**The Post-Event Reflection process**

**Part 1: When/where/what**

Log the date, event, results (if it’s an audition, competition, or jury), and rate your performance from 0-10, where 0=poor, 5=acceptable, and 10=excellent.

**Part 2: The good, the bad, and adjustments**

a) what went well (e.g. “What worked well for you today?”), and b) what went not so well (“What did not work so well for you today?”). Practice adopting a thoughtful *growth* mindset where you focus relentlessly on identifying the *specific adjustments you can make* in preparing for the next performance

**Part 3: The mental side**

This is where you can write down all the mental skills that you’re working on – from confidence to focus to your ability to bounce back from little mistakes – and rate each of them on a scale from 0-10, where 0=low, 5=ok, and 10=high.

**Part 4: Activation (not nerves)**

Activation is just a word to describe the level of physical arousal we experience in performance settings, ranging from “deep sleep” to “intense excitement.”

**Part 5: Open-ended reflection**

“What did you learn about yourself today?” and “Anything else you want to note?”

So what does the Post-Event Reflection (or PER) look like? Well, there are 5 parts.

**The Post-Event Reflection process**

**Part 1: When/where/what**

Part 1 is basically the when/where/what of the performance. Where you log the date, event, results (if it’s an audition, competition, or jury), and rate your performance from 0-10, where 0=poor, 5=acceptable, and 10=excellent.

And even if you rate your performance a 9 or 10, that doesn’t mean you’re done! As you’ll see in a moment, there is still a lot to be gained by going through the whole reflection process, even if you just had a great performance.

**Part 2: The good, the bad, and adjustments**

Part 2 is where you dig a little deeper into the specifics of your overall performance score, by describing a) what went well (e.g. “What worked well for you today?”), and b) what went not so well (“What did not work so well for you today?”).

Because even if you had one of those transcendent days on stage, there is always room for improvement. And no matter how poor the performance, there are almost always *some* things that went well.

Whether it was a good day or a bad day, the most important thing here is to go beyond the shallow, evaluative mindset where you simply identify the good and bad of your performance, and instead practice adopting a more thoughtful *growth* mindset where you focus relentlessly on identifying the *specific adjustments you can make* in preparing for the next performance (e.g. “What adjustments do you need to make?”).

For instance, if your rhythm was inconsistent or tended to rush, this might suggest that it would help to do more metronome work and recorded run-throughs in front of other musicians who make you nervous, so you can listen back and more effectively pinpoint the specific places that get unsteady when the nerves kick in.

**A performance rubric?**

This is where developing a performance rubric (like [described here](https://www.robknopper.com/blog/2016/5/23/how-principal-2nd-violin-was-won" \t "_blank)) to help guide your reflection could be really valuable as well. For example, in orchestral auditions, you might review the recording and give yourself separate grades for intonation, sound, and rhythm, as well as articulation, dynamics, character, and so on.

You might be thinking that a rubric seems awfully grade school-like, and yes, it totally is. But every time my kids have used their writing assignment rubrics to guide the writing and editing process, they’ve done well on their writing projects. And every time they’ve ignored the rubrics, their grades have suffered.

Similarly, I think you’ll find that listening to your performance with a rubric does change your experience. For one, it’ll help you listen with a keener ear for detail. But more importantly, it’ll help you avoid the tendency to obsess about one single aspect of the performance at the expense of others.

**Part 3: The mental side**

Part 3 is all about the mental aspect of your performance. This is where you can write down all the mental skills that you’re working on – from confidence to focus to your ability to bounce back from little mistakes – and rate each of them on a scale from 0-10, where 0=low, 5=ok, and 10=high.

The idea is to quantify how well you did in each area, and elaborate a bit on these scores with some observations about how you did.

Like, “Focus = 4. I started out pretty well, and had a pretty clear focus on sound and phrasing, but then my thoughts started to wander a bit and I started worrying about a difficult shift coming up, and then when I missed it, I had a hard time not thinking about it, and getting back into the music.”

**Part 4: Activation (not nerves)**

Part 4 is devoted to reflecting on your performance “activation.”

What’s that? Well, anxiety has two components – a mental component (worry, doubt, etc.) and a physical component (increased heart rate, sweating, etc.). Activation is just a word to describe the level of physical arousal we experience in performance settings, ranging from “deep sleep” to “intense excitement.”

The idea is to reflect on whether you were at an optimal level of activation in warm-ups, right before the performance, and during the performance. Because if you were bouncing off walls in warmups, but feeling sluggish on stage, that’s not ideal and might call for some adjustments (like some morning exercise? or a nap at some point?). And if you were really high in activation backstage, but then managed to get to a more optimal place once you began playing, it’d be helpful to explore what you did a bit further, so you can replicate that in future performances.

**Part 5: Open-ended reflection**

And last but not least, part 5 is a series of open-ended questions to help prompt some additional self-reflection in areas that may not have been covered by the previous sections. With questions like “What did you learn about yourself today?” and “Anything else you want to note?”

**Takeaways**

I used to think of each performance as a one-off experience. Where it was practice, practice, practice, perform, and then move onto the next one.

In hindsight, I think it’s more effective to think of each performance or audition as just another step in our ongoing development and growth. Seeing our senior recital as an opportunity to improve our memorization strategies, for instance. Using upcoming mocks and the next few auditions as an opportunity to work on bow distribution and bow arm control under pressure. Or using a semester’s worth of studio classes to focus on increasing the variety of vibrato we feel comfortable using in performance.

My post-performance reflection process always led to the inevitable conclusion that I simply needed to practice more if I wanted to have a more positive performance experience the next time. But I think I had it wrong.

When you look at a post-performance review process like the one Chow and Luzzeri ([2019](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21520704.2018.1555565" \t "_blank)) developed, you get the sense that the goal after a performance isn’t so much to beat yourself up or pat yourself on the back and make adjustments to your practice time, but to use what you learn from the experience to evaluate your preparation process and figure out how you’re going to practice *differently*. Which may not change the past, but certainly puts you in a better position to have a more positive experience the next time.