playing and creatively exploring your instrument. Just keep in mind when you are practicing and when you are playing.

Warm Up

Spend the first part of your practice time warming up, even if it's just for a few minutes. The point is to get the blood flowing and your hands (and feet) relaxed and ready to play. Strenuous practicing without warming up can cause damage to your muscles and tendons over time. Start slowly and don't make the warm up itself too strenuous.

I like warming up with the rudiments. The rudiments are the ABCs of drumming and they take you through a variety of stickings and accents. They are also an excellent way to gain control and dexterity. You can practice the rudiments with both your hands and your feet.

You can also use part of whatever you are working on as your warm up. You don't necessarily need a specific routine.

While you warm up, take notice of your grip. Are the sticks moving effectively in your hands? Take a look at your stroke. Are the left and right sticks reaching the same rebound height? Another thing that's frequently overlooked is posture. Are you sitting up straight? Is your weight balanced? Are your arms hanging by your side naturally? Taking care of these fundamentals will ensure that your drumming will grow from a solid foundation.

Stay Loose

Excessive tension in your hands, forearms, and legs will make it difficult to play with speed and precision. Stay loose. Don't grip your sticks any tighter than it takes to hold them. Learn to apply techniques such as the Moeller stroke, rebound strokes, and finger control to play with proper volume and dynamics. Let the sticks do the work for you.

One thing you can do to work on playing without tension is to play a beat or a rudiment quietly and slowly. That usually makes your muscles loosen up if they're not already. That is how your muscles should be when you play at all times. Take a mental picture of how that feels. Then gradually speed up and get louder. Notice when you tense up. When you do, stop and start over. By doing this, you are training your muscle memory to stay loose.



Concentrate

Playing and performing music requires a certain level concentration. You must be aware of not only what you are playing, but also what the other musicians you play with are playing. So when you practice, make sure you can concentrate. Try to minimize distractions that can take your attention away from what you're practicing.

This may require the cooperation of others. Let people around you know that it is important that you have uninterrupted time to practice your instrument and work with them to make it happen.

Once you have internalized what you are practicing, it can be good to try to play while other things are going on. This can strengthen your concentration, but only after you have a good grip on what you're playing.

Slow Down

Practicing slowly makes it easier for your muscle memory to internalize the physical action of what you're learning. Once you can play what you are working on slowly, work with a [metronome](#) to increase the speed. Don't make a habit of practicing things faster than you can play evenly and with control. The speed will come in time.

Try increasing the tempo in increments of 5 to 10 bpm (beats per minute). For example, start practicing something at 40 bpm. Once you feel you can play it comfortably, increase the tempo to 45 bpm, then 50 bpm, etc. It may seem tedious to do it this way, but it's the best way to work something up to speed and less frustrating than just trying to barrel your way through it.

The other advantage to doing this is that you will be able to sense small changes in speed. When you play a piece of music repeatedly, you internalize the tempo. If you are asked to play it a little slower or faster, it can be difficult to keep it steady because of wanting to gravitate to the internalized tempo. Practicing this way will help you maintain the tempo.

Break It Down

If you notice you are repeating the same mistakes when playing something, focus on just that part before continuing. When working on a difficult song or a long piece of music, work on it in sections.

Count It Out Loud

In order to play in time and keep a groove, everything you play needs to line up to the subdivisions of the meter. This is why playing to a metronome is so important. Counting out loud will make it easier to see where you are off, rhythmically. If you are not sure of the timing of what you are practicing, count it out loud.

Eventually, counting will become second nature and you will know exactly where you are in the measure without having to count. Then you will be able to focus on the music you are playing and the other musicians you play with.

If You Can Play It, You Can Say It

If you can verbalize what you are attempting to play, it will be easier to execute it. Try sounding out the beat or fill you are trying to play.

Cover Your Ears

If you play loudly, even for a short period of time, your hearing can become damaged over time. Wear earplugs or noise reducing headphones if you practice or play loudly. Your hearing is delicate and your ears are very important to you as a musician. It's no fun to have constant ringing in your ears from the damage caused by repeated exposure to extremely loud sound.

