

# ORGAN PRACTICE IS A PRIVILEGE

By VIDAS PINKEVICIUS

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## About the Author



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## Introduction

I started writing instructional articles on the art of organ playing in the late 2011. My intent was to help my readers grow as organists and achieve their goals in organ playing. What started at first as my own ideas about this subject, very soon began to be a discussion between me and the readers of my blog, [Secrets of Organ Playing](#).

This happened because people naturally were asking many important questions about the problems and struggles they are facing. I wanted my articles to be more relevant to the people who will read them so I expanded the answers I sent to the readers into articles.

After writing my first 100 or so articles people began to wonder if I could create an e-book which would include some of the best articles I have written on this topic. I understand that blog posts and individual articles might be very helpful to the people but there is something magical about creating a larger body of work, such as an e-book.

An e-book helps to spread the ideas about organ practice even further. Although one article or a blog post might contain some incredible information, not every one of them would stand the test of time.

On the other hand, if an e-book is helpful to the readers, they will share it and, consequently, the idea of organ practice will live much longer. Therefore, this e-book is a collection of my most important articles on various aspects of organ practice written in 2011-2013.

## Organ Practice Is a Privilege

Practice is a privilege, as my professor [Pamela Ruiter-Feenstra](#) always said to me.

Privilege which we have to be grateful for. So many people would wish to practice organ but they can't.

If you can touch this King of Instruments and share some of the most beautiful music ever created with other people - that's something to be really grateful for.

Practice is not a burden. It's not something you have to do. It's something to enjoy. Because every single minute spent on the organ bench wisely moves you closer to your goal one step at a time.

Baby Steps - it's a privilege to be able to take them every day.

Practice Is a Privilege - write it down and post it where you can see it every day.

## How to Create Your Own Organ Practice Plan?

Because organ repertoire is so vast (the earliest surviving music is from the 14th century), we might sometimes get overwhelmed by the variety of compositions, composers, national schools, types of compositions, and historical periods. In this case, our wishes might be too broad for the moment. One day we might want to play this, another day - that. By doing so, we might even lose our motivation to play the organ in the long run.

We can't achieve a quality performance by playing different pieces every day. What happens is that by doing so, we might develop reasonable sight-reading skills but our overall level will not be as high as if we create a strict practice routine or a plan.

If you want to succeed in organ playing, you need to have a plan. Just like any other activity, organ playing requires thinking about our goals, strategies, and tactics to achieve a higher level.

So, how do we create this plan for our organ practice? First of all, we need to think about our goals with organ playing. Where do we want to be in 2 months, in 6 months, in 1 year, or 5 years from now? Do we want to get a solid foundation of our organ technique? Or to

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find a good organist position? Or to be able to play a challenging but exciting organ piece of our choice. Or maybe to prepare for our organ recital? Because we are all different, our needs will be different, too. But we still need to think about our goals.

When we know what we want to accomplish in x months from now, then we can begin to think about the strategy to do that. For example, let's pretend I want to be able to play the famous Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor (or any other piece) in 8 weeks. In order to achieve that goal, my strategy might be something like this: I would need to spend 3 weeks by learning the piece, 1 week memorizing it and 4 more weeks perfecting it.

Once I have the strategy in place, I can plan the tactics, too. This would mean I have to calculate how much time and effort I have to put in order to learn the piece in 3 weeks. Because this piece is about 9 pages long, I would need to learn 3 pages per week, or 0,5 page per day to meet my goal.

So, would you like to create something like this for your own organ practice? Try this approach and you will have incredible clarity in what you need to do to achieve your goal.

## How to Learn Multiple Organ Pieces?

Many pieces in the organ repertoire are so beautiful that sometimes we can't decide which one is our favorite for the moment. And often we have to practice several different pieces every day. This can happen if we prepare for a recital or a church service, which might require prelude, offertory, communion, and postlude music.

Even if you play the organ just because you like it, it might be a good idea to practice several different compositions. I will explain why it is so. You see, because different historical periods, national schools, and composers require different performance practice techniques, playing different pieces every day will give you a benefit of diversifying your organ technique, too.

One possible approach would be to take 4 compositions: one free work by Bach, one chorale work by Bach, one Romantic work (Mendelssohn, Brahms, Frank etc.), and one Modern work (Messiaen, Langlais, Distler, Hindemith etc.)

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The question then is: how to plan your practice time in order to learn these 4 works every day?

First of all, you need to know how much time you can spend practicing your music every day. Two hours a day of practice would be a reasonable amount of time. Working less than that would not give the results you want for these 4 pieces. By the way, this does not necessarily mean that you have to spend 2 actual hours at the organ. It can involve some time at the piano, or even working without the instrument, too.

I would suggest practicing each piece for 30 minutes. In these 30 minutes, you can have time to do 2 things:

- 1) 10 minutes to practice and repeat the pages that you already have learned before.
- 2) 20 minutes to learn new music from this piece.

If you do this with all 4 compositions regularly, after some time you will get to the point when you will know them all together.

Note that if you want to play even more pieces every day, you have to spend more time practicing every day, too. In other words, if you have 10 compositions that you need to learn you will have to spend that much time every day practicing them. Of course, not all organ pieces have equal length and not all of them might have the same level of difficulty. Therefore, these numbers are relative. We have to adjust them to a real situation.

It is possible to practice four or five pieces one day and another four or five the next day, too. That way we just alternate our repertoire every other day.

So, would you like to be able to learn multiple organ pieces? Try this approach for yourself.

## What Is the Fastest Way to Advance in Organ Playing?

Do you ever think about how much time it will take to reach the next level in organ playing? Of course, we all want to progress as fast as possible. We want to be able to play those virtuoso organ pieces that master composers like Widor, Vierne, Franck, and others wrote. We wish to have the ability to master major polyphonic works by Bach and other Baroque composers.

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So, what is the fastest way to achieve that level of competence? The answer to this question is simple: slow, regular, and persistent practice.

### **Slow Practice**

By slow, I mean we should practice pieces in a slow tempo. Even the fast tempo pieces should be practiced this way. The tempo will become easy if you will know the piece very well. There are various practice techniques that help achieve fast tempo but generally speaking, we have to take such practice tempo in which we would avoid making mistakes.

### **Regular Practice**

In addition, we have to practice regularly. By regular practice, I mean that ideally we should practice every day. It does not always have to be two or more hours of practice, but try not to skip practicing. Even if you have only 20 minutes available, repeat the work that you practiced the day before and it will become a little better every time you practice it.

There is a saying among organists, that if we skip one day without practice, then only we notice it. If we don't practice for two days, then our teacher will start noticing it. If we spend three days without practice, then everyone will notice it.

### **Persistent Practice**

Finally, it is important that we have persistence in practice. For example, what do we do if we find a challenging spot in the music and we make mistakes? There are three options:

- 1) correct the mistakes
- 2) play with mistakes
- 3) choose another piece

Ideally, we should strive for option 1. And that often takes persistence. Very often we will get discouraged by the difficult places in a piece. We don't always see the solution very clearly. But if we have persistence, then we'll find the way out eventually. By the way, option 3 might be a good solution, if the piece is too difficult to play comparing with our current level of ability.

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So the fastest way to achieve a higher level in organ playing would require slow, regular, and persistent practice. I sure hope you are practicing this way.

## How to Memorize Music Faster and Easier?

Have you ever had a feeling that it is very hard to memorize music? Do you struggle to memorize a few measures and get stuck? Or if you memorize something and try to learn something new, you just can't remember the first fragment. Or you try to memorize the piece for weeks if not months and still it does work. Or you think you memorized something but when the time comes to play it public, something happens and you can't remember most of the piece.

If so, I know how you feel. It was even worse for me: I was so afraid to play a piece from memory that I started having nightmares about that. However, it all changed when I came across this simple and easy system that Marcel Dupre, the master French organist and composer used in his teaching.

Dupre suggests that we subdivide the piece into fragments of 4 measures. Then the memorization is done in the following manner. First, learn measure 1. Just repeat it a few times in a slow tempo, perhaps 5 times looking at the score and 5 times without looking. Then learn measures 2, 3, and 4 this way. Always start and finish the fragment on the downbeat of the measure.

After learning these 4 measures separately, practice two measures at a time. Combine measures 1 and 2, 2 and 3, 3 and 4. Again, repeat them 5 to 10 times. Then practice fragments of three measures: 1, 2, and 3, and 2, 3, and 4. Only then master measures 1, 2, 3, and 4 without stopping.

Then take another fragment of 4 measures and learn it in the same manner. Remember to repeat the previous fragments before learning something new. After learning the piece in these fragments, you can combine 2 of them together and practice 8 measures at a time. Later, take 16 measures, and so forth.

Of course, this method works very well not only for memorizing organ music but also for any other instrument as well. However, not all musical passages are equally difficult. Some are easier than others. For example, if you try to memorize any fugue, you will

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notice right away that there are places where not all parts are present. This is especially true for the beginning of the fugue. Then you will need to repeat the opening measures much less than others with full 4-part polyphonic texture. So we always have to adjust to the real situation.

This system is so powerful, but at the same time so simple and easy to implement that if you use it, you will notice how much faster and easier the whole learning process will become. The fragments will stick together in larger blocks very easily and you will know the entire piece inside out.

## Four Pillars of Organ Playing

The road to achieving a high level in organ playing can be a lifelong journey. This is so because organist's profession requires a person to have many skills. That is why people studying at universities and conservatories to become organists need to take many different music classes. Although all of them are vitally important to the aspiring organist, there are four which I consider indispensable.

### 1. Organ Technique

In this field, we learn the basics of organ playing. These may include depression and release of keys, legato touch, finger independence, glissando playing, finger substitution etc. The same holds true to the pedal playing. This area of study involves playing specially designed exercises which develop specific organ technique.

