

Kathleen Schoen

Performer, Teacher, and SAA Teacher Trainer - Historical and Modern Flutes and Recorders

flutesrus@gmail.com

780-887-1421

www.fluteplayer.ca

This article is also available on my website as a blog post: <https://fluteplayer.ca/2020/02/10/review-in-practice-why-and-how/>

Reviewing previously learned material in practice

When you are a beginner, you don't know many things yet, and all of them are new.

So when you practice, you practice everything. It doesn't take very much time.

Then you get to a point where you know more than you have time to play in one practice session. This is when you need to organize your material on a rotation, for constant review.

There are two categories of review: patterns & pieces

Patterns:

These are the building blocks of music. Scales, triads, and other patterns recur in different contexts in every piece of music.

We extract these patterns from the pieces and isolate them for individual practice. This is a very methodical and efficient way of practice to develop facility on the instrument and to train the ear and fingers to expect typical pitch and fingering combinations.

Pieces:

Patterns, however, are meaningless unless placed in the context of an expressive melody. So we also need to review our pieces.

You know how sometimes you meet someone in the grocery store, and you feel you ought to know them, but can't remember who they are? It may be someone you know from work, but in a different location you can't recall their name. (And feel slightly embarrassed.)

In the same way, you may meet a pattern that you already know in a new piece, but you don't recognize it and need to learn it all over again because the new context makes it feel very unfamiliar.

This is why we need to review all our known pieces, so that we can become familiar with all the different contexts where we have to be able to recognize a pattern.

And we need to review them in different settings and venues: practice, lesson, concert, group, festival, exam ... so that we can recognize these things in any setting, and not draw a blank like you did with your acquaintance in the grocery store.

Result:

If we review both patterns and pieces, we become very good at recognizing known patterns in a variety of contexts. This makes it easier to learn new pieces quickly.

If we don't review, learning new pieces takes a very long time, as you have to do everything as if it was for the very first time.

OK, I get it. Now how do I do it?

Your teacher will have many resources for helping you organize your practice time. Approaches will vary depending on the needs of individual students.

Here's the basic idea.

- Take all the pieces and exercises you know
- Divide them into groups based on the main technical point required to play them
 - e.g. high register, low register, fast scale passages, sustained tone, specific keys, etc..
- Play a different one from each group every day
- In this way, you will play everything you know over the course of a few days, while reviewing all your technical abilities every day.

Some pieces may exercise more than one technical point. These ones can get swapped around between groups or become a group on their own.

Newer pieces can be in a group that gets played very day, until they are as familiar as the older ones. Then you can put them in a group where they get played after a longer interval.

If you find a piece that you feel that you have forgotten, you can add it to the every day group until it is back to being familiar again.

You can combine groups into bigger categories and review pieces after a longer interval. This will exercise your long term recall. If you find yourself having to re-learn pieces after a long interval, make your categories smaller so the pieces rotate more often.

I find this system to be a good indicator of when a student is ready to go on to something new. If the review of the known scale patterns and pieces is completed quickly and confidently, there will be time left in the lesson or practice to start a new project. If the review takes a long time, and spots need to be re-learned, that will use all the available time. And that is OK, because that is what that student needs to be doing before going on to new things.