

# 5 Things a Young Player Can Do to Improve

## Spencer Chapman

- ⌘ Record Yourself Regularly
  - ⌘ Practice the Technique, Not Just the Piece
  - ⌘ Slow Practice = Fast Improvement
  - ⌘ Utilize a Metronome & Tuner Correctly
  - ⌘ Remind Yourself Why You Pick Up the Instrument- Inspiration
- 

### #1- Record Yourself Regularly

Today, most phones have basic recording capabilities. At least once per practice session, record yourself giving a “performance” of something that you are working on. Afterwards, listen back with some of the following questions in mind:

- Is my rhythm consistent?
- Does it sound effortless?
- How is my intonation? (Bonus points for listening back with a tuner; it’ll keep you honest)
- What is one thing that I can focus on in the future to improve? (It can be simple, ex: take fuller breaths.)

### #2- Practice the Technique, Not Just the Piece

*Practicing the skills that are required independently of their original context will lead to faster improvement.*

Many phrases can be broken down into a series of scales, intervals, or sequences. Practicing these skills independently from the music can help avoid plateaus in one’s progress.

Ex: A piece is in B Major, and you want to improve your pitch. Adding a diet of slow scales, interval studies, and lip slurs that are all based around the key of B Major can help you work on the skills needed to perform the piece. This will help you improve as a trombone player & musician, which in turn will improve your performance of the piece.

©2020 Spencer Chapman

[www.spencerchapman.com](http://www.spencerchapman.com)

*No portion of this document may be edited, sold or otherwise distributed for monetary/material gain without express permission from the author.*

### #3- Slow Practice = Fast Improvement

*Slow & steady wins the race.*

A slow step-by-step methodical approach to practice affords you more time to focus on fine details that would otherwise be neglected at higher tempi. This is especially important when learning a piece. Building good habits from the onset is much easier than having to correct bad ones later on. The tempo of slow practice will vary from individual to individual. To choose your slow practice tempo:

- Find the most rhythmically challenging passage in the piece
- Figure out what tempo you can play the entire passage at successfully
- This is your slow practice tempo, even if it is 16<sup>th</sup> note = 58

As your practicing progresses, your slow practice tempo will often increase. Just remember, slow practice will always have a place in one's practice culture.

Slow practice is like depositing money into a bank. Playing something fast is like withdrawing money from a bank. With this in mind, try not to "spend" more than 1/3 of what you deposit.

### #4- Utilize a Metronome & Tuner

It may seem obvious, but using a metronome & tuner correctly can greatly aid one's preparation. These are tools of reference, not crutches of operation.

Solely relying on the metronome to generate the pulse is like using an answer key to learn how to take a test. It is important to "check your answers" now and then, but the metronome won't be there in the audition. A metronome gives a steady pulse. We must train ourselves to consistently replicate that steady pulse.

A tuner's function in practice culture serves a similar purpose. A tuner is a central point of reference that allows us to check in on pitch accuracy. Like the metronome, it will not be there in the audition. Use a tuner to inform you of your general tendencies & to further calibrate your ear.

©2020 Spencer Chapman

[www.spencerchapman.com](http://www.spencerchapman.com)

*No portion of this document may be edited, sold or otherwise distributed for monetary/material gain without express permission from the author.*

## #5- Remind Yourself on a Daily Basis Why You Pick Up the Instrument- Inspiration

*Music is supposed to be fun!*

The path to success is not a linear one. We all have bad days; it's part of being human. The better you get, the higher your standards will be. Effective practicing forces us to look at ourselves honestly in the mirror everyday, flaws & all.

Remind yourself why you put in the work. Listen to your favorite recordings, or play your favorite song/piece. Take the time to discover new genres, composers & musicians. Everyone has something unique to bring to the table. We can learn so much from the experiences & performances of others.

At the end of the day, music is something to be enjoyed & treasured. Yet, it is so easy to loose sight of this simple truth in our pursuit of excellence. Keep your morale up by taking time to fall in love with the art of music making on a daily basis.

**Spencer Chapman is a trombonist & educator based in the Greater Houston Area. He holds degrees from the Manhattan School of Music (M.M.) & Boston University (B.M.) Please visit [www.spencerchapman.com](http://www.spencerchapman.com) for further information.**

---

©2020 Spencer Chapman

[www.spencerchapman.com](http://www.spencerchapman.com)

*No portion of this document may be edited, sold or otherwise distributed for monetary/material gain without express permission from the author.*