Some people do not consider the basics of organ technique very important and they start teaching organ with organ repertoire right from the beginning. I think that although this can be done, playing repertoire from the start might be sometimes too difficult for the beginner. However, the repertoire can be incorporated and mixed with the exercises quite successfully.

### 2. Organ Repertoire

This area, of course, involves practicing and performing many organ compositions from various national schools and historical periods. Because organ repertoire is so vast (the earliest surviving music was composed about 700 years ago), every organist can learn something from it that is interesting and useful.

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Naturally, the Bach organ works are the main emphasis of the repertoire for most organists, but various other important schools need to be learned as well. For example, very popular among organists today are French Classical, French and German Romantic, North German Baroque, 20th century French repertoire. However, I think one can benefit from playing other lesser played composers from the Italian and Spanish Renaissance, English Baroque composers etc.

### 3. Organ Registration

Organists would not have sufficient skills, if they did not know the basics of organ registration. This involves knowing how to register specific types of organ composition, how to mix the stops, how to achieve balance between manuals and pedals, how to adjust historical registration practices to different modern organs etc.

It is important for an organist to know how to make a good seamless crescendo, how to apply principles of terrace dynamic, how to make good use of the swell pedal etc. All these things can be learned if we study organ registration practices.

### 4. Sight-Reading

Organists also need to sight-read new repertoire pieces every day. This is the skill which will be very useful when organists have to accompany choirs or collaborate with other musicians. Without practicing sight-reading regularly, organists will have difficulty of reading and learning new music.

It often happens that we are given new music to perform with choirs, ensembles, and soloists just a few days in advance (or less). If a person does not have good sight-reading skills, he or she might have much trouble and stress learning to play these new pieces fast.

So you can see how these four areas of study (organ technique, repertoire, registration, and sight-reading) are crucial, if the organist wants to be successful.

## Why Some Organists Have Performance Anxiety?

As organists we often have to play in public. It could be services, weddings, funerals, even recitals, concerts, and organ demonstrations. However, for some organists, to play in front

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of other people can be a real stress. As you know, if we practice at home or any other place alone, our feelings and performance level can be much different than if we play for others.

Some of my organ students even have nightmares about that (me too, by the way). Actually, my worst nightmare about organ playing is like that: I have to play a recital but the music on the music rack is absolutely unfamiliar to me. Another version of the same nightmare would be if I have to play some pieces from memory, but I don't even know how they start (of course, one can easily improvise such a piece, but when you dream, it is difficult to remember this option).

Going back to this topic, people feeling stage fright or performance anxiety might get quite uncomfortable before performances. Their hands start to shake, breathing becomes very shallow, a person might start to think about the people in the audience, about their negative comments, about difficult places in some particular piece etc.

Naturally all these thoughts and feelings might affect not only person's general condition but also quality level of the performance.

So, if you are like me and have some performance anxiety what can you do about it? Is it possible to get rid of it entirely? I think as long it does not affect your playing, some anxiety might be a good thing. It gives you more focus and determination. Otherwise, the playing might be too relaxed, even boring for others to hear.

I think the level of performance anxiety might have something to do with the actual ability to play the music confidently and fluently. The better you will know the piece, the more confidence you will have in your playing, and consequently, the less stress you will feel.

In addition, the performance anxiety might be reduced by mental focus. This does not mean that we have to try to exclude all external thoughts but instead we should strive to be in the moment. When playing some particular piece, try to shift your focus and attention from measure to measure.

So the take away message here would be this: whatever piece you are working on right now, try to achieve the level of fluency when you could play it with precision and without mistakes at least three times in a row. Even try to memorize the music. Keep your focus on the current measure. Then when the time comes to perform it in public, the performance anxiety will not affect you as much.

## **Seven Common Mistakes an Organist Can Make and How to Avoid Them**

Not every organist who plays this instrument masters the organ playing and achieves the high level. Many fail to stick with it for a long time and quit before they even start to see the results of their playing. This can happen because they fall into one or more pitfalls that slow down their progress. Avoiding these mistakes can save you much precious time and energy.

### **1. Having too many wishes**

Because so much of organ music is so beautiful, sometimes people cannot decide which pieces are the most important for them to practice for the moment. They watch videos or listen to recordings, find a piece that they like and start practicing. However, the next day they might find another piece and the same will happen.

And so they have just too many pieces to learn for one practice session. Only the very best organists with much experience and extraordinary sight-reading skills can prepare for several recitals simultaneously. So limit your wishes and keep other pieces waiting for you in the future.

### **2. Laziness**

Let's face it, many people are just too lazy to learn to play the organ. Although this can be changed, they spent most of the time wishing they could be practicing and dreaming of how to become skilled in organ playing instead of just sitting down on the organ bench and start practicing.

If you are serious about organ playing, never let a day pass without some practicing. Even if the full practice time is unavailable to you, you can spend some 20 minutes just repeating what has been learned the day before.

### **3. Lack of prioritizing**

The reason many organists do not practice regularly is due to their poor ability to prioritize. If they have other responsibilities besides playing the organ, they need to set firm priorities what is the most important to accomplish each and every day. Do the tasks which are urgent first, then the important tasks, and only then the tasks that can wait.

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If you don't have or don't follow your priorities during the daily tasks and do only the things that you love first, then the urgent tasks still need to be done. Spending the day this way can mean that you will not have enough time to practice organ.

### **4. Practicing without a goal in mind**

How many times do we sit on the organ bench and just go through the motions? We may play the piece once or repeat it several times but without being aware what we need to accomplish here.

Ask yourself these questions regularly. Was the posture, hand, and foot position correct? Did I play the notes in this episode correctly? Were the fingering and pedaling without mistakes? Did I play the rhythm correctly? Was the articulation precise?

If the answer to any of these questions was "No", then go back and do it correctly a few times. If you are aware of these goals constantly while practicing, your performance level will improve dramatically over time.

### **5. Not having an experienced mentor**

Having a mentor, a teacher or a coach is crucial to your advancement. Although there are manuals, textbooks, and tutorials from which you can learn many things about organ playing, having a person whom you can trust is even more important.

There is one specific issue that needs to be addressed here: a good mentor will hold you accountable for your actions. He or she will not listen to any excuses. The mentor will push a little further each time you say "I can't". This is because the mentor was in your shoes once, mastered something, and can share this skill with others.

### **6. Not listening to the mentor you trust**

What happens if you have a good mentor but you don't follow his or hers advice? Of course, your progress will be much slower. What happens if your mentor tells you to practice for two hours a day and you only practice for 30 minutes every other day? What if your mentor asks you to memorize a page of music, and you only memorize one line?

Good mentors are supposed to be strict. Only then real progress can be seen. But remember, only you are responsible whether or not you accomplish the task that your

mentor asked you to do. So trust your mentor and try not to make excuses.

## **7. Habit of not finishing tasks**

Some people choose a piece of music, play it, practice it but never really master it. Long before they know the piece, they take another one. This approach will not get them very far. This can happen if the piece has places that organists cannot master easily. So they switch to another piece. I say this way people may eventually quit practicing the organ altogether.

We have to finish what we start unless the piece is really too difficult for us for the moment. If this is the case, ask your mentor for advice.

Realizing these common mistakes that organists often do and consciously avoiding them will help you to become a better organist. Be serious about your progress and you will reap great results.

## **What is the Secret in Achieving Fast Tempo in Organ Playing?**

Every organist wants to be able to play technically challenging pieces with precision, accuracy, and most importantly in a fast tempo. Organists who have this skill deserve much respect from their fellow organists and from their listeners. If you are curious to know how to achieve the fast tempo in organ music, read on to find out.

### **1. Practice slowly**

The most important thing to remember here is this: you should practice slowly. No matter how boring it may sound, you simply have to have patience and practice at a tempo in which you can avoid making mistakes. If you make a mistake, very often (but not always) it means that the tempo is too fast.

Achieving a fast tempo and fluency is similar to lifting weights. If you try to lift a weight for which you are not ready, you will hurt yourself but if you say to yourself "OK, even though I am lifting only that much, this is my current level. I will stick to the plan and see it through."

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This is so true because it is generally believed that you should raise the resistance level by only 10 percent every week for safe exercise. In other words, if you can currently lift 50 pounds, you should add 5 pounds after one week of exercising with this weight. Then add another 10 percent after another week and so on.

The same thing is valid for organ playing. Even though you might think that you are progressing too slowly and you are not able to achieve the fast tempo yet, you are making progress, if only you are practicing correctly and slowly. You can even use the metronome for choosing the tempo. Just like with lifting weights or any kind of physical exercise, increase the speed of your metronome by 10 percent every week. When you are ready, the faster tempo will seem natural. Just have patience and you will succeed. In fact, very often people give up playing a certain organ piece only days before a real breakthrough.

## 2. Build Up Your Technique

If you feel that achieving the fast tempo is too challenging, it might mean that you need to work on improving your organ technique. Try practicing daily exercises like scales (natural, harmonic, and melodic versions in both major and minor keys), and chromatic scales in parallel and contrary motion in octaves, thirds, tenths, and sixths over four octaves. Also play regular and long arpeggios and chords on a tonic, dominant, and diminished seventh chord. When these exercises become easy, later add scales and chromatic scales in double thirds, and sixths.

All of these exercises can be practiced either on the organ or on the piano. Take a pair of major and minor key with the same number of accidentals and practice all of the above scales, chords, and arpeggios for a week. Then every week practice different keys according to the circle of fifths. If you have very limited practice time, work on your technique at least for 30 minutes a day. After only a few weeks you will start to see some real changes in your organ playing.

## How Piano Exercises Can Strengthen Your Left Hand Technique on the Organ?

One of the main difficulties an organist can encounter is a weak left hand technique. An underdeveloped left hand can lead you into a number of problems when playing organ music. Very often organists have trouble playing more than one voice in the left hand. Additionally, when they encounter fast passages in an organ piece, their playing might

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lack precision and clarity. Consequently, majority of organ repertoire is inaccessible to them due to the underdeveloped left hand. If this sounds familiar to you, read on to find out how the left hand technique can be improved.

