

Ratko Delorko's Piano Police

Declutter Your Playing With Snackable Nuggets of Pianistic Wisdom

A 40-Page Guide to Better Playing. In a Half-Hour Read.

After many failed attempts and setbacks, today I can share with you the experience and insights I have gained over the years and certainly show you some shortcuts or put you on the fast track. This is also called pragmatic learning and conveys a high problem-solving potential. I created the idea of the Piano Police to give you simple, actionable, bite-sized strategies to help you declutter your playing and feed you with snackable nuggets of pianistic wisdom. If you're an ambitious teacher or performer, or one in the making or on the rise, who is really looking to create a pianistic approach that makes an impact and music you love, you're in the best place. Let's dive in.

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Index

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Warming Up | 05 |
| How To Practice A Difficult Part | 07 |
| How long to practice - Reasonable practice times | 12 |
| When was the piano invented? | 14 |
| Got Sweaty Fingers? | 16 |
| Pre-Performance Alimentation | 18 |
| Stage Fright Management | 21 |
| Is there any Baroque Roadmap for Articulation? | 24 |
| Meet the Author | 27 |
| Selected Productions | 29 |

First a Little Trivia:

Hey there! Greetings from my little slice of the Piano Business. I'm Ratko Delorko, pianist, composer, producer, educator and author. I've got a side hustle at the Piano Police as a Piano Police Officer. At the moment, there's an incoming emergency call at the Piano Police Operations Center from a desperate pianist. I offer some advice on how to cope with the situation. Happy reading. Over and out.

Warming up

Ringelingeling. A worried pianist calls.

Hello - Piano Police - how can I help?

The colleague seems stressed out.

You want to warm up with fast & loud scales?

The teacher in charge is suggesting fast and loud scales.

Not such a good idea, because for scales you should be warmed up. First: If you just play cold, don't be surprised if you get problems with your playing apparatus at some point. It's as simple as that. You won't find a professional athlete who doesn't stretch and warm up before he starts exercising. For good reason: by stretching and warming up, athletes minimize their risk of injury and optimize their training results.

Pianist asking for better options.

Do you like thirds? Alternating SLOW thirds are ideal!

Multiple muscle groups are always addressed at the same time, which leads to a quick warm-up, and the hand is allowed to stay in one position. A volume range from

♩ = 96 legato

mp 13 24 13 24 35 24 35 24

Spiegelfingersatz

mezzopiano to mezzoforte works best. The metronome is only for monitoring your speed. And: It is always better to stay away from the loud volumes... Later: Small hands move on to alternating fifths and bigger hands to alternating sixths. Then: Endless numbers of exercises can be found in collections from Hanon to Brahms to Cortot. Are there hundreds? A lot of fun to play. You should be good for scales by now.

Pianist giggles.

Sure thing. Always happy to help. Thanks for calling the Piano Police!

How To Practice A Difficult Part

Ringelingeling. Nervous pianist calling.

Piano Police. What's your emergency?

Nervous pianist babbling fast and unclear.

How to practice a difficult part... I see. Want to play fast? Practice slowly. Thanks. We'll send out a patrol car to monitor your practicing speed.

Nervous pianist starts asking questions.

What you can do in the meantime: Lock your door in order to keep the complaining neighbors out.

Nervous pianist questions quizzically.

Limit the section to 20 secs. Do a set of 8 repeats, relax for 30 secs, repeat the set of 8. You should repeat the set 3-5 times. More makes no sense.

Nervous pianist being incredulous.

Yes, you may use a metronome, but for short monitoring purposes only.

Nervous pianist wants to practice with the click all the time.

No, not constantly, you may become dependent on it. Constantly used, it becomes a crutch which may prevent you from generating a stable inner tempo. Means: You are used to practicing always with the click. Once taken away, you are lost because you did not develop your inner pace. Better: count loud! In slow tempo you can always subdivide in 1-and 2-and, and so forth. In a faster tempo, you have the option to chop a 4 signature down to 2 or a 3 signature down to 1.

Nervous pianist being resolved.

Thank you for your cooperation - happy to help.

Ringelingeling. Next pianist in line.

You have reached the Piano Police. What is your emergency?

The young lad is being pretty nosy.

How often to practice a complicated passage? A passage is to be repeated eight times. Define sections that overlap by half a measure, depending on the musical sense. The section must not last longer than 20 seconds, please only in a tempo that is perfectly doable for you, with all dynamics, articulation and what have you. More than 20 seconds cannot be stored in short-term memory and therefore makes no sense. These are memory-appropriate snacks, which the brain deems worthy of transmission to long-term memory. Then allow a break of about 30 seconds. During this time, you are not doing nothing, but your brain is doing hard work, shovelling what you have learned from short-term memory into long-term memory. Only through repetition at intervals is the information at hand deemed worthy and valuable by the brain to be anchored in long-term memory.

“How to speed up?” Asks the nosy guy.

Eight repetitions of the passage follow again until you get to five repetition phases. While doing this, play slowly enough so that a) there are no mistakes or stagnations, b) the musical processes can be learned and controlled immediately from the beginning. This can be quite slow. Then the playing tempo will increase a little by itself. Don't push it. Caution: If you go beyond the repetition contingent just described, a surprising phenomenon occurs: You systematically unlearn what you have learned!

So if you were to play 150 repetitions instead of the current 50, you would end up in the evening far below the level of the morning.

Nugget: He who wants to play fast, has to practice slow. Sounds pretty simple, but it's always difficult to make this crystal clear and understandable. They all want instantly the fun of playing and therefore butcher clarity and precision.

Nosy one: Again on speeding up...

Look, the following technique makes sense after about six weeks of standard practicing. Play the run in groups of a dotted 8th-note and a 16th-note. Then invert the groups in a second step. Play an 8th-note tied to a group of four 16th-notes. Next step: an 8th-note tied to a group of eight 16th-notes.

Thoughtful silence.

Take your metronome to a very slow, safe and comfy tempo. No mistakes should happen from now on, because the brain saves all mistakes, which later may pop up under stress. Play the section of 20 secs max. 3 times perfect and with all musical ingredients. Raise the metronome for one step on the scale, normally 4 bpm. Do