

# Practicing With Purpose: What's the Big **IDEA**

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Pre-session Survey  
[pollev.com/practicepurpose998](https://pollev.com/practicepurpose998)



Website & Materials  
[practicewithpurpose.net](http://practicewithpurpose.net)

# the Big IDEA

## I

### Identify:

Identify a small section of a piece that needs work. This should be 1 to 12 measures, avoid large sections. Avoid “playing through” a whole piece.

## D

### Decide:

Decide on an OMG = Obtainable Musical Goal  
What aspect of music needs work?  
Fingerings, Intonation, Rhythm, Tempo, Tone, Bowing, Articulation, Dynamics, Phrasing...

## E

### Execute:

Execute your goal using a variety of practice strategies. Repetition will always be a part of working on a small goal, but should not be the only factor. Remember to take things slowly.

## A

### Analyze:

Analyze how you did. Did you improve? Did you reach your goal? Did you execute effective strategies? Should you try something else? What skills will it take to obtain & maintain mastery of your OMG?

## Practice with Purpose!

## General Ideas:

- ☐ CHUNK IT - work on only a small chunk at a time, then group chunks together
- ☐ ADD A NOTE - start with just a few notes, then add one at a time
- ☐ ADD A MEASURE - work measure by measure, grouping measures together as they are learned
- ☐ TIZZLE/SIZZLE - good for combining Fingerings, Rhythm, and Articulations together
- ☐ PENNY GAME - try to get your spot right 3 to 5 times in a row. If you get it right slide a penny from the left side of your stand to the right. If you get it right again slide another. Anytime you mess up all the pennies go back to the left and you have to start over.
- ☐ REVERSE - start at the last measure of your section, then move back 1 measure, then 2, etc.
- ☐ SLOW - play slowly with a metronome and gradually increase speed
- ☐ RECORD - and then listen for errors
- ☐ FRIEND - practice with a friend (in person or virtually)
- ☐ FAMILY - perform for a family member

## Fingerings/Slide Positions/Stickings:

- ☐ Do fingerings while saying notes names
- ☐ Use Mixed Rhythms to isolate tricky fingering passage, Short (S), Long (L)
  - ☐ Examples: SL, LS, LLSS, SSLL, LSSS
- ☐ Figure out a fingering for a tricky spot and write it in as a reminder
- ☐ For tricky finger patterns isolate the problem notes – practicing going forward and backward
- ☐ Double it: play each note more than once before moving to the next note

## Rhythm:

- ☐ Write the counting in your part
- ☐ SUBDIVIDE (count/think in small units - 1&2&3&4& or 1e&a2e&a...)
- ☐ Count the rhythm aloud
- ☐ Count the beat (1,2,3,4) while clapping the rhythm
- ☐ Do fingerings while counting aloud

## Tempo:

- ☐ Practice counting with a metronome
- ☐ Practice playing with a metronome
- ☐ Practice playing with a recording
- ☐ SUBDIVIDE

*Free metronome:*  
[www.metronomeonline.com](http://www.metronomeonline.com)  
*or download a free app*

## Articulation:

- ☐ Isolate the articulation by playing it on one note
- ☐ Listen to music in the same style to get a sense of what the articulation is supposed to sound like
- ☐ Practice the articulation style within a scale

## Intonation:

- ☐ Listen to your tone quality - if it is not correct, intonation will not be correct
- ☐ Are you sitting with correct posture?
- ☐ Are you taking a good breath?
- ☐ Practice the scale and finger patterns within the key of your part
- ☐ Sing your part
- ☐ Play with a tuner
- ☐ Practice intervals, or identify intervals in your music to listen for:
  - ☐ Half step –jaws
  - ☐ Whole step – Do-Re (first two notes in a scale)
  - ☐ Major 3<sup>rd</sup> – “Doe, a Deer” (“deer” is the third)
  - ☐ Perfect 4<sup>th</sup> – “Here comes the bride”
  - ☐ Perfect 5<sup>th</sup> – Twinkle Twinkle, or Star Wars
  - ☐ Major 6 – NBC or My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean

## Tone:

- ☐ Check your posture:
  - ☐ Are your feet flat on the floor?
  - ☐ Is your back straight?
- ☐ Check your breathing:
  - ☐ Are you taking a full breath from your stomach?
  - ☐ Are you putting enough air into your instrument?
  - ☐ Is your air moving at a steady speed?
- ☐ Check your embouchure
  - ☐ Is your chin flat?
  - ☐ Are your cheeks in (not puffed up)?
- ☐ Check your playing position
  - ☐ Are you bringing the instrument TO you?
  - ☐ Are your arms/hands/shoulders free of tension?
  - ☐ Is your instrument at the correct angle?
  - ☐ Are you holding your sticks/mallets at the fulcrum?

## Phrasing:

- ☐ Sing your music!
- ☐ Think of a phrase as a musical sentence. In speech there are natural pauses for periods and commas. Figure out where the natural pauses might be in the music. Make sure your breathing isn't interrupting the “sentence.”
- ☐ Make sure your phrase going somewhere. Be sure to maintain breath support through the end of each phrase.

## Dynamics:

- ☐ Identify the dynamics and circle things that you have trouble remembering
- ☐ Ask yourself the following question: What is my AIR doing?

## General Ideas:

- ☐ CHUNK IT - work on only a small chunk at a time, then group chunks together
- ☐ ADD A NOTE - start with just a few notes, then start again adding one at a time
- ☐ ADD A MEASURE - work measure by measure, grouping measures together as they are learned
- ☐ PENNY GAME - try to get your spot right 3 to 5 times in a row. If you get it right slide a penny from the left side of your stand to the right. If you get it right again slide another. Anytime you mess up all the pennies go back to the left and you have to start over
- ☐ REVERSE – learn the last measure of your section, then start back 1 measure, then 2, etc...
- ☐ METRONOME CHALLENGE - play slowly with a metronome and gradually increase speed
- ☐ RECORD - and then listen for errors / successes
- ☐ FRIEND - practice with a friend (in person or virtually)
- ☐ FAMILY - perform for a family member

## Fingerings:

- ☐ Figure out a fingering for a tricky spot and write it in as a reminder
- ☐ Check if tunneling would be helpful
- ☐ Check if using 4<sup>th</sup> finger would be helpful/best (violins/violas)
  - ☐ Rule: If you are moving from a lower string, to open, & back to the lower string use 4th finger
- ☐ For tricky shifts, isolate the shift – practicing going forward and backward - be aware of the spacing
- ☐ Look for alternate fingering possibilities. Would shifting help?
- ☐ Double it: play each note more than once before moving to the next note
- ☐ Use Mixed Rhythms to isolate tricky fingering passage, Short (S), Long (L)
  - ☐ Examples: SL, LS, LLSS, SSLL, LSSS

## Rhythm:

- ☐ Write the counting in your part
- ☐ SUBDIVIDE (count/think in small units - 1&2&3&4& or 1e&a2e&a...)
- ☐ Count the rhythm aloud
- ☐ Count the beat (1,2,3,4) while clapping the rhythm
- ☐ Pluck or Bow the part (on an open string or with the notes) while counting aloud.

## Tempo:

- ☐ Practice counting or playing with a metronome
- ☐ SUBDIVIDE.
- ☐ Play with a drum beat or backtrack

Free metronome:  
[www.metronomeonline.com](http://www.metronomeonline.com)  
or download a free app

## Intonation:

- ☐ Listen for ½ steps and whole steps
- ☐ Practice the scale of the key you are in
- ☐ Practice finger patterns for that key
- ☐ Practice with double stops (Play notes on one string while droning the open string below or above)
- ☐ Sing your part, or sing AND play your part
- ☐ Play with a tuner - (app examples - Tuner Lite, Tonal Energy Tuner...)
- ☐ Practice intervals, or identify intervals in your music to listen for:
  - ☐ Half step - “Jaws”; Whole step – Do-Re; Major 3<sup>rd</sup> – “Doe, a Deer” (“deer” is the third); Perfect 4<sup>th</sup> – “Here Comes the Bride”; Perfect 5<sup>th</sup> – “Twinkle, Twinkle” or “Star Wars”; Major 6 – “NBC” or “My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean”, etc..