Obviously you can improve your left hand technique by playing special exercises on the piano or the organ. A great resource for the left hand technique is [Piano Music for One Hand: A Collection of Studies, Exercises and Pieces](#)

It is important to understand that both hands should be developed at a similar level. My favorite collection of daily exercises which develops both hands equally is [Hanon: The Virtuoso Pianist](#). This collection contains 60 exercises in three parts. The entire set takes about one hour to play in a concert tempo.

In the beginning, it may be enough for you to play just the first part – the basic 20 exercises which last about 20 minutes. Take one new exercise every week and master it. Practice it daily several times. With the following week practice 2 exercises without stopping, later 3, 4, and so on until after about 20 weeks you will know all 20 exercises. After that it will be sufficient to play the entire set of 20 exercises just once.

After they become easy, start adding more advanced exercises from the Part 2. I think you get the idea. When you reach the end of Part 2, your left hand technique will already be at the decent level. If you go even further and play the Part 3 (60 exercises total), you will achieve exactly what the title of this collection promises – the level of the virtuoso.

I have to admit that these exercises are a bit mechanical and it takes some willpower even to play through the Part 1, but the results are really great. It is a great way to develop your technique by only playing one hour a day. I can testify personally that whenever I have not enough time to practice my organ music, if only I continue to play through the set of Hanon exercises daily, my manual technique is in good shape.

I have to add that most of the time I practice them on my organ and not on the piano. Because organ mechanics might be lighter than the piano (at least on a small instrument), it is possible to add a coupler for more resistance. A great thing about practicing Hanon exercises on the organ is that you can turn the power off and play on the silent keyboard. That way you won't annoy your family but the results will be the same.

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A word of caution – always pay attention to how you are feeling. Some fatigue is OK but if you start to feel tension in your hands, you should stop at once and take some time to relax your hands and shake off the tension. This is really important if you want to reap the best results and not to hurt yourself.

Take a slow tempo at first (60, 50, even 40 beats per minute). Later you naturally start to play a little faster and faster until you reach 120 beats per minute.

If you continue practicing the exercises from [Hanon: The Virtuoso Pianist](#) regularly, I can guarantee that you will see the definite changes in your left hand technique already after a few weeks. Real pianists spend playing etudes and other piano music several hours a day in order just to maintain their keyboard technique. With the Hanon exercises you will only need about one hour a day because of the diversity of the exercises. Every imaginable classical piano technique and figure is included in the set, including tremolos, octaves, and scales in double thirds and sixths.

You may be thinking that these exercises are good only for pianists. However, just think how much the legato Romantic organ technique was influenced by the piano technique in the French symphonic organ school (Widor and Vierne, for instance) and you will have no doubt about the benefits of the Hanon exercises for the organists.

The good thing about this collection is that at the end of the second part there is a set of exercises devoted to scales and arpeggios. So people who are fond of scales and arpeggios will find benefit from this collection as well. By the way, I play scales and arpeggios on two manuals because compass of the organ manuals is a little too short for some exercises.

## How to Achieve Accuracy in Manual Changes When Playing Organ?

In organ pieces where you have to jump from one manual to another frequently, doing it with accuracy and without hitting the wrong notes can be a tricky task. Here are a few of my recommendations which will definitely help you to achieve accuracy when changing manuals.

### **Practice opposite changes**

Because it is likely that you will encounter an organ where the Great is either the first or the second manual, it is important to practice switching manuals the opposite way. This can be useful also because you will not always know which manual will serve you best in each specific situation. So you have to be prepared to jump upwards or downwards. I personally can testify how tricky it may be, especially if the organ is unfamiliar and you are mentally unprepared to make such adjustments.

I remember playing Bach's D Minor Toccata and Fugue in one concert where the Great was the second manual and the Positive was the first. I thought I was mentally prepared for it but did not practice the actual manual changes the opposite way. In this concert, I had to jump downwards for echo effects in toccata. The first manual change was like a cold shower to me – I almost missed the manual.

Luckily, at the last moment I remembered that this organ had positive in the lower manual and everything went well. Knowing that, I was on my guard for echo effects in the fugue.

However, the feeling of having to jump the wrong way was quite strange. Lesson learned – always practice manual changes both ways, unless there is no other way to do that (like in thumbing down technique).

### **Imitate manual changes**

My organ students often ask me if it is really necessary to have a two manual organ at your disposal to practice manual changes. My answer is the definite NO. You can practice majority of organ repertoire on a one manual instrument, even on the piano. When the time comes to make a manual change, just imitate the movement you would do with you hands if you had several manuals.

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In other words, make a mental note of the change, physically move your hand upward or downward but continue playing on the same manual. This type of practice greatly saves time because it involves a powerful strategy – visualization. Using this technique, we visualize the manual switch and make appropriate movements with the hand but use only one keyboard.

### **Imitate the movements on the table**

I explained how manual changes can be practiced on one keyboard but you may be surprised to find out that it could be done on the table as well. Just do all the movements of the hand and pretend you are playing the real organ and jump upwards or downwards for manual changes. This technique is a real time saver.

You can practice on the table even during TV commercials. Imagine how much of your precious time that will save. Usually there are at least three commercials during a show or a movie each lasting at least 5 minutes. Practicing your manual changes this way will give you at least 15 minutes (most likely even more). This amount of time is surely more than enough to master at least one difficult manual change in the piece.

If you follow my suggestions, your accuracy will improve over time. Try to plan this in advance, practice slowly and repeatedly. When you hit the wrong note when changing manuals, always go back, correct the mistake and practice not until you can play it correctly but until you can't make the same mistake again. In other words, make your manual changes automatic. Take advantage of the piano or the table and the difficult jumps will become easy to you.

### **Mark manual changes in the score**

Although it might be tempting to have a clean score, it is always best to write in manual changes in your music, however obvious they might be. Mark not only the graphical representation but also write in which manual you will use. For example, if the right hand has to jump from the first manual to the second, write in the exact manual separation by drawing a line. In addition, at the exact place when manual change has to occur, write "II" in your score. This is indeed necessary to avoid confusion when performing the piece in public, at least until you will have more experience in organ playing.

### **Stay close to keyboards when changing manuals**

Once you know the place where the switch has to be made, make sure that you only lift your hand or hands as little as possible from the keyboards. The distance between the manuals is about a couple of inches or 5 cm (sometimes more) so your hand has to make a rather noticeable movement in order to reach a different manual. This is even more obvious when jumping from the first manual to the third or vice versa.

For example, the distance between the manuals on my organ is 6.7 cm (when a note on the lower manual is depressed). It is even greater when I have to reach the second manual diagonally – around 10 cm. I remember having a great trouble when practicing the last page of the notorious *Motto Ostinato* from *Sunday Music* by Petr Eben (the most important 20th century Czech composer). This particular episode has frequent jumps over three manuals which make an astounding echo effect on the organ. I managed to learn it with accuracy only when staying close to the keyboard.

### **Practice slowly**

If there is one single most important point about accuracy in manual changes, it is a slow practice. Practicing slowly can make a big difference in a challenging spot. Try to overcome the temptation of playing technically difficult pieces in a concert tempo frequently. By applying slow motion in your practice you will be able to control your movements much better.

You see, at the beginning stages of organ playing, your hand movements are still not precise and fast or medium tempo does not help here at all. In fact, you should take such practicing tempo that will not allow any or almost any mistakes and you will feel comfortable. It is precisely slow practice which helped me master the above-mentioned page of *Motto Ostinato*.

### **Practice repeatedly**

If you managed to play the difficult spot with manual change correctly, do not be satisfied with only one correct attempt. Instead, practice this episode repeatedly 10 or more times until it becomes automatic. Try to achieve the level when you can play correctly with precision and accuracy at least three times in a row.

This means that if you play correctly twice and make a mistake on a third attempt, you have to start over and begin counting from one. I know from my personal experience just how frustrating this can be sometimes. Do not get discouraged by your mistakes. They simply mean that you need to take a slower tempo. If you insist upon making manual changes automatic, when the time comes, you will be ready to perform the piece with confidence.

## **5 Reasons Why Piano Practice Can Make Wonders to Your Organ Playing**

Organ technique can be developed through regular, smart, and persistent practice. One of the best ways to advance in organ playing is through piano practice. People who start playing the organ after some years of piano studies are definitely in better position than those who start directly from the organ. In this section, I will give you five reasons why practicing on the piano can make wonders to your organ playing.

The basis of modern legato organ technique is piano technique. Ever since modern organ technique was first formalized by Jacques Lemmens (more on this history you can read in this [Orpha Ochse's book](#)) in the middle of the 19th century, the legato touch became a norm even for Baroque compositions for a long time. Lemmens' method was perfected by a few other organists, like [Marcel Dupre](#) and [Harold Gleason](#) who published their own organ method books. Traditionally, normal touch for much piano music is also legato. I am not suggesting that baroque music must be played legato on the piano too, but I want to demonstrate how all pervasive romantic piano tradition was to organ playing.

### **Piano keyboard is often harder than organ**

If you compare various organ keyboards to that of the piano, you will find that to depress a key on the organ (without couplers, of course) often is easier than on the piano. This is especially true on electronic organs, on electric action organs, on pneumatic action organs with barker levers, on electro-pneumatic action organs, and even on small tracker action

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organs, such as positive organs. This feature of the piano keyboard gives you a lot more resistance. In other words, if you play technically challenging fast exercises, like [Hanon virtuoso pianist](#) exercises on the organ for some twenty minutes, your fingers are likely to be less tired than if you play them on the piano.

On the piano all inequalities of the touch is much more visible than on the organ. Try to play an excerpt of any organ composition on the piano and you will notice right away how easy it is to play one note too loud with your thumb or too soft with your pinky on the piano. In other words, you must work very hard too make all notes sound dynamically equal on the piano. This is so because of the dynamic possibilities that piano action allows. Therefore the stronger and longer fingers often play too loud and shorter fingers too soft. To equalize all notes, by the way, is our goal when practicing organ music on the piano.

