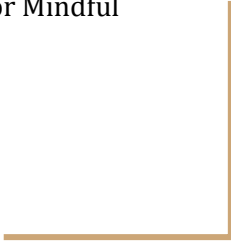




# Do it Again!

Creative Games and Techniques for Mindful  
Repetition



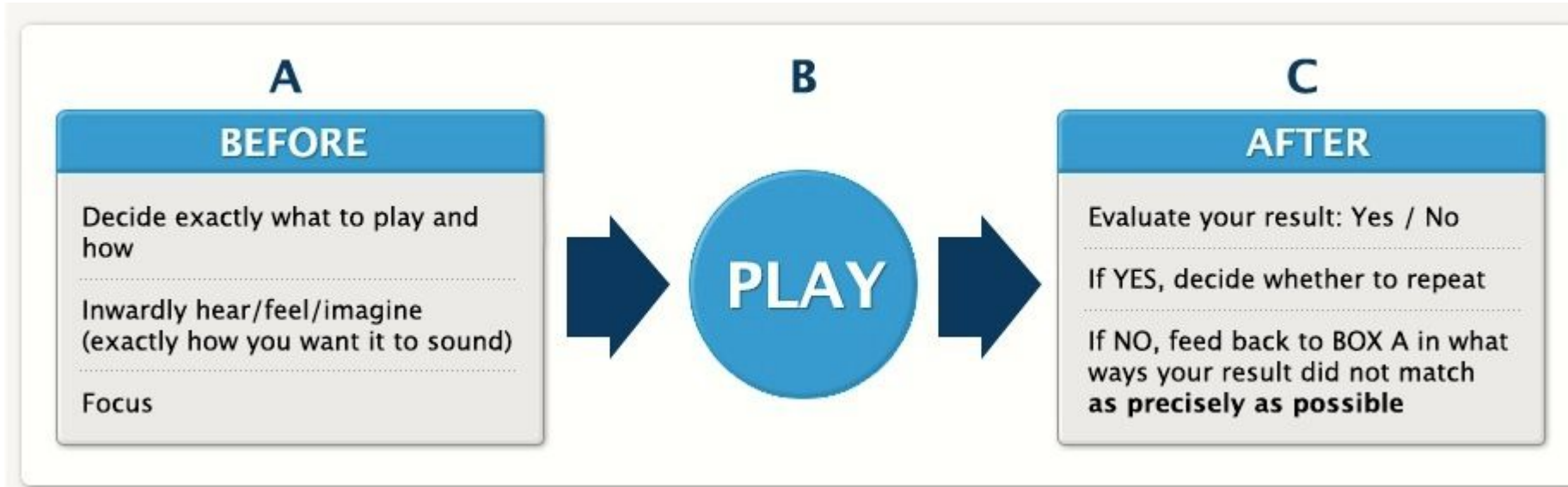
**What is mindful  
repetition?**

What I have achieved by industry and practice, anyone else with tolerable natural gift and ability can also achieve. --*J. S. Bach*

- We all know through personal experience that musical ability is acquired through practicing.
- There is a growing body of research devoted to what happens when musicians practice, and many debates (scientific and not) about the best ways to practice and improve.
- One thing that is very clear though is that ability is developed by the repeated firing of neurons and the subsequent coating of those neurons by a substance called myelin. The repetitions that cause this myelination, however, cannot be mindless or on “autopilot”. Myelination is achieved through what Daniel Coyle describes as “Deep Practice” in his book *The Talent Code*.

## Think ten times and play once--*Franz Liszt*

In his article "How To Manage Repetition in Practicing" Graham Finch describes this type of effective "Deep Practicing" as a sort of feedback loop.



