

How to practise with a metronome to improve your ensemble playing

No matter which instrument you are trying to master, there are some basic things to keep in mind.

RHYTHM. To play with others in an ensemble, you have to play rhythms accurately. This will ensure that you are keeping pace with other musicians and fitting in to the music properly. Use a metronome to correct any mistakes. Here are a few tips:

1. Understand **rhythmic notation** fully. If you don't know what a symbol means ask your tutor or use the internet.
2. **Practice difficult music slowly** at first to correct mistakes (see "Technique" below).
3. **Subdivide** hard rhythms. For example: if a bar contains an unusual quaver rhythm, count out **the whole bar in quavers** to discover which beat the rhythm falls on.

TECHNIQUE. If you cannot play a fast passage well, SLOW it down and practice with a metronome. If you do not practise slowly, your mistakes and struggles will be heard by your peers and your audience! Find a slower speed where you can play every note correctly (pitch, rhythm, tone quality), no matter how slow. If you can play the passage without mistakes **five times in a row**, you can speed up (about 2-4 clicks on the metronome) and repeat. Gradually increase the tempo until you reach the tempo asked for by the conductor.

NOTE ACCURACY AND TUNING. Make sure you can play every note with the correct fingering. Do not ignore sharps or flats – a Bb is not a B using a lower finger, it is a completely different note! The same thing for C and C#! (there are 12 notes that we can play, but there are only seven letter names used. The other five are sharp or flat notes). Once you are playing all the right notes, make sure that you are in tune when you practise. Playing in tune with yourself is the first step toward becoming a **good ensemble musician**.

TONE. Always strive for an even and pleasing tone quality in all the registers of your instrument. Do not compromise your tone because a passage is hard to play. If a part is too difficult go back to step 1 and try again.

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