### **Piano practice develops finger dexterity**

If you play exercises and organ music on the piano regularly, gradually you will notice how much easier it will become for you to play in a fast tempo. Your touch will become light and swift, your virtuoso passages will sound truly virtuosic. Such technically challenging pieces, as [Prelude and fugue on BACH](#) and [Fantasy and Fugue on “Ad nos, ad salutarem undam”](#) by Liszt or [Sonata by Reubke](#) will pose no difficulty to you.

### **Piano practice develops finger independence**

If you have ever noticed in your organ playing that technically advanced pieces sound sloppy, practice them on the piano. All these technical challenges arise because our fingers might not be independent enough. You may notice it very clearly if you play a scale in a very fast tempo on the organ. It will sound legato, of course, which is not necessarily a bad thing. What is worse that this scale may be performed unequally.

In other words, if you record this scale and play it back in slow motion, then you may be able to hear that a few notes could be stuck together and others would sound too detached. Therefore, piano practice helps in developing finger independence needed for technically challenging music.

If you practice your organ pieces and exercises on the piano regularly, chances that you will achieve a high level in organ playing are quite good. Piano practice will give you finger dexterity and independence that will propel your organ performance on to the next level. When playing piano, you can practice performing pedal part of organ compositions

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on the floor. That will save you much precious time. However, never forget that organ touch is very different from piano touch and practice accordingly.

If you would like to know more about the practicing techniques on any keyboard instrument, I highly recommend [Keyboard Practice Skills by Elaine Grover](#). This compact book presents a comprehensive presentation of all the basic practice techniques needed for successful mastering of keyboard skills. Chapters include "Warm-up Exercises," "Creating a Practice Routine," "Learning the Basics," "Developing a Practice Mind," "Using Practice Skills," "Building Momentum," and others.

## What Are the Top 10 Techniques Which Will Help You to Develop Good Organ Practice Habits?

In order to learn any organ piece, regular practice is required. However, if you want to make some real progress in organ playing you need to develop good practice habits. Practicing sporadically or without a goal in mind will not get you very far. Every time you sit down on the organ bench, you have to practice correctly. Over time correct practice leads to correct practicing habits. In this section, I will teach you my favorite 10 techniques which will help you to develop good organ practice habits.

### 1. Practice regularly

This is perhaps the most important suggestion. Many people fail to advance in organ playing because their practice is sporadic. They may practice for a few days or a week with initial excitement but later they find it hard to commit. Make your practice time constant and mark it on your calendar so that you will not forget it.

### 2. Have a specific goal in mind

If you have difficulty in committing to practice regularly, this point might help you. Setting short-term and long-term goals will allow you to have a vision of what it is you want to accomplish today, in a week, a month, a year or five years from now. Always think whether your current organ practice moves you closer to your goals.

### **3. Keep correct posture**

Try to sit up straight on the organ bench. Remind yourself frequently to check on your posture. Do not slouch because this will be not good for your health. Practicing with incorrect posture will eventually lead to back problems. Relax your shoulders and breathe deeply. You have to force yourself to sit up straight at first. With time it will become easier because you will form a good habit.

### **4. Check your hand and feet position frequently**

When you practice, ask yourself if your heels and knees are held together. Make sure you do not lift your fingers and feet from the keys. Keep them in contact with the keys at all times. If you insist on having a good hand and feet position, with time it will become habitual.

### **5. Practice in a slow tempo**

They say that the fastest way to progress in organ playing is done through slow practice. Try to resist the temptation of playing at a concert tempo often, especially during the learning stage. Remember that practicing is very different from performing. There are special techniques which can help you to achieve a faster tempo, but majority of your practice should be done in a slow tempo.

### **6. Be strict on correcting your mistakes**

It is best to practice in such a way and tempo that you could avoid making mistakes. However, this is not always possible. When you make a mistake, always make a mental note of it, stop and think about what might be the reason for it (incorrect hand or feet position, fingering or pedaling, tempo, difficult rhythmical element or any other thing). When you know what the reason was, go back, try to correct it, and play a few times in a row without mistakes. Practicing in this way will help you form the right practice habits.

### **7. Work on improving your manual and pedal technique**

Mistakes may also occur because your technique is not yet well developed. I suggest daily practice of Hanon exercises and pedal scales for improving your finger and pedal technique. They not only are perfect means to warm up before practice but also will help

you to acquire advanced technical skills. Even if full organ practice time is unavailable on a particular day to you, manual and pedal exercises is a must. You won't regret it.

### **8. Be aware of how the piece is put together**

As you practice, think not only about correct notes, fingers, pedals, rhythms, and articulation, but also about the structure of the piece. Think like a composer. Discover the main cadences, keys used in a composition, and identify the form. In order to do that you may need to refresh your music theory skills. You will be surprised how much more solid and convincing your organ playing will become.

### **9. Practice sight-reading**

Choose a collection of music of your level and play a page or two daily. If you will find this task too difficult, try playing just one line, voice, or hand at a time. If you want to be able to learn advanced organ music fast, this sight-reading exercise is indispensable.

### **10. Have patience**

Do not expect fast results in a short time. Sometimes we are even not aware of our own advancement. Even though you make mistakes and find many challenging parts in your music, you are still making progress. On the other hand, if you think you are progressing fast, that may not necessarily be true and you need to reassess your practicing habits. Try to find someone who can listen to you objectively. Record your own organ playing and analyze it with a strict ear. By the way, this is why having a teacher or a mentor is so important.

Consider these points when you play the organ. If you bear these suggestions in mind every time you practice organ playing, you will develop the right practice habits which in turn will lead to a solid technique. Because solid technique is the foundation of organist skills, you will have no trouble learning technically advanced organ music and your organ playing level may become quite high.

## How to Practice Organ Without an Organ?

For many adult organists having enough time during the day to practice the organ is perhaps one of the greatest challenges. However, you will be surprised that organ practicing often can be done even without any organ at all. I hope people who have a very limited access to actual organ will find the following advice especially useful. Please read on to find out my suggestions.

Let me start by remembering a recent experience I had while preparing a new, long, and challenging program for a concert of choral music at the Madeleine church in Paris. I was supposed to play organ accompaniments (many of them with an advanced organ part) and some solo organ pieces on the choir organ at that church. I was given the music quite early in advance but circumstances were such that I did not have enough time to practice this repertoire. So I felt like it might be a bit of a challenge to perform it with confidence.

Our concert was supposed to be on Tuesday afternoon, but I arrived at the hotel on Sunday afternoon. Because this church is very popular among tourist groups, I was not given any time to practice organ until the day of the concert. Imagine that – two and a half days without an organ right before the concert. Oh, and by the way, I played a full solo recital in my church with completely different music on Saturday the night before my trip to Paris. So I had to use my practice time wisely to be able to prepare multiple organ pieces .

I am writing all this not because I want you to think that I was cool or to brag but just because I would like you to appreciate the seriousness of my situation. However, I was quite confident that my system of practicing will not fail me. And sure enough, the concert went well, and was well received. So if you are curious to know what method I used for practicing organ without having access to it for two and a half days - here it is:

Because the bed of my hotel room was not high enough, I put a few cushions, pillows and other things that I could find on the edge of the bed. The height of it became similar to that of an organ bench. Then I pulled the table next to my bed so that I could put my music on it. I think you get the picture now: the bed became my organ bench, the table – music rack and keyboards, and the floor... the pedal board.

So I sat there pretending that I played the real organ and began practicing. I imagined that the edge of the table was my keyboard and played just as I would on a real instrument. I

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also moved my feet visualizing the pedal keys accordingly. It was an interesting experience – the music sounded in my head.

You see, it is all about visualization. They use it in sports and martial arts all the time. In boxing they call it “shadow boxing”, in karate - “kata”. The athletes don’t always practice their moves and techniques with a partner. Very often they practice on their own. They visualize their opponent or multiple opponents.

The same thing applies to basketball as well. I once read about an experiment with 3 groups of people who liked shooting a basket. Before the experiment their abilities were measured. Group A was told not to practice shooting basket and forget about it for a month. Group B had to practice shooting the basket for one hour every day for one month. Finally, Group C was supposed for one hour every day to visualize the movements in great detail without actually physically shooting the basket.

Their abilities were measured after one month. As you can imagine, Group A tested the same as before. Group B showed 24 percent of improvement. And here is the most interesting part – Group C showed 23 percent of improvement. That’s only one percent less than that of Group B who were physically shooting the basket for a month.

I hope you can now see the power of visualization. This kind of practice not only gives you same results as you would be physically playing the real organ but also develops your mental focus abilities and inner hearing. It is important that we try to hear in our minds the music that we pretend to be playing. We don’t just go through the motions, so to speak. I am sure that practicing on the table and on the floor without mental visualization would give you some improvement, but not nearly as much as if you would practice with your inner hearing.

Let’s take another real life example: recently I taught a group of adult students in our organ studio. These were adults, some of them professors at the university with some piano but no organ experience. Usually the way we worked was such that one person would play exercises from our [method book](#), I would comment, correct the mistakes, play myself to show my students how it supposed to sound. While one person was playing, others would be watching him or her and make mental notes of the mistakes, my comments so on.

But one day I decided to do an experiment with them which would prove if my system

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was any good. And so, while one student was playing, others also were playing at the same time but on the table and on the floor. After a while I asked them to switch and another student took the place on the organ bench. Strangely enough, even though the exercise was new to her and she only practiced it on the table, she did not make any mistakes at all on the real organ. I thought maybe that was because she played only the manual part and that she will have more trouble with the pedals .

After a while it was her turn to play the pedal line of that exercise on the organ and as you can feel, she did it fine, too. So you see, it works not only for the finger work but also for pedal part as well.