# It's not necessarily the amount of time you spend at practice that counts; it's what you put into the practice. --Eric Lindros

- This chart was compiled by Lisa Maynard in her *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* article "The Role of Repetition in the Practice Sessions of Artist Teachers and Their Students"
- Each practice frame (except one) lasts less than 2 minutes
- The average duration of the item being practiced is only 6.3 seconds

**Table 1**  
Practice Data by Instrument and Level

Instrument Level	Duration of Practice Session (mins)*	Number of Practice Frames	Mean Practice Frame Duration (m:s)	Number of Perf. Trials	Number of Perf. Trials per Frame		Mean Perf. Trial Duration (secs)	Max. n of Perf. Tr. per Frame
					M	SD		
<b>Guitar</b>								
AT	63	36	1:45	421	11.7	6.6	9.0	29
AG	87	49	1:46	839	17.1	20.2	6.2	76
AU	74	19	3:53	333	17.5	18.0	13.3	43
BU	19	19	1:00	194	10.2	12.2	6.0	51
Overall	243	123	1:58	1787	14.5	15.9	8.2	-
<b>Piano</b>								
AT	39	96	0:25	595	6.2	3.9	4.2	19
AG	89	95	0:56	702	7.4	7.4	7.8	51
AU	84	167	0:30	1723	10.3	15.1	3.0	108
Overall	212	358	0:36	3020	8.4	11.3	4.2	-
<b>Saxophone</b>								
AT	32	23	1:23	334	14.5	19.6	5.7	86
AG	22	31	0:43	136	4.4	1.5	9.6	8
AU	24	16	1:30	193	12.1	16.3	7.2	17
BU	18	13	1:23	113	8.7	10.2	9.6	36
Overall	96	83	1:10	776	9.3	13.6	7.4	-
<b>Trombone</b>								
AT	40	23	1:44	143	6.2	4.4	16.8	19
AU	42	25	1:40	211	8.4	6.8	12.0	28
BU	13	13	1:00	98	7.5	6.4	8.0	26
Overall	95	61	1:34	452	7.6	5.9	12.7	-
<b>Viola</b>								
AT	86	60	1:26	857	14.3	15.2	6.0	67
AG	55	51	1:50	509	10.0	7.3	6.5	39
AU	42	19	0:40	384	20.2	17.2	6.6	60
BU	65	45	1:44	703	15.6	21.3	5.5	133
Overall	248	175	1:25	2453	14.0	15.8	6.1	-
ALL	894	800	1:07	8527	10.7	13.4	6.3	-

\* Durations do not include extended breaks.

**Ten dubious repetitions plus a single accurate one don't equal security.**

*--Gerald Klickstein in The Musician's Way*

- Most people engage in repetition when they practice, but often those repetitions are inefficient.
- If we do not actively teach students how to do repetitions and use repetitions ourselves in the classroom or lessons, students will not learn how to effectively practice.
- We must teach students how to develop and use their own feedback loops independently.
- We must help students develop techniques for mindful repetition of correct performances.
- Short, focused games are an effective way to keep students engaged with the repetitions.

**How can we motivate our students to engage in mindful repetition?**

**Pay attention to what your children are fascinated by, and praise them for their effort--*Carol Dweck***

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University lists 9 points to keep in mind when engaging children and adolescents

1. Follow children's lead
2. Elicit curiosity
3. Encourage spontaneous play
4. Prioritize social learning
5. Provide a challenge
6. Allow agency
7. Provide incentives sparingly
8. Praise the process, not the result
9. Be empathetic



# Ideas for Encouraging Mindful Repetition

# Thoughts on Using Practice Games

- Games should allow time for thought before and after repetitions
- Action should be short and focused
- Total time of the game should be fairly short
- The game should be designed to compliment student's existing interests and natural curiosity

# Practice Games

*The games presented are ideas that I have observed, collected and used over my years of teaching and learning. These are by no means invented by me, but are rather collected and in some cases modified slightly. There are a few games that I believe originated with specific individuals and I have made every effort to credit these individuals.*

The games are organized into the following categories, examining how to achieve repetitions when working on 5 different teaching points: posture, intonation, rhythm/articulation, tone, and phrasing/dynamics.

1. Games based on sound
2. Games based on physical feeling
3. Games based on imagination
4. Games based on social learning or other people in the environment
5. What to do if you aren't sure how to motivate your students

# Games Based on Sound

# Teaching Point: Posture

1. **Sound of your Seat:** Sit with your very best posture and listen to the sound. Try sitting hunched over, what does it sound like? Try standing, what does it sound like?
2. **Emergency Responders:** Demonstrate an “alarm” sound on your instrument (either a siren type sound or a bell). Tell students that their goal is to play a passage without the emergency responders coming to fix their posture. If students enjoy making you play the emergency responder noise, tell them that their “prize” for not having the responders come is that they can make the noise themselves.

