

The Secrets to GREAT Practice by Anne Sullivan

You may be thinking "There's no magic pill that will make me a better harpist," and you're right. There is no magic pill that will make you a better harpist or a better anything else, for that matter. YOU make yourself a better harpist; nothing can do it for you, which is why good practice so important. Good practice habits and skill can help you on your way to being a GREAT harpist.

There are five skills that you can use today to start you on your path. These are the skills I call GREAT practice, and the better you get at them, the better you get at harp-playing. It's that simple. What I will do for you in this column is give you an outline of the five skills, with some suggestions thrown in to get you started. In future installments, we will talk in more detail about specific techniques and how to make progress quickly. Here we go -

The first step to GREAT practice is good **goal-setting**. It is important to have a practice goal. Why? Because if you don't know where you want to go, you won't get there. It's the roadmap for your practice. And there are three types of goals: long-term, weekly and daily. The long-term goals may be thing like a recital date or any kind of performance. Think about how much better or harder you practice when a recital date gets close, and you'll see why it's important to have these goals always in front of you. But the other kinds of goals are equally important. The weekly goal may be what your teacher wanted you to accomplish before your next lesson or just an intermediate step you set for yourself in your learning. The daily goal is the result you want from your daily practice, and it's critical to keeping you on track toward your longer term goals.

The next step is **repetition**. We've all heard from our teachers that doing something once is not really practicing, and that ten or twenty or a hundred times is the only way to truly know something. Guess what - all our teachers were right! There are many different strategies for making repetition extra effective, but the principle remains the same. Do it again!

And doing it again takes **energy**. Energy is the next step, and it is crucial to your success because if you don't practice with energy, your practice won't do you much good. Practicing with energy doesn't mean just playing loud or fast. What we mean is to be your own teacher, to not just go through the motions of playing something a hundred times, but to really try to put your whole self into what you are doing, always keeping your goals in mind. Practicing with energy is more efficient. That means better results in less time. Doesn't that sound good?

But with your energy, you must be aware of what you're doing. **Awareness** is paying attention to all those little things that you know you should be watching as your practice: the notes, the rhythm, the dynamics, your technique, your tone, in short, all the things your teacher would notice. Save yourself time and hassle and notice them before your

teacher does. If you practice with awareness, you will experience something you may never have experienced before: a really terrific lesson!

Lastly, there are many practice **techniques** that you can use to help you over rough spots, or through technically challenging spots. Many of these you know already, like playing hands separately, or tapping a rhythm or ways for speeding up passages that are difficult. There are dozens more, and I'm certain your teacher helps you use these in your lessons. But in my future writings here, I will give you some more that I have learned and that I use in my teaching to help my students.

So to review, the GREAT practice skills are:

Goals

Repetition

Energy

Awareness

Techniques

Got it? Now go make yourself GREAT!