This method of organ playing also saves time because we are not fixed to the location of the organ. Organ practice can be done anywhere where there is quiet. All you need is a table, a floor, your music, mental focus, and inner hearing. Of course, you can use this method to memorize music as well.

I hope my suggestions will be useful especially to organists who have very limited practice time on the actual organ.

## How to Find Time for Organ Playing?

One of the most common reasons why people skip practicing the organ is that they don't have enough time. With all other important tasks and activities during the day it seems impossible to squeeze that extra time needed for organ practice. People who work from 8 to 5 are often too exhausted to play the organ after work. Our families also require much attention. Is there any recipe or solution how to find time for organ playing? Read on to find out.

First of all, we have to set firm priorities what is most important for us during the day. If organ playing is a hobby for you, then obviously you have other responsibilities every day. These tasks need to be done first, in order to properly fulfill our duties. If you love organ playing and tend to sacrifice other more important things in your life then you should consider setting firm priorities.

I am not suggesting that organ practice does not need any sacrifice at all as you will later find out; I am just saying that first things come first.

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Do not prioritize your family. Your family is the most important thing you have in life and they need your special attention and care. If your spouse asks for your help and you are in the middle of your organ practice, don't say "I will help you when I am done with my organ playing". Or if your kids ask you to look at their homework, do it right away.

However, we also need to think about what we do when we work. That way we could be more productive in our work, accomplish more, and perhaps have more time for organ playing at the end of the day. Are we working seriously and staying focused on the task at hand all the time or we are reading our email, and newspapers, checking social media, watching online videos during our work day?

All of this takes precious time. I may say, "It will just take a few minutes and I'll be done", but in reality I even won't notice how I may spend 30 minutes or more doing things that are not necessary.

You see, these 30 minutes can be all you need for your organ practice after work. Some people work at evenings so they could practice organ in the morning.

What about playing organ on weekends? Sure you could play more on Saturdays and Sundays. Usually our weekends are not that full of activities and we may try to practice even for 2 hours. That would be great. Imagine, how your organ playing would improve, if you could practice that much every weekend for one year.

You are probably wondering what is the minimum time required for organ playing? On weekdays, perhaps minimum time could be 30 minutes of wise and productive practice. You could work on your keyboard and pedal technique playing [Hanon exercises](#) , [pedal scales](#) , and [sight-reading](#) for 30 minutes every evening and practice for 2 hours on weekends. This could be all you need to see constant improvement.

Even if full practice time is unavailable for you, repeating for 15-20 minutes what you learned the day before could be much better than to skip practice that day altogether.

Some people would rather practice in the mornings, other later in the evenings. Of course, this requires a little sacrifice. But if you have a goal in mind, if you are truly passionate about organ, it is probably worth it.

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Do whatever works best for you. Whatever time you choose for organ playing try to make it constant. Put it on your calendar. This way you will know exactly when to practice. You will have a constant time for it and you will not have to worry about how to squeeze it into your schedule every day. Just write it down.

I know that we are all different and our needs are different, too. Every person has to find a special solution. But these are my personal recommendations and I hope you will find at least some of them useful.

## What Is the Best Way to Start Playing the Organ: Organ Method Books or Organ Repertoire?

When beginners first decide to start playing the organ, they inevitably have a question: where to begin? Having an answer to this question is crucial to the advancement of an organist.

Without a clear understanding of what are the strengths and weaknesses of any particular approach, it will be very difficult to succeed in developing one's technique. In this section, I will give you my thoughts on this topic.

First of all, let me say this: if you have a teacher or a mentor whom you can trust, do as they tell you. It is important that you accept and follow your teacher's suggestions. Otherwise, he or she can't take full responsibility for your development.

When I first started to play the organ, my teacher asked me to choose a choral prelude from the [Orgelbuchlein](#) by J.S.Bach. Imagine that – playing from Orgelbuchlein right from the beginning...

I have to admit, although I had a fairly well developed piano technique (I played the piano for 10 years before starting taking organ lessons), I had much trouble with this chorale.

I did not know the reason why it was so difficult then, but now I can confidently say it was so because it had 4 independent voice parts (one in the pedal).

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Talking about Orgelbuchlein, it would have been better to start with the trio texture with 3 independent voices (chorale prelude "[Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ](#)"), because it does not require to play two voices in one hand, which makes too difficult for a beginner to control the articulation.

So going back to this topic you can see, that if the organist chooses a piece from the repertoire, it should be a wise choice.

On the other hand, having a [good organ method book](#), proceeding from the beginning and diligently following the instructions might save a lot of precious time.

You see, the author who writes a particular method book gives you not only very specific exercises to develop your organ technique, but usually a good method book is structured in a very graded manner – from easy to difficult exercises and compositions.

A traditional method book might start just with a single line and large note values and proceed a little bit further and involved with each set of exercises. This way the beginner might not feel overwhelmed by the subtleties of texture and technique.

I understand that in many cases method books have long sections with dry unmusical exercises which are focused just on one particular element of organ technique, like pedal playing and the organist is supposed to complete them all. Organ pieces sometimes are only at the end of such method. For some people, this approach might be too boring.

Isn't the most beautiful organ music that they first heard was the most important reason for them to start playing this instrument in the first place? And here they are forced to play these exercises for many pages...

Perhaps they could feel better about them if they had their goal, vision, or a dream in mind. For example, imagine that the organist wanted to play some piece that he or she always dreamed of, like [the D Minor Toccata and Fugue by Bach](#) or [Toccata by Widor](#).

But this organist would understand that they are too complicated for a beginner and start studying organ from the method book first with this goal in mind. In fact, it is possible to use a mixed approach.

With this approach you would study exercises from the method book but integrate

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compositions from the repertoire of your level, too. Incidentally, [the best method books](#) available today integrate pieces within the exercises or construct the exercises out of the excerpts of the pieces.

In addition, such a book also has extensive details on early organ technique, registration, ornamentation, service playing, organ construction, and even on the new late 20th century techniques.

Another option would be to start playing the organ with very easy pieces from organ repertoire, such as the chorale prelude [“In dulci júbilo” by Johann Michael Bach](#).

However, be aware that you will need to figure out many details by yourself which otherwise would be included in the method book. These details include choice of fingering, pedaling, articulation, registration, ornamentation etc.

So you still probably would need to consult your teacher or a method book. Otherwise, your solutions might not be the best and the road to mastering these pieces would be too long.

Following the directions from your method book in a way is like studying with an experienced teacher but without the benefits of feedback, motivation, encouragement, and support. By the way, most of the good teachers I know of use method books in one way or another in their teaching.

In the end, I would say that it is possible to start playing the organ with any approach described here. Of course, the choice is yours but my recommendation would be to choose and practice wisely. Treat the pieces like the exercises, find and isolate the difficulties, practice them diligently and you will have no trouble in mastering any organ piece.

## How to Keep the Organ Music in Our Long-Term Memory in 11 Simple Steps?

Many organists want to be able to play the most wonderful organ compositions from memory. This skill lets them to know the music at a much deeper level and gives many advantages against the organists who do not work on memorizing their music.

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But is it possible to store the music in our permanent memory so that we could play it after many months? The answer is yes, and my advice below will show you how to do it.

First of all, we have to understand that after we memorize the piece the next day we have to repeat it otherwise we will soon forget it. What does it take to truly [memorize the composition](#) ? We can take the analogy with learning the words of the new language.

Just imagine if you have to memorize 5 new words in a foreign language today. How many times you have to repeat them in order to memorize them? Perhaps repetition of 10 times each would be enough for most people. Will you remember them tomorrow? Not really, unless you repeat them tomorrow, right? So, if you repeat them tomorrow, will you remember them permanently? Not yet.

We have to repeat them about 100 times over a long period of time to be able to remember them permanently. In other words, repetition of just 10 times stores them in our short-term memory, but if we repeat them 100 times over some months, then we will have them stored in our long-term memory.

Going back to organ playing, we can also use a similar system how you could go about in memorizing music and keeping it in your long-term memory. We will use a special 11 step strategy.

- 1) Memorize the music. Repeat it 10 times.
- 2) Repeat it after 1 day 10 times.
- 3) Repeat it after 2 days 10 times.
- 4) Repeat it after 4 days 10 times.
- 5) Repeat it after 1 week 10 times.
- 6) Repeat it after 2 weeks 10 times.
- 7) Repeat it after 1 month 10 times.
- 8) Repeat it after 2 months 10 times.

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9) Repeat it after 4 months 10 times.

10) Repeat it after 6 months 10 times.

11) Repeat it after 1 year 10 times.

Note that the length of the piece does not matter as long as you repeat so many times. However, I suggest you try something shorter for starters. After 1 year you will have 110 repetitions of this piece and it will be stored in your long-term memory. Then you can leave it for many months, but you will not forget it.

However, I don't mean you should be playing ONLY this piece for one year. Of course, play and other organ compositions but this is for the sake of an experiment. You can memorize more pieces, if you have time.

Now try this for yourself and I would like to know how it will work for you. It certainly did work for me.

## How Not to Give Up Your Organ Practice - 4 Tips

Although many organists start playing the organ, only a small portion of them ever achieve success. This may happen for a variety of reasons but one of the greatest obstacles is when people give up playing this instrument and quit. If you want that this will not happen to you, try applying the following 4 tips.

### 1. Have a goal in mind

First and foremost you have to find a goal which you can focus on. It could be like a dream which keeps you going. Your goal could be a general one, like to become a good organist, or a more specific, like to master any piece you love.

However, if you play aimlessly, your chances of keeping up your practice for years to come are not high. In other words, if you play one day this, another day that - such practice will not lead you anywhere. Note that I am not talking here about sight-reading which you should also practice. Instead, I am referring to the pieces that you want to master at a deeper level.

## **2. Have a schedule for practice**

Once you found out what your goal is, prepare a plan with specific steps and schedule for your regular practice. Remember that it is important that you practice regularly.