# Teaching point: Intonation

1. **Ringing Tones:** Count how many seconds of ringing sound can you get. Can you get more seconds? Who can get the most? (Dr. Alice Ann O'Neill)
2. **Hits & Misses:** Try to play the pitch correctly and notice the sound. Try to play it sharp, then try to play it flat. How is the sound different? (Mr. Paul York)
3. **Hear the Beats!:** Have one student play a pitch or play a pitch on the piano and ask another student to match it. See what it sounds like if you are close or far away--do you hear how the sound waves crash into one another if you are not matching? You can also have students play different intervals, such as octaves or 5ths to hear the sound.

# Teaching point: Rhythm/Articulation

1. **Mix & Match:** Demonstrate aurally two different rhythms (or correct vs. incorrect rhythm). Students must identify which rhythm was performed. Students may then take turns performing the rhythms and having their peers guess which was played.
2. **Bumpy/Smooth:** Demonstrate staccato vs. legato playing. Have students identify which one sounds bumpy vs. smooth. Have students attempt these sounds on their instruments. Ask students to name songs that they know that are either bumpy or smooth. If you have older students use the word “pointed” instead of bumpy. (Dr. Alice Ann O’Neill)
3. **Lifted or Hammered:** Demonstrate a lifted articulation vs. a hammered (martele) articulation. Use the same process as above to allow students to practice the different sounds.

# Teaching Point: Tone

1. **Hear the Room:** listen to how your sound echos in the room. Can you hear your sound in the corners of the room? Try playing in a different place in the room. How does the sound change? Try playing facing a wall or a corner. If you have access to different areas, try playing in different rooms or outdoors.
2. **Name that Tone:** How many different kinds of tone (fluffy, dark, rich, etc.) can you think of? If you could give the sound an name what would you call it? What is your favorite tone? Does it have relatives? Can you play for the rest of the day using that tone?



# Teaching Point: Phrasing/Dynamics

1. **Silly Phrase:** Did you know that when we play music we have to decide how the notes are going to sound? Just like when we talk we have accents and emphases on different words. Try to play this phrase with the emphases you want. Try to play it in a silly way. What is the difference? Can you play it the way you want 3 times in a row? How many ways can you think of to play this phrase?
2. **Loud vs. Soft:** How loudly can you play your instrument? Does it still have a good sound? What does the room sound like when you play loudly? How softly can you play? Can the person in the back of the room hear you still?

# Games Based on Physical Feeling

# Teaching Point: Posture

1. **Fast Sit:** Find a good position for your instrument while seated. Stand up and then quickly try to find that position again. Try standing on one foot, then sit and find the position. Try a variety of postures or have students taking turn finding postures and then see how quickly they can sit with good posture.
2. **Head First:** Try balancing various objects on your head while playing. Be careful that the object won't hurt anything if it falls. Choose easy objects like a cloth to start--this can become frustrating if the object is too difficult. Let students go around the room to find fun objects to use.
3. **Herculean Task:** Have students place their instruments in a safe spot by their chair. Tell them they have 7 tasks to complete--in between each one they must sit and find their proper instrument posture. Try to find tasks that may be appealing to the student.

# Teaching point: Intonation

1. **High vs. Low:** Practice singing pitches while moving the body, for high pitches, hold the arms/hands above the head. For low pitches arms/hands are close to the ground. Try the activity with some people playing and have students demonstrate pitch levels. Demonstrate a glissando and have students mirror the sound with their body.
2. **Feel the Beats!:** Have one student sustain a pitch, then you play slightly sharp. Show the students with your hand how the soundwaves are moving very fast and small. Play a bit more sharp and show them how the sound waves are still moving fast, but are a bit bigger. Try the same by playing flat. Have students demonstrate the sound waves with their own hands and also take turns playing flat or sharp to a sustained pitch.  
(Dr. Alice Ann O'Neill)

# Teaching point: Rhythm/Articulation

1. **Body Percussion:** This is a somewhat obvious tool, but provides almost infinite opportunity for learning. Students may have fun using different body parts for different rhythms and to make different sounds. It is also helpful to point out different sounds made by different body parts (feet vs. hands)
2. **Found Percussion:** For the extremely active, you can assign stations throughout the room. Students must rotate through the stations and perform the rhythms with whatever materials they can find at that station.
3. **Musical Charades:** Demonstrate the rhythm through dance. Provide examples of motions that show the rhythm and motions that do not. Have students try to guess the rhythm that is shown either by playing, clapping, or writing their guess.