## Tone:

- ☐ Basics: Is your bow tight? Are you holding the bow correctly? Are you sure? Check your posture!
- ☐ Is your bow at the sound point? (contact point between the bridge and the fingerboard)
- ☐ Follow the LAWS (Location/Lane, Amount, Weight, Speed)
  - ☐ Are you drawing your bow straight?
    - ☐ If not – make sure you are utilizing your shoulder, elbow, AND wrist joints.
  - ☐ Are you playing smoothly? Are you pushing too hard?
  - ☐ Are you using enough weight at the start to grab the string & then releasing to let it ring?
  - ☐ Are you keeping your bow moving at a consistent speed?
- ☐ Are your bow hairs tilted towards the bridge?
- ☐ Are you placing your left hand fingers down evenly with weight on the string?
- ☐ Are your left hand fingers curved?

## Articulation:

- ☐ Isolate the articulation by playing it on open strings rather than with the fingerings
- ☐ Listen to music in the same style or from the same time period to get a sense of what the articulation is supposed to sound like
- ☐ Identify what part of the bow you need to be in
- ☐ Experiment with bow tilt, and LAWS (Location/Lane, Amount, Weight, Speed)

## Bowings:

- ☐ Shadow Bow (with or without the fingerings)
- ☐ Think about where you should be in the bow – frog, balance point, middle, tip?
  - ☐ Try a section at different points to determine what is easiest and most useful
- ☐ Isolate - If something like a slur or string crossing is giving you trouble, isolate it and try to figure out what will make it easier – how much bow are you using, where in the bow, where on the string, etc...

## Phrasing:

- ☐ Sing your music!
- ☐ Think of a phrase as a musical sentence. In speech there are natural pauses for periods and commas. Figure out where the natural pauses might be in the music. Then apply different bow techniques to create vary your dynamics.
- ☐ Identify places that might benefit from addition dynamics, such as hairpins or echoes, & mark them in.
- ☐ MOVE & BREATHE! This should be natural and a part of every musical experience.

## Dynamics:

- ☐ Identify the dynamics and circle things that you have trouble remembering
- ☐ Ask yourself the following question: WHAT IS MY BOW DOING?
- ☐ Apply the “LAWS of Tone & Dynamics”
  - ☐ Location or Lane - where the bow is on the string:
    - ☐ Sound Point (middle) – strong sound, clear tone
    - ☐ Ponticello (near the bridge) – strong sound, often crunchy tone
    - ☐ Sul Tasto (by the fingerboard) – soft sound, often weak tone
  - ☐ Amount – more bow generally = more sound
  - ☐ Weight – more weight generally = more sound
  - ☐ Speed – varies the dynamics depending on location, amount and weight
- ☐ Experiment with flat hair vs a tilted bow stick – with the hairs tilted towards the bridge

*Improve your practice skills and habits by trying these ideas:*

Always practice at the same time of day.

Set a practice schedule for each week.

Make sure you have a quiet place to focus.

Use a music stand.

Have a pencil when you practice for marking things.

Check posture at the end of each line or section.

Avoid “playing through” the whole piece.

Create OMGs - Obtainable Musical Goals.

Follow the Big **IDEA**.

Don’t always start at the beginning.

Don’t be afraid to slow it down.

Do work on “spots,” but also make sure to practice transitions.

Repetition is important.

Make sure to play a little each day to improve your muscle memory.

# HAVE FUN!

Student Name

Class

Date Due

Quantity : Spend quality time practicing using the Big IDEA. Check off each day you complete a quality practice session. Aim for at least 5 per week.

Dates	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Dates	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Quality: Follow the big **IDEA**. What are your OMGS? Remember to use **musical terminology** in your responses.

#	IDENTIFY Piece & Measures (small chunks)	DECIDE Musical Concept - what are you trying to achieve / improve on?	EXECUTE What strategies did you use to work on this goal?	ANALYZE Did you achieve your goal? Do you still need work on it? Do you need extra help?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Optional: Thoughts/Questions about your practice. (use the back for more space)