If you skip one day without practice, only you will notice it. Spend two days without a practice and your teacher or friends will start noticing it. As the old saying goes, practice is like boiling water - without constant heat it cools down.

Note that your practice sessions do not necessarily have to be very long. Only 30 minutes a day might be all you need to start seeing some positive results after a few short months.

## **3. Choose pieces according to your level of ability**

Try to be realistic about your technical level when practicing organ. Although your dream might be to play something technically very challenging, like [Widor's Toccata](#), you might not be ready for it yet.

Instead, take some shorter, slower works from the same period and master them. Think of them as a preparation for your goal which you eventually will attempt to achieve.

## **4. Find a mentor you can trust to push you**

Although you have chances to succeed when working alone, having a good mentor, a teacher, or instructor is much more beneficial. Your mentor can tell you to practice harder, motivate you, give you a daily plan, and other valuable recommendations.

However, you must listen to your mentor and do what he or she asks you to do. There is no point of working with a mentor and doing things that contradict with mentor's teachings.

Key points to remember: find a goal, prepare a schedule for practicing, practice pieces that are not too difficult for you at the moment, find a mentor and listen to your mentor. If you follow my advice, you will have many more chances to practice for many years successfully.

## How to Avoid Frustration When Practicing the Organ - 6 Tips

Every organist wants to see great results from practicing the organ playing. However, if the results are not as good or if they cannot be achieved fast enough, some people might feel disappointed and frustrated. Practicing with this feeling is not going to help them to advance in organ playing. What they need is to overcome the frustration and focus on what is important. In this section, I will give you 6 tips which might help you to avoid frustration when playing the organ.

### 1. Check if the piece is not too difficult

Very often organists with modest technical abilities have quite ambitious goals and start playing compositions that technically are too challenging or they simply are too long. For example, such a person might like Bach's or Widor's Toccata or [Prelude and Fugue on BACH](#) by Liszt or any other difficult piece.

However, no matter how beautiful these works are, beginners have to start with more modest and shorter pieces first. For instance, if you like [Bach's D minor Toccata](#), try several shorter preludes and fugues from the collection of [8 Little Preludes and Fugues, BWV 553-560](#).

Or if you eventually plan to master [Widor's Toccata](#), why not to start with an easier piece from the French symphonic school, such as [Berceuse](#) by Vierne, pieces from [L'Organiste](#) by Franck or works from [Practical Organist](#) by Guilmant.

Instead of [Prelude and Fugue on BACH](#) by Liszt, play easier movements from [Mendelssohn's sonatas](#), or [choral preludes](#) by Brahms. Although they are short and not as difficult, the artistic level of these works is very high.

You are probably wondering, how to know if the piece is too difficult? Try sight-reading it in a very slow tempo, and if you make mistakes in every measure, I suggest taking an easier piece first.

## **2. Practice in voice combinations to avoid mistakes**

If the piece you are working on is of your technical level then there is one more thing you can do to make things easier. In order to avoid making mistakes, which will save you a lot of frustration, try practicing your organ piece in separate voices first.

After that work on two-voice combinations, do not rush and achieve the level when you can play them at least three times in a row correctly. Then play three voices the same way and finally, the entire four-part texture.

## **3. Practice in fragments to correct mistakes**

If after playing according to the above point you are still making some mistakes, it is best not to play your piece all the way through. Instead, work on one small episode or fragment at a time. It could be as short as 1-2 measures or longer (1 line).

If you make a mistake, just go back to the beginning of your fragment, take a slower tempo, correct your mistake and play it at least three times in a row without any errors. Note that your fingering, pedaling, notes, rhythms and articulation must be precise.

## **4. Remember your goal**

Usually frustration sets in when we are unsatisfied with our progress or the results we are seeing. However, all this negative feeling can be avoided if you remember your goal, dream or vision as an organist.

It may be something general, like becoming a good organist or developing a solid organ technique or more specific, like learning any particular piece that you like or preparing for an upcoming recital or church service. Try to resist the thoughts that let you down and keep your mind focused on your goal. This way your mistakes and challenges will not seem as daunting to you.

## **5. Make a plan for your daily practice**

Once you determine what your goal is, you have to create a plan of your daily steps to reach this goal. In other words, you will have to know what kind of specific action you

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have to take every day in order for your dream to become a reality.

For example, imagine that your piece is 3 pages long, each page having 4 lines which makes total of 12 lines. Your daily plan might be to learn 1 line per day and repeat the previously learned lines. As you can see, it will take 12 days to learn the entire piece and a few more to make your playing fluent. Of course, if you want to progress faster, you can always put in more practice time and learn more lines per day.

### **6. Take a slow tempo**

Usually when we make a mistake it is because our practicing tempo is too fast. Here you have to understand the difference between practice and performance. You see, although faster tempo might be required when performing any particular piece in public, you have to play differently when practicing alone.

The best tempo for practicing is the tempo in which you can avoid making mistakes. So check how many mistakes you are making and slow down accordingly until they disappear. It really is that simple. You will not feel any frustration this way. On the contrary, you might feel some pride that you are seeing the results you want.

Do not worry about the concert tempo. You will reach it gradually when you are ready. As the saying goes, slow practice makes fast progress.

To summarize: choose the piece which is not too complicated for you at the moment, work in voice combinations and in smaller fragments for best results. Practicing this way will lead you to success in organ playing and will help you to avoid much frustration. Most importantly, remember your goal, stick to your plan and small challenges will seem insignificant to you. Remember that every practice session brings you closer to your goal one step at a time.

## How to Play Each Voice Independently in a Polyphonic Composition?

Because much of organ music consist of polyphonic works with several independent melodies, it is important for the organist to be able to hear and play each voice independently. If you focus on emphasizing different voices, your playing will become very clear and much more interesting to the listeners. By hearing each voice independently you will let your audience appreciate the structure and the thematic material on a higher degree. However, if you want to achieve such level in organ playing, you must know the correct way of practicing polyphonic compositions.

### Practice solo voices first

If you take an unfamiliar polyphonic organ work, such as a fugue and try to play it as written right from the beginning, there is a high chance of missing many important details, such as articulation and phrasing. In addition, you might make many mistakes. However, if you truly want to master a polyphonic piece and play each line independently, I suggest you practice solo voices first.

Practicing this way might save you a lot of energy and you will avoid frustration. In fact, you will master each line separately and know how the piece is put together. This way you will build a solid foundation for your further practice. Make sure your fingering, pedaling, rhythms, articulation, phrasing and ornaments are precise in each voice.

### Practice two-voice and three-voice combinations

After you master each voice part separately and are able to play them at least three times correctly in a row, work on two-voice and three-voice combinations. This step will be more difficult to master, so take a slow and comfortable tempo in which you can play without mistakes. The most challenging combination will be the one which requires to play the left hand and pedal part together.

### Coordinate the releases

After you can play three voices together in a polyphonic composition, make sure your releases are precise. This means that you have to treat each voice separately with correct articulation. Often suspensions and syncopations in one voice must be played using a different articulation from other voices.

### **Work repeatedly in fragments**

The best way to practice either each voice or various voice combinations is in smaller episodes or fragments. This way you can either prevent making mistakes or to correct them immediately. Therefore, I suggest you avoid playing long episodes or the entire work, at least in the beginning stages of your practice.

Note that you must try to notice and execute such details, as articulation, ornaments, fingering, pedaling and phrasing correctly. This way your voices will sound very precise and independent.

### **How to Read Three Lines of Organ Scores in 3 Easy Steps?**

Beginner organists usually struggle with reading three staves of organ scores. Although they may have some experience in reading piano scores with two lines, adding just one more line for the pedals seems a daunting task. Not only they lack the technical ability to play the right notes on the pedal board but also they have to face another challenge – their left hand naturally wants to play the bottom line. Prospective organists might get frustrated with these difficulties and quit practicing the organ. However, there is an easier way to read three lines of organ music which will help you to simplify this task.

#### **Practice 1 line at a time first**

Since 3 stave notation is new to beginner organists, it is not surprising why they find it so difficult to read all the lines together at first. However, we should remember that even two lines of piano scores were difficult to read at first. Therefore, I suggest you practice one line at a time in the beginning. For example, when you take a new organ composition, don't attempt to play the entire organ score with pedals, but practice the right hand part at first, then play the left hand part, and, finally, master the pedal part. This will be the hardest task.

#### **Practice 2 lines later**

When you can play your solo parts at least three times in a row correctly without hesitations and interruptions, put 2 lines together and practice them. You can work in the following dispositions: the right hand and the left hand, the right hand and the pedal part, and the left hand and the pedal part. As in the previous step, try to achieve some fluency

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and play each disposition without mistakes, with the right articulation at least 3 times in a row correctly. The most difficult disposition undoubtedly will be the left hand and pedal part. Here you will have to repeat the most times. Stop at each measure when you make a mistake, go back a few measures and correct each mistake.

### Practice 3 lines

If you are honest and practice sincerely the two previous steps, this final step will not be as hard as it have seemed to you originally. Now you are ready to play all parts together. Again, work in smaller fragments for the best results and correct your mistakes.

Note that every step requires practicing in a slow and comfortable tempo. Although the concert tempo might be much faster, don't worry about it at first. You will be able to play up to tempo naturally when you are ready.

### Practice sight-reading the same way

If you are interested in reading music at the organ, you can try practicing [371 Harmonized Chorales](#) by Bach. Although they are short but their harmonies are spectacular. We know that Bach never wrote a treatise on harmony. But these chorales are like a real textbook of harmony. Many theorists after Bach analyzed them and developed a system of tonal harmony.

You can practice these chorales (with bass part on the pedals) to improve your sight-reading abilities at the organ. Apply the same above steps and play solo voices, combinations of 2 voices, combinations of 3 voices, and finally, the entire four part texture.