# Teaching Point: Tone

1. **Bag of Sound:** Put several items into individual bags--make sure to include some items that are rough or scratchy, smooth, soft, etc. Have students put their hand in the bag (or pull the item out if they are nervous about that) and demonstrate the sound of that object. If you are brave, you can include sticky, slimy, etc.
2. **Feel the Sound:** Demonstrate good vs. bad tone or different types of tone. Have students put their hands on the instrument to feel how it vibrates. Have students form partners take turns with this activity. Ask students if they can feel their instrument vibrating when they play.

# Teaching Point: Phrasing/Dynamics

1. **Act it Out:** Imagine the story that you are trying to tell with a particular phrase. What is at the beginning, middle, and end. Try to physically act out your story, then see if you can play the story on your instrument.
2. **Move the Sound:** When you play, how you move is what makes the sound. If you move in a big way, the sound will be larger. If you move in a small way the sound will be less. Imagine how you want to move to create loud or soft sounds, then try it on your instrument.

# Games Involving Imagination



# Teaching Point: Posture

1. **Role Play:** Who is your favorite TV character? How would they sit to play their instrument? Can you play like them? (If they choose someone who wouldn't sit properly go through a number of characters and then find someone who would sit well. You can take turns naming characters, ending with someone who sits properly. This does require you to know at least one character from a show they might watch)
2. **Nature:** Try to sit as if you are a big tree, imagine the different creatures on your branches. Think about the tree swaying in the breeze. Try to sit like a sunflower. Where are your roots? What else is tall? (Dr. Alice Ann O'Neill)

# Teaching point: Intonation

1. **Hear it in your head:** Close your eyes and hear what the piece sounds like. Can you imagine the pitches? Try to play the pitch and see if it matches what is in your head.
2. **Picture the Sound Waves:** Show the students what sound waves look like. Show them how different pitches and intervals can interact with one another. Have them imagine this while playing. Ask them what shapes each combination would make.
3. **Color the Sound:** Imagine what color a perfect octave sounds like. What color is it when it is out of tune? Listen for the pure colors of beautiful intonation. Try this with different intervals. If you want, draw them on a paper!

# Sound Wave Pictures



# Teaching point: Rhythm/Articulation

1. **Secret Code:** Different rhythms can sound like different words. Try making up a word that goes with your rhythms. See if you can make up several word/rhythm combinations and teach them to a friend. Try to talk to each other using your “code” by playing on your instrument.
2. **Story of a Journey:** Tell a story of someone traveling. At first the road is very smooth, then the road starts to get a bit bumpy, soon there is a huge bump. Play this on a scale of your choice. Ask the students how their journey goes and then play it!
3. **Animal Sounds:** What sound does a bird make? Play that on your instrument! What sound does a cow make? Can you play that?
4. **Letters:** Can you play the sound of a “p”? What about a “k”? Write a sentence on the board and try to play the consonants on a single pitch.

# Teaching Point: Tone

1. **Imagine Christmas:** Think about Christmas morning. Try to play as if you are playing on Christmas! What does it sound like? Try to think about your birthday, how does it sound different. What about the first day of school? (Dr. Alice Ann O'Neill)
2. **Dedicate the Song:** Who does this song remind you of? Try to play the song for them! (Dr. Alice Ann O'Neill)

# Teaching Point: Phrasing/Dynamics

1. **Playing on top of the Empire State Building:** Imagine that you are playing on top of the Empire State Building and your sound is going out over the whole city! Where else can you play? (Try the Grand Canyon, or try using places that they are learning about in school or traveled to recently)
2. **Lion vs. the Mouse:** Ask students which one is louder, a lion or a mouse. Have them play a phrase like the lion, then the mouse. Play them as other animals!

