

# THE SEVEN STAGES OF PRACTICE

## for strings

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Practice is an individual process. The choice of studies is not subject to pedantry; the ever-present 'here and now' determines how you should proceed in each session. Every single exercise can be studied under each of the following seven stages of practice. Practising is usually hampered by two main errors: the stages of analysis are too superficial, and the *stages* of synthesis are generally missed out altogether. Ideally, these two factors, analysis and synthesis, should complement one another; a conscientious control of the details gives a better chance of grasping the whole. Practice has its own breathing-process, which oscillates between thinking and forgetting.

1. Read through. Play through. No details.  
Sketch a musical image of the work.
2. Build up the musical image.  
Musical analysis. Technical analysis.  
Bowling. Fingering. Introductory practice.
3. Work out the technical basis systematically. Pay attention to every detail.  
Refine the musical image at all stages.  
Strictly control every technical action. Explore a variety of methods. Exercises.
4. Begin to synthesize practice-elements, through conscious coordination of left-hand fingering and right-hand bowing.  
Aim for complete control of this coordination.  
"The marriage between the left and right hands" (William Pleeth).  
Begin to realise the musical image.
5. Let the bow conduct every aspect of your playing.  
Practise 'remote control' of various actions through bowing.  
Aim for complete control of bowing.  
Regard each bow-stroke as preparation for the next one.
6. Let the instrument play you, not vice versa. Conscious control of technique is forbidden at this stage, but control the musical structure carefully.
7. 'con amore'  
Music can only transcend through freedom and total lack of resistance.  
Don't think about anything, don't try to force anything.  
"We do not will things; we just let them happen." (Sergiu Celibidache)