## How to Play the Organ Smoothly, Freely, and Without Interruptions?

Every organist wants to achieve a high degree of fluency while playing the organ. It is rewarding to be able to perform pieces without mistakes, without faltering, and without stopping. However, achieving this level requires a very specific way of practicing without which your chances to succeed are not as high. In this section, I will give you five tips which will help you to play the organ smoothly, freely, and without interruptions.

### **Practice in a slow tempo**

When you start practicing a new organ composition, it is crucial to play in such a tempo in which you could avoid making mistakes. Usually, this means practicing very slowly. Don't worry so much about the concert tempo. You will be able to achieve it naturally, when you are ready.

### **Practice in voice combinations**

If you have a challenging polyphonic piece, such as a fugue in front of you, it is best not to jump and play all the voices right away but patiently practice in solo voices first. Usually this is not too difficult. When you can play your piece fluently in separate voices, start working in two-voice combinations. Later advance to three voices and only at the end, when you can play this version correctly at least three times in a row practice all the voices together.

### **Choose compositions of your ability**

Although it is tempting to play your favorite pieces right from the beginning, always think about your technical ability level. So choose the pieces wisely. This may mean that some of your favorite organ works must wait until you are ready for them. For example, if your dream is to be able to play Widor's Toccata, start with easier French Romantic pieces first.

### **Practice in fragments repeatedly**

I have seen many of my students play organ music from the beginning until the end in their practice. Although this is not necessarily an incorrect approach, the best way to practice is to choose shorter episodes or fragments and practice them over and over. This way you can correct your mistakes right away and develop the right practicing habits. It is not too difficult to decide when you have practiced this fragment enough times. I suggest a minimum of 3 correct repetitions in a row.

### **Write in fingering and pedaling**

Although this particular point might be a little boring, but trust me, it is well worth your time and effort. You see, whenever you encounter a problematic place and make a mistake, chances are that you need to think about more efficient fingering and pedaling. Do not play organ music with accidental fingerings. Since your fingers can remember the

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particular passages, it is very wise to reinforce the correct fingering. Since pedal playing is a new skill for every beginner organist, writing in pedaling is even more important. An excellent resource on using early fingerings is the book "[Early Keyboard Fingerings](#)", ed. [Maria Boxall](#).

As you probably understood, practicing this way requires certain amount of patience. It is important not to give up and start playing the organ without a method or a system. Always have your goal or a dream in mind of what you are trying to accomplish. Know that every correct practice brings you closer to your goal one step at a time.

## What is the Secret of Eliminating Mistakes in Organ Playing?

We all know the need for a slow practice and the work in fragments, and attention to detail which are all technical things. Although attention to detail is crucial in practicing your organ music, it is not enough to be able to play without mistakes. You need to have a special kind of mentality. Here I am referring to the focused mind which can help you to reach that optimum performance state which in turn will empower you to play without mistakes. Moreover, your performance will have the special power over listeners and you will have their attention fixed on your playing without interruption. In this section, I will explain this mental technique and how to achieve it.

The mentality or the mindset of a world-class organist is similar to the state of mind of a world-class athlete or a [martial artist](#). Athletes refer to it as "Being in the Zone". Martial artists say that "their body should be relaxed but the mind should be on fire". In other words, they have to have an alert but clear mind. They have to throw all of their thoughts, insecurities, and mental blocks away and simply be in the moment.

Various traditions have different techniques which can help you to achieve that state of mind. Some of the most popular are breathing, meditation, or prayer. In organ playing, I find that deep, regular, and slow conscious breathing from the lower abdomen actually helps me to improve my mental focus. When playing a piece of music, I often try to find the natural breathing rhythm. Usually it coincides with the cycle of measures. For example, I may inhale over two or more measures and exhale over the same number of measures and repeat this process over the course of the piece. The breathing should be done through the nose.

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You can do the same in your piece and you will start to notice some really interesting things over time. If you stay focused on your breathing, then your mind gradually calms down, your body relaxes, and you will be able to control your movements much better. In turn, the risk of hitting the wrong note by accident is much lower.

If you do play an incorrect note or two during your performance, let it go and force yourself to stay focused and not keep your thoughts on this mistake. Very often if we make a mistake, we think about it for a while when we are playing, we lose focus, and consequently make more mistakes. So no matter what went wrong you have to try to stay focused until the very end.

It is interesting how we can make mistakes even in a slow tempo in an easy spot. This is how it may happen. As we are playing, we might be aware how well we play or how easy is this particular episode and again, we may lose our focus. The solution is to keep your focus until the very end.

The legendary American organist [Marilyn Mason](#) used to say that the recital is not over until you are in the parking lot. Actually, it is so true because if for a moment we relax our focus, we can make a mistake and lose control over the piece.

The master French organist [Marcel Dupre](#) suggested that we keep our attention fixed on the current measure that we are playing in order to avoid mistakes. This thought is similar to the idea stated earlier of being in the moment.

I understand that for most people it will be hard to achieve this level of focus on the organ. However, if you consistently practice slowly, work in fragments, give a great attention to details, and keep your attention on your breathing, eliminating mistakes actually is not too difficult. Simply change your focus from how not to make mistakes to fulfilling the musical needs of the piece, be in the current measure, and your performance level will improve dramatically.

## How Attention to Detail Can Help You Eliminate Mistakes in Organ Playing?

Many of my organ students ask me how they can play their organ pieces without mistakes. They ask for an advice about being able to achieve the level of fluency when they could sit down on the organ bench and play flawlessly for a long time any organ composition they want, slow or fast, easy, medium, or difficult. They know it is possible because they have heard top level organists play organ music with such an impeccable technique that it could be taken directly from a CD recording.

However, they also know that very few people ever advance this far in organ playing. Performing on this level takes more than mastering a piece of music. It also requires a special attitude and mindset. In this section, I would like to give some insight into the techniques which might help you eliminate mistakes in organ playing.

Somebody told me some years ago about the difference between the good performance and a superb performance. When you are listening to a good organist playing some nice organ music, everything seems to sound well. There might be some tiny insignificant errors but in general, you like this performance. However, if you happen to listen to a real world class performer, there is something more in such a playing. It is hard to express this feeling in words but you feel that absolute clarity and sense of precision and perfection in such a performance.

If you ever had an opportunity to listen to such playing, you probably know what I mean. I am not talking about many wonderful CD recordings which we all love to listen to, because most of the time they are edited, mastered, and sometimes they may not necessarily reflect the real skill of the organist. I am talking about the live organ concerts, these unforgettable events when you simply marvel at the artistry of the performer.

At any rate, the real difference between a good performance and a superb performance is attention to detail. A truly world class organist will know exactly why he or she made some particular decision about some episode in the organ piece. These people never leave anything to chance. At any given moment in a piece they know the exact reasoning about the fingering and pedaling choices, about the rhythmic and melodic accuracy, about the phrasing and articulation, about the registration, or about the formal and harmonic

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structure of the piece. They simply give such a meticulous attention to any detail that many of us take for granted.

So if you seriously want to be able to play without mistakes, I recommend you give some thought about the above mentioned aspects of organ playing. Moreover, once you are sure about your choices in your practice, you should attempt to achieve those things through practice. In other words, it is not enough to know why you are playing this particular spot with this fingering and pedaling, articulation, ornamentation, or registration. You should reconcile all these things through dedicated and relentless practice. Always ask yourself questions like “Does it sound the way I want it?” or “Why am I playing this spot in this particular manner?”

Answering to these questions and in turn practicing with attention to detail will enable to progress to such level of organ playing when the task of playing without mistakes will seem insignificant. Instead, you will want to express the composer’s intentions to the best of your ability. And you will have the means to do that. Remember, that professionalism is not necessarily a financial status of a person. You can also think of it as an attitude. You can play like a real professional with absolute precision and clarity a simple 2-part invention or a majestic 5 voice fugue. The complexity level does not matter. What matters is your attitude and the attention to detail.

## How to Eliminate Mistakes in Organ Playing?

Every organist admires people who can play flawlessly without any mistakes. Such a performance seems like taken directly from a CD recording. While listening to live concerts of top level organists we are wondering how they are able to play without mistakes not one piece but the entire recital. Most people can play with accuracy a slow piece but when it comes to playing in fast tempo, they might hit at least a few wrong notes. This is the opposite with world class artists. There is seemingly no limit of their finger and pedal technique. Achieving that level can take years of dedicated practice but there are certain elements which can help you to progress faster along the road to perfection.

In this section, I would like to give you some advice on how to eliminate mistakes in organ playing. These tips are not about the situation when you make mistakes because you do not know the piece well enough and leave some difficult passages not fully mastered.

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Instead, I am writing about a situation when you think that you have already mastered the piece but during the actual performance accidentally hit the wrong notes here and there.

### Slow Practice

One of the most important techniques which can help you to play without mistakes is a slow practice. If you struggle with accurately playing in a fast tempo, it is crucial to understand that slow practice is a key to success. Even though the piece is fast, you will only be able to reach this tempo through a slow practice.

On the contrary, if you usually practice at a concert tempo, the time may come when you will not be able to be in control. In fact, constantly practicing in a fast tempo is actually quite dangerous. You may reach the point of making mistakes habitually and consistently at the same spot. So practice slowly in order to have a full control of your piece. When you are ready, you will reach the fast tempo naturally.

If you know the piece really well, mistakes usually occur when you are not aware of every detail, every note or every passage. The music just flies by and you may accidentally hit the wrong notes. This can be cured with slow practice because through it you will get accustomed to notice every important note and every single detail.

### Work in Fragments

If you want to be able to eliminate mistakes in your organ playing, another recommendation would be to subdivide the piece into smaller episodes and work in fragments. If you practice in shorter fragments (4 measures or so at a time), then every mistake you make will be easy to fix. For example, if you make a mistake, stop at that point, go back a few measures and play the same fragment correctly at least three times in a row. Note that if you play correctly twice but make a mistake on the third attempt, you will have to start counting from the beginning.

However, if for some reason you lose patience and continue playing the piece until the end even after making the mistake, chances are that next time you will do the same mistake in the same spot. Remember that if you are constantly practicing eliminating mistakes and forming good practicing habits, then you are progressing the right way. On the other hand, if you don't fix your mistakes and play with them every time, actually, you are practicing your mistakes, which just move you farther away from your goal.

So have patience, practice slowly, work in fragments, correct your mistakes and you will see some real advancement in your organ playing.

## **How to Reach the Fast Tempo in Practicing Organ Composition?**

Many of my organ students ask me for an advice in reaching the fast tempo in their organ pieces. They often struggle to achieve this level of fluency either because their technique is not developed enough or because they do not know how to practice the piece in order to reach fast tempo. In this section, I will share with you one particular method of practice which will help you reach the fast tempo in practicing organ compositions.

### **Practice in Fragments**

If you have difficulty playing in a fast tempo any particular organ piece, here is a special technique you could use. Try to work in shorter fragments like one beat first, then practice this piece in half of measure, then the entire measure and so on until you can play an entire line without stopping. Let me explain how it works.

You see, if this composition has to be performed in a fast tempo, then playing the entire work might be too difficult for you at the moment. However, you may notice that you can play all voices together very quickly just for one beat easily. Play just one beat, then stop and hold the chord. Look at the next beat. When you are ready, play another beat and stop. Look at the next beat, prepare and so on. So you will practice stopping every beat.

If you have never tried this before, this kind of practice might seem strange to you. You maybe wondering what is the point of stopping at every beat. What happens is that although you stop at every beat, you can play the notes of that beat very quickly. And so practice a few times playing the piece this way until you feel comfortable enough. Then make your fragment two beats and stop every two beats. Then one measure, two measures, four measures, one line, two lines, one page, two pages and so on. While practicing this way, you will begin to notice that your ability to play the piece in a fast tempo improves gradually over time.

When you stop and hold your chord, do not rush to play the next fragment. Instead, make sure you look ahead and understand in your mind what the next fragment is. Only then play it. In other words, play only when you are ready.

Reaching the level when you can play organ music fast is not so easy. As you can see, the system is simple enough for most organists to understand but not too many people reach that kind of proficiency. However, you must persevere and practice with never-give-up mentality. Although there are many techniques in achieving this mentality, one thing in particular is helpful to me – having a clear goal in mind. In other words, you have to have a vision or a goal what it is you are trying to accomplish. If you say that your goal or dream, for example, is to be able to play that wonderful prelude and fugue by Bach or Toccata by Widor at a concert tempo, then you will have the necessary motivation to persevere. No matter how boring, how tiring it will be to practice, you will stick to the plan and successfully accomplish your goal.

## **What Sports and Organ Practice Have in Common?**

Do you want to achieve success as an organist? In order to do this, you will need to outrank your competitors. One of the ways which helps you to become better than your fellow organists is to look around and see how people perfect their skills in other professions. In this section, I will show you what sports and organ practice have in common.

### **Try to be unique in your organ practice**

Compare your practice to other areas of life and see if you can use similar techniques in your practice.

For example, you could take a look at athletes in various sports and see how they practice their moves. You see, sports and music are similar in that both activities require countless repetitions of similar movements which lead to mastery.

For instance, in basketball a player who wants to improve his/her shots from a certain position must practice them repeatedly hundreds if not thousands of times. In a way, the best basketball player will practice until every single one of his/her shots is successful. In other words, his/her movements have to become automatic.

The same is with organ playing. If you run into the problematic spot in you organ score and want to perfect it, you must practice it repeatedly. You must play it right until literally you just can't make the same mistake again.

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In my experience, this process takes around 100 repetitions spread over time. I remember, when I tried to perfect "the Gigue" Fugue in G major, BWV 577 by Bach some years ago.

I mastered this fugue in 10 days by repeating each fragment 10 times every day. First 10 repetitions were just a good start but felt quite shaky. Then with every set of 10 new repetitions, it was exciting to see gradual improvements in the performance of this piece.

Of course, I completely memorized this fugue in the process. My feet movements became automatic thanks to pedal preparation technique I was using. I couldn't miss a note in the pedal line even if I wanted to.

Find and apply similar techniques used in sports in your organ practice today. In time, they will empower you to become a respected expert and a leader whom others will want to follow.

## What Practice Length Means to You

Are you struggling in achieving success as an organist? Perhaps you should think about the length of your practice. In this section, I will explain what practice length means for your playing.

The majority of organists don't spend too much time practicing organ playing. They play a few minutes here and few minutes there. In addition, they find it difficult to practice every day.

Sometimes such organists will complain that practicing organ playing is not for them. However, when I ask them how much time they spend on the organ bench, they respond by saying they play organ one day per week for 30 minutes with a total amount of 2 hours per month.

Of course, this is exactly why they keep on struggling. 30 minutes per week is just simply too little time to see any progress.

The more time you put in your practice, the better chances you have at succeeding. Some organists spend as many as 8 hours a day practicing their organ pieces. I don't recommend

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this approach. You see, if you play without a break for many hours, your practice quality most likely will deteriorate.

Instead, practice until you can keep your mind focused at the present measure. To train your mind, push yourself a bit further so you can extend your focus a few minutes longer.

With time you will find that your focus level improves and you can practice longer. So gradually you can extend your sessions until about 2 hours a day. I believe this is an optimum length. You still can make some rests every 30 minutes or so.

If you want to be the best in what you do, you cannot hope to achieve this level practicing only a few minutes a day. If you consistently practice 2 hours a day, you will start noticing some tremendous changes and improvements in your organ playing very soon.

## 5 Tips for Achieving Quality in Organ Practice

Do you want to achieve success as an organist? In order to be successful, your practice has to become of the highest quality. I have 5 tips for your practice in this section.

### 1. Try to practice better than your competitors do

If you want to become a better organist than many of your fellow organists, you have to apply better and more efficient practice techniques than they are using.

You see, the majority of organists simply play their organ pieces from the beginning until the end without any practice plan. They think such playing will allow them to master the pieces they practice.

However, the reality is that although you can learn some easy pieces that way reasonably well, you will not be able to advance to the new quality level. So you have to have special efficient practice system which allows you to master new difficult pieces faster, easier, and better than your competitors.

## **2. Focus on giving your best in your practice**

Many people tend to practice with a relaxed mind which doesn't compel them to push themselves a bit further than they can do at present.

If you want to give your best in your concerts and recitals, you have to do the same in your practice. Imagine that today's practice dictates results of the tomorrow. Be very strict with yourself and constantly ask if there is anything else that you could improve in your practice.

## **3. Focus your mind**

It will be easier to give your best in practice if you stay focused. Many people tend to have short attention spans but it doesn't mean you couldn't practice making stronger and longer focus.

Keep your attention focused on your present measure and do not allow yourself to relax until the practice is over (or until the previously designated break).

## **4. Do not allow yourself to make a mistake**

Practice at such a tempo which allows your playing to be free of mistakes. This is very important if you want to achieve success as an organist.

## **5. Make correcting your mistakes a habit**

Of course, in every practice session you will find yourself making mistakes every now and again. If you make a mistake, go back and correct it repeatedly until you can't make the same mistake again.

Use these tips in your organ practice today. If you consistently apply them when practicing organ playing, in time they will empower you to achieve the quality in your performance.

## How to Strengthen the Quality of Your Organ Playing - 8 Tips

### 1. Fingering

When you open your new organ score and want to start practicing a new composition, don't play it right away from the beginning until the end. I mean, you could play it through once just to get familiar with it but then the real practice begins.

Write in your fingering in every difficult spot of the piece. How to find out if the passage is difficult and needs fingering? You could play it once and see if you made a mistake. If you did, stop playing, go back, figure out and write in the most efficient fingering for it.

### 2. Pedaling

I suggest you write in pedaling on every note in the pedal line. This is very important because unlike manual playing, pedal playing usually is a completely new skill that organists must learn.

### 3. Notes

When you have fingering and pedaling in place, you can now start practicing it. Observe that every single note is correct. Sometimes you can hit the wrong note accidentally but in most cases, it is better to go back and play this spot with correct notes at least 3 times in a row.

### 4) Rhythms

In every measure, make sure that your rhythmical values are also correct. This is usually not so difficult in places with straightforward rhythms. But when you see any complications, such as syncopations, dotted notes, duplets, triplets, irregular rhythms, meter changes and so on, you have to be very careful about playing with correct rhythms. It is best that you subdivide the beats of each measure and count out loud while playing.

### 5. Articulation

Do not play every note legato. For people who come to the organ from piano playing, this is especially difficult to understand at first. You see, you have to look at the historical period that this piece was created in. If you are playing a piece by a composer from

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Renaissance, Baroque or Classical period, play with gently detached articulation (articulate legato) unless it is indicated otherwise by the composer.

If the piece is from the Romantic or modern period, usually composers indicate articulation very precisely. So pay close attention to each slur, dot or dash under or above the notes and try to execute them in the exact way.

### **6. Phrasing**

If you want your organ performance to become natural, try to incorporate phrasing in your playing. This helps to achieve a feeling that you breathe together with music. In fact, you should breathe slowly, deeply and consciously while playing. Look for cadences in your music which reveal perfect places for phrasing.

### **7. Tempo**

While performing, choose a concert tempo very carefully. Evaluate the mechanics and the size of the organ. In addition, assess the room in which you play and the reverberation of the space. While practicing, usually take a much slower tempo which will allow you to avoid mistakes in your playing.

### **8. Practice**

When you practice your piece, be very systematic about how you learn new music. It is best to practice in short fragments of about 4 measures each and later combine them together. Also for polyphonic music try to master each voice separately, then combinations of 2 voices, 3 voices and only then - the entire 4 part texture.

Strengthen the quality of your organ playing by concentrating on the above details and making the details concentrated. This approach will help you to achieve the level of exceptionally outstanding performance.

## How To Know If Your Organ Playing Is Overdramatic?