Give Me a Break

Our minds can only concentrate at an optimal level for so long. If you find yourself not being able to focus or play well after practicing for a while, take a short break and allow your mind and muscles to relax for a bit. Practicing in blocks of 45 minutes to an hour is optimal (10-20 minutes for really young players). You can do something musically related on your break like reading a drumming magazine, watching a drum video, or listening to songs to analyze what the drummer is doing.

Just Get Started

Often times when we are busy with other things or when we just don't feel like practicing, it's easy to skip it all together. In that case, just do it for a couple of minutes. You'll most likely find that you will want to keep practicing. The trick is to just get started.

Try to have your practice sessions at the same time of the day if you can (preferably when you know you are most productive). If you make practicing a habit, you will come to expect it.

If you are having trouble finding any time at all to practice, try [writing](#) down everything you do in a day. Do that for a whole week. Look at your list and see where you can find pockets of time to practice. See if there are things you can substitute for some practice time; even if its 5 minute increments throughout the day.

You don't necessarily need to be at your instrument to practice. You can bring a metronome and drum sticks with you wherever you go or tap out rhythms with your hands. If you really want to improve as a musician, you will find time to do it. **Mastery requires more dedication than motivation.**

To build up the habit of practicing, try this. For one month, make a commitment to practice for just 5 minutes, 3 to 5 days a week, for the whole month. After you have made a habit of doing it consistently for a month, increase the time to 10 minutes, 3 to 5 days a week, for a month. Then 20 minutes, then 40 minutes, and then 60 minutes, or as long as you want.

Patience and Persistence

You'll find that some things take more time than others to learn and it can be frustrating when you don't see results right away. Keep at it. Mastering your instrument is a gradual process and takes time. If you are practicing consistently and efficiently, you will see results.

When you reach certain goals, take the time to acknowledge and celebrate the work you put in to accomplish them.

Do things to keep yourself inspired. Go see your favorite bands play live. Try to discover new music. Listen to the music that made you [want to play](#) in the first place. Your musical tastes may have changed since then, but taking a trip down "memory lane" can bring back the feelings of inspiration.



Enough Already

At some point you will have practiced something enough to decide that it's time to move on. In general, I recommend you use two factors to decide when that will be. The first is when you've *internalized* what you're working on and can play it without having to think about it too much. The second is when you can *apply* it in its proper context. For example, if you're working on a specific fill, make sure you can transition from playing a beat into the fill and back into the beat again. Also make sure you know when to use that fill properly.

One More Thing

I want to end with a note on the importance of working with a qualified [teacher](#) that can guide you through your journey in developing your craft. Now, more than ever, you can find an almost endless supply of videos and media from which to learn (some good, some not so good). An experienced teacher can save you countless hours by guiding you to practice the specific things you need to get the result that you want.

They will also help you avoid bad habits that can hurt your playing and slow down your progress. A good teacher will also motivate you to keep at it. Having the accountability of regular lessons can help you commit to putting in the time to achieve your goals.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. It is my hope that it will help you get the most out of your practice time—so you become the musician you want to be. Feel free to send me any comments or questions at info@drumlessonsinfo.com.

Keep practicing,

Stefano Ashbridge
DrumLessonsInLA.com



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Drummer and educator Stefano Ashbridge has a passion for music that has taken him on an amazing journey of playing, teaching, recording, and touring internationally. He has spent the last two decades developing a successful teaching strategy that has helped hundreds of drummers to improve quickly and have fun learning the music they love.

Stefano has studied drum set percussion with world class drummers such as Zoro (Lenny Kravitz, New Edition) and Mark Schulman (Pink, Foreigner). He has also studied songwriting, audio engineering, and the music business.

Originally from Naples, Italy, he is working professionally in Los Angeles. Some of the bands Stefano has worked with include Brad Wilson of Stone, Rakit, Alan Ritchson, and Grammy nominee Derek Jordan. He also took home the "Electronica Drummer of The Year" award at the L.A. Music Awards.