# Games Involving Social Learning

# Teaching Point: Posture

1. **5 Point Check:** Show students 5 points of good posture (I use head, shoulders, seat, knees, and feet). Put students into groups and see how many times they can each perform a successful 5 point check.
2. **Fix My Posture!:** Sit with horrible posture. Have students come up and fix your posture. Pair students up and let them pretend to have horrible posture so that their friends can fix it (Dr. Alice Ann O'Neill)
3. **Create a Handbook:** Have students make a list of common posture problems and ways to fix them. Let students create a sort of handbook with illustrations that the class can use.



# Teaching point: Intonation

1. **Musical Tag:** Arrange students in a line or circle. Tell them that they should each play their pitch quickly one after another, but it must match the person before them in order to go on to the next person. See how long it takes to get through everyone, try to get it down to less than 1 second per person.
2. **Class Assessment:** Perform a passage, then ask the students how they would grade the class intonation overall. Ask students what they think would fix the problem, and lead them in experimenting. Keep trying until the class gets an “A” 3 times in a row! If students have trouble self-evaluating, use a video or audio recording.

# Teaching point: Rhythm/Articulation

1. **Complete a Picture:** This works for any item needing repetition (not just rhythm). For every correct repetition, draw one line of a picture and ask the students to guess what the drawing is going to be. When the student can guess it then someone else can have a turn drawing the picture. (Dr. Andrea Yun)
2. **Group Rhythm Chain:** Identify a rhythmic pattern that needs repetition. See how many times the students can pass the rhythm around the classroom without a mistake or pause.
3. **Articulation Challenge:** Divide students into groups--have them practice and polish a particular articulation. Once the each group has the proper articulation, they can teach it to the other group and visa versa.

# Teaching Point: Tone

1. **Who is playing?:** Choose a few students to be players and a few to be guessers. Have the guessers turn around or cover their eyes. The players can then use silent signals to determine who will play and the guessers must decide who was playing.
2. **Group Sound:** Start off with just one person playing and gradually add each student. Have the group listen carefully to hear how the sound blends together to form a whole. Try this in a variety of dynamics and tone colors to determine the “Best Sound” of the whole group.

# Teaching Point: Phrasing/Dynamics

1. **Unique Phrasing:** Divide students into groups and ask them to try and find a unique way of playing a particular phrase. If you want more focused work, give them one variable to work with (such as vibrato, bow speed, bow placement, etc.). Have students share their phrases and let the group as a whole try each one. As the teacher you can choose one, have the students choose one by voting, or make the end goal a recording of the options and choose at a later date.
2. **Who Can Play Louder (With Good Tone)?:** Divide students into groups and have them practice dynamics together (loud and soft). Emphasize that their performance won't count unless they maintain good tone. Have the students take turns performing the passage and see who has the best dynamics. Encourage students to examine how they are achieving those dynamics.

What to do if you don't know what to do.

# General Purpose Repetition Games

- **Use a counting device**--younger students respond well to using an abacus, moving a bead for each time they do a correct repetition. You can also use your smartboard and create animations, such as popping a bubble or filling a jar on the board. (Dr. Alice Ann O'Neill)
- **Characters**--you can choose a variety of characters (for younger students you can use stuffed animals, for older students you can use characters off of TV shows or out of books) and try to play the passage once "in character" for each of the characters. (Dr. Alice Ann O'Neill)
- **Action games**--for every correct repetition, students are rewarded by a move in a game. Either on a board game (smart boards are helpful for this), or on something like a bowling or basketball game.

Occasionally, students don't really respond to anything. Either they choose not to participate fully or they don't seem to be improving.

- **Ask questions**--what do they want to do right now? How can that be redirected to the teaching point?
- **Give them more information**--explain clearly what you want from them and see if they prefer to work more independently.
- **See if something is wrong**--try to find out if something external to the lesson or class is bothering them.
- **Ask them what they are thinking of**--they may be focusing on the wrong thing.
- **Remember that the student *signed up for your class (or lessons)*.** They do want to be there, but mastering an instrument can be quite hard and frustrating. It is our job to keep the excitement alive and give them the tools to succeed.

# Occasionally you may just not have any fun ideas (or what you thought was fun the students don't like.)

- Ask the students what they want to work on
- Ask the students how they would practice a particular spot
- Tell the students to practice for 5 minutes and use Google to find an activity
- Listen to a piece of music that is important to the instrument or curriculum.



# Desperate Times

This student wasn't particularly interested in playing these songs yet again.....  
And I was out of ideas!!



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