

# \*\*\*REPERTOIRE STUDY GUIDE\*\*\*

## GETTING STARTED

1. Obtain a clean copy of the music.
  - Purchase your own original when possible
  - When working with a photocopy, take the time to tidy the part with white out to make a clean copy. (It is easier to read your own notations and it is unwise to trust someone else's markings.)
2. Write your name on the music in ink.
3. Keep your music in a plastic sheet protector, filing cabinet, or sturdy folder.

## PRACTICING: Part I

1. **Initial read-through**—Begin by playing through the piece under tempo. Use this time to begin learning the overall structure of the piece and to mark (in pencil) anything that might require special attention. Items to mark include:
  - Sections, phrases, motifs, patterns, etc.
  - Tempo indications or changes
  - Markings, symbols, or terms unfamiliar to you
  - Unusual rhythms or time signatures
  - Technically challenging passages
2. **Sectional learning**—Divide the music into logical phrases and/or sections. Practice each section separately using the following principals:
  - Always use a metronome
  - Begin as slow as necessary to avoid practicing mistakes
  - Increase speed gradually
  - Decide upon stickings (and/or tuning plans) as early as possible and mark them clearly

### \*\*\*\*\*About Stickings and Tunings\*\*\*\*\*

Keep your goal tempo in mind when choosing stickings. Stickings that work at slow tempos sometimes do not work as well faster. Also, roll pulse is always affected by tempo and will definitely be an important factor in any sticking plan. Again, keep your goal tempo in mind. Choose a sticking, mark it in pencil, and practice it thoroughly and consistently. As your knowledge of a piece evolves, it is likely you will change your mind about some stickings and alter them accordingly. This is fine! Write in your new sticking and incorporate it into your concept of the piece. New ideas are part of the learning process.

3. **Connection**—When each section can be played consistently and comfortably (still under tempo), work to connect from one section to the next. Start with small increments of music on each side of the connection and gradually increase until fluid and comfortable.
4. **Putting it together**—Once command of the sections and connecting passages has been achieved, is time to put the whole piece together. Practice the piece from beginning to end using these fundamental principles:

(Over)

1. Practice slowly with the metronome
2. Avoid practicing mistakes
3. Gradually increase the tempo
4. Always practice musically

**Conclusion:** Once the piece can be played consistently from beginning to end with minimal errors and basic musical understanding, practicing must be approached in a different manner in order to continue improvement. (See: *Practicing, Part II*).

## LISTENING STUDY and RESEARCH

Listening study and research begin from the moment a piece or excerpt is chosen and continues for as long as the piece is being practiced or performed. Use the *Repertoire Research Worksheet* to document historical information and listening study. Keep in mind the following principles:

1. **Historical**—Understanding of the history behind a composition is tremendously important. In addition to the obvious facts and dates, consider questions such as: Why was the piece written? (Commission, special occasion, contest, etc.) What was going on in the world at this time? What was going on in the composer’s country or personal life at this time? The answers to these questions can provide insight into how a piece should be performed.
2. **Publishing**—Many older pieces have been published several times by several companies and excerpts may appear in several excerpt books as well as in various engraved parts and scores. Be aware of the different generations of printed music available for any piece and learn about any commonly recognized discrepancies. This information is a must for any performance.
3. **Listening**—Spend time with multiple recordings to gain understanding of the piece and to begin to form an opinion about how it should be performed. Listen with music in hand to notate ideas for phrasing and other interpretation issues. Also, listen without music to concentrate on sound, style, scope of the composition, etc.
4. **Theoretical**—Solo compositions in particular need to be understood theoretically. Perform a thorough analysis of the piece in order to understand how it is put together. This knowledge is absolutely essential for meaningful performance.
5. **Score Study**—Orchestral works, works for chamber groups, and other ensembles should be studied with a full score. Take special care to understand the percussion part’s function within the orchestration at any given time. Also, be aware of solos, solis, and other exposed passages.

**Conclusion:** Thorough knowledge of a piece includes not only “learning the notes,” but also understanding the music from a theoretical and historical perspective and being aware of the details surrounding publishing and performance traditions.

## PRACTICING: Part II

After successfully internalizing a piece, it is the performer's job to become capable of expressing her or his internal vision consistently. This section will focus on how to hone those performance skills to a professional level. The following techniques should be used concurrently and repeatedly until consistent execution is achieved.

- **Audio recording**—Record yourself performing entire pieces, sections, and passages in order to observe whether your playing matches your perception of your playing. This technique is particularly helpful in perfecting phrasing, rhythmic clarity, and consistency of tempo. For example, record a passage and play it back with your metronome set to your goal tempo. Repeat this until the goal tempo is met and maintained exactly every time.
- **Video recording**—Employ video to record mock performances of entire pieces, excerpts, or auditions. Observe how your body language affects the quality of your performance; Examine your playing technique to see whether physical problems are affecting performance; For auditions, clock the time it takes to tune or switch instruments and look for inefficiencies in that movement.
- **Practice performing**—At every possible opportunity, play for people. Ask percussion colleagues, other musicians, friends, professors, and strangers to listen to you for 5, 10, 20 minutes or more. While comments and suggestions are sometimes helpful, the goal is to perform for an audience. Use audio or video recording so you can make your own judgments later. When preparing for a performance or audition, play for people 5 to 10 times per day!!!
- **Continued refinement**—At this point in the preparation process, it is clear which pieces and passages continue to cause problems. These areas can be addressed through several techniques, including ultra-slow repetition with the metronome, practice of exercises derived from difficult passages, and even working up “fast” passages to speeds beyond the goal tempo.
- **Continued study**—Throughout the process of learning and perfecting a piece, it is essential that study in maintained. Reading, listening, and score study will continue to reveal clues to performance. In fact, when a performer knows a piece, in-depth study becomes more interesting and useful.

## PRACTICING II (continued)

- **Auditions**—Here are some additional techniques specific to audition preparation:
  - **Play along with several different recordings of each excerpt.** This type of practice is invaluable for understanding how your part fits in with the ensemble and for understanding the variety of interpretations that exist for each piece. Do this daily in the weeks leading up to an audition!
  - **Practice mock rounds** by writing the name of each excerpt on identical scraps of paper and drawing them randomly to simulate playing any excerpt on demand. (Record yourself for later observation.)
  - **Practice simulating audition procedure** by wearing the clothes (especially shoes) you will wear for the audition, walking on and off the stage carrying your own equipment, performing your round with cold hands, playing at the time of day you will audition, and practicing when tired & hungry.
  - **Think about the instruments on which you practice.** When you know ahead of time what make and model instruments will be used and how they will be set up (height and tilt), duplicate these specifics as much as possible. When this knowledge is not available practice on a wide variety of instruments with various set-ups.
  - **Prepare to adapt to requests from the audition committee.** Envision different musical requests that could be made of you during the audition. Practice each excerpt with different sticks/mallets, at louder and softer dynamics, at faster and slower tempos and with various phrasings. Practice playing under the direction of a conductor or with another instrumentalist or accompanist, if the excerpt warrants.
  - **Prepare to adapt to environmental factors.** Learn as much as you can about the space in which you will audition and prepare accordingly, but be ready to adapt to what you hear when you begin to play. For example, a big reverberant space might require more articulate sticks and slightly slower tempos, while a small rehearsal hall might benefit from rounder, softer playing.

**Conclusion:** The process of preparing any piece of music for superlative performance is demanding and rigorous and includes several phases. Serious musicians take the time to practice thoroughly, study, think, and practice again (and again and again) in order to achieve and maintain the highest level of quality and consistency in their playing. While this checklist—even if followed precisely—cannot guarantee a particular result, it can serve as a guideline for the serious student seeking to be prepared for auditions and performances.

Matthew Bassett

# REPERTOIRE RESEARCH WORKSHEET

## BASIC INFORMATION

Composer \_\_\_\_\_

Dates \_\_\_\_\_

Composition \_\_\_\_\_ Date composed \_\_\_\_\_

Composer information (i.e. nationality, adopted country, employment details, political difficulties, family details, compositional influences, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Instrument(s) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Complete percussion instrumentation (excerpt only)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## PUBLISHING DETAILS

Publisher(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Additional sources (i.e. repertoire books or collections) \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information (i.e. different editions, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## MUSICAL DETAILS FROM LISTENING STUDY

Primary excerpts/sections (Movement, measure numbers, and/or rehearsal letters):

\*\*Note discrepancies between editions/score/parts/performance practices, etc.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ High tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Low tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Goal tempo \_\_\_\_\_

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ High tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Low tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Goal tempo \_\_\_\_\_

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_ High tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Low tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Goal tempo \_\_\_\_\_

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_ High tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Low tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Goal tempo \_\_\_\_\_

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Secondary excerpts (Orchestral repertoire only)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ High tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Low tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Goal tempo \_\_\_\_\_

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ High tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Low tempo \_\_\_\_\_ Goal tempo \_\_\_\_\_

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(over)

