

## What to Practice When You Practice

### Description

I recently came across a book by management consultant Peter Drucker titled [The Effective Executive](#).

One of the chapters deals exclusively with time – specifically, the relationship between one’s effectiveness as an executive and one’s use of time. After all, we all have the exact same 24 hours to work with, so it’s the person who is able to get more out of those same hours that is going to gain an advantage as the weeks, months, and years go by.

And what could be more frustrating than working harder than the next person, but having less to show for your efforts?

So...how do we make the most of our time?

### Plan time, not work

Drucker suggests that rather than planning out our work and tasks (which usually don’t go according to plan anyway), effective execs start by figuring out where their time *actually* goes first, and then cutting back on time-wasters, or the least productive bits of that time.

Conceptually, this will sound familiar to many of you who have heard of the [Pareto principle](#) (aka 80/20 rule), which is the proposition that 80% of our results often result from only 20% of our efforts.

This “rule” came about when Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto observed that 80% of the land in Italy was owned by 20% of the population. And that 80% of the peas in his garden came from just 20% of the pea pods.

It’s an interesting concept, and a useful one as well, though it’s [not always understood or applied correctly](#).

The main idea is that we can increase our productivity and maximize our results by focusing on the handful of activities that give us the greatest return on investment of time. In other words, being choosier about what we spend our time on both in and out of the practice room.

### Questions to start asking

What proportion of your day do you spend fully engaged in activities that represent the most direct path to your goals?

What proportion of your practice time do you spend working on things that will make the biggest difference

in your playing? That will help further your development most expeditiously? Is it another 15 minutes of scales? Or is it more valuable to do some listening and score study? Or learning more about the composer? Super-slow practice to troubleshoot? Or trying to clarify your concept of sound or phrasing for that section?

What activities contribute most to enhancing the quality of your playing? Specific etudes, scales, or warm-up techniques? A particular way of listening? Practicing for performance and developing stronger focus? Sight-reading? Based on experience, observation, and what you know, what are the most valuable things to spend your practice time on?

## Take action

### 1. Do a time audit

Track what you spend your time doing in 30-minute increments over the course of a few days or a week. You might be surprised to see what it is that you are actually doing every day and how busy you are doing things that seem important at the time, but don't actually get you much closer to your goals.

What we think we did over the course of a day and what we actually did are often two very different things. It can be pretty shocking how much time we spend on things that keep us busy, but don't help us get things done. Here is a printable worksheet you can download to help make this easier: [Time Audit Chart](#) (via The Organized Life)

What did you find to be your biggest time-waster?

### 2. Do a practice time audit

Record 30 minutes of practice time (preferably video, if for no other reason than it's a little more interesting to watch yourself practice than listen to yourself practice).

Review the recording and based on your goals for the practice session, how on-point was your use of time? Did you engage in relevant activities? And of all the relevant things to work on, did you select the most important or impactful activities?

Did you slip into mindless repetition? Or could you identify moments where you were obsessing about things that were annoying (like a note that just didn't speak quite right), but less important in the grand scheme of things than the pacing of a phrase, or shaping of line, or having something to say with it all?

Use the insights you gain to guide your next practice session, and begin to shift the bulk of your practice towards those activities that make the biggest difference in the quality of your playing, and provide the most bang for your buck.

Think of this as [deliberate practice](#) applied to productivity.

## The one-sentence summary

“In the absence of clearly defined goals we become strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia.”  
~Robert Heinlein

### Date Created

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