

The 7 Best Practice Tricks to Get Ready for a Performance

All of these will help you pull off a successful performance, and can help you break free from “stuck-in-a-rut” practicing. The best way to combat nerves is solid preparation!

1. **Listening Method** - Listen to a professional recording of the piece. Really listen. Listen with your eyes closed one day, listen while looking at the music another day, listen and mark your part on yet another. Listen to different performances. It really helps!
2. **Visualization Method** - Imagine an excellent performance, in detail. Imagine someone else doing the piece with confidence, ease, and expressiveness. Or imagine yourself, but without the uncertainty – just relaxed and comfortable. How does this performer walk onstage, how he hold his hands, how does she smile? What is her breathing like – relaxed and full? How much is he focused and concentrating? What does this confident performer do during the really challenging parts? The more you imagine the actual performance, the more you’ll be ready for it.
3. **Chunking Method**– take small chunks and practice them slowly, really listening to the sound of each note, really absorbing it. When you’ve played a piece for a while, you tend to listen less closely. Now is the perfect time to turn that listening back on.
4. **Absolutely No Mistakes Method** - Play the whole thing through at exactly the tempo at which you will make absolutely no mistakes. Not even one! That means that you can hang onto a note while you think about the next in order to prevent a mistake. Don’t worry about rhythm. What we’re trying to do is make sure that the connections between each note and the one after it are solid and confident. This also may be the ONLY time that you play the piece through with absolutely no mistakes. *Thinking*
5. **Steadiness method** - After you’ve done the “no mistakes” method a few times (successfully), add the metronome. Now, it’s there to help you keep the piece going steadily, with no mistakes or hesitations. This is very, very difficult. It is worse than useless if you make mistakes, so put the metronome on a VERY slow tempo, and don’t make mistakes. It’s amazing how much harder it is to get the piece 100% correct than 95% correct (a lot more than 5% harder).
6. **Beautiful Tone Method** – Choose a technically challenging portion of your piece, and pretend it’s marked “Adagio espressivo.” Play it without rhythm (or with your own rhythm), with a gorgeous, soaring sound, as expressively as possible. It won’t sound like it’s from the same piece, and shouldn’t. It’s reinforcing that even technical sections are expressive and every note in the piece should have good tone, regardless of how quickly it goes by. It also reminds you to enjoy this section, instead of being scared of it.
7. **Pretend Performance Method** – Do mock performances as often as possible, for as many different audiences as possible. Practice announcing, bowing, etc., and then play the piece, but it doesn’t have to be up to tempo. All it has to be is absolute performance quality, with the dynamics, phrasing, correct notes, and right articulations that you intend for your actual performance.