

Different Ways to Practice

Additive: Start by playing the first two notes close or at tempo. Then play the first three notes. If you are successful, play the first four notes. Repeat when you miss a note or it doesn't sound right. Keep adding notes until you can play the whole exercise or section!

Chunking: Split the piece or exercise into a few large chunks. Practice the first chunk without stopping (mistakes and all). Then practice the next chunk. Complete all the chunks and then play them all together.

Serial: Start at the beginning. Start playing below or near tempo (your choice) and play until you make a mistake. Start again and play until you make a mistake. Go slow if you need to. Hint: playing through it correctly does not mean you'll always play it correctly! "Good musicians practice until they get it right. Great musicians practice until they can't get it wrong!"

Changing the Music: This technique should be used sparingly (not very often!). Try playing the music from the last note and working backwards. Try slightly changing the rhythms so that the piece basically sounds the same. Try flipping your music upside and playing it.

Break it Down: This is a tool we use a lot. Start by "ta-ing" the rhythm while tapping your foot. Then "ta" and finger. Then sing and finger. Start by playing the piece slowly as needed in order to be successful. Keep adding stuff or speeding it up until you can play the piece correctly.

Mental Practice: This is a surprisingly powerful technique. Leave your horn in the case and work through your music in your head. Air play/shadow play. Sing or buzz your part. Say the note names. Say the slide positions/fingerings.

The key to any practice session is to do a variety of all of these techniques. Just one type of practice alone will not give you good results. The most efficient thing to do is to try each one in every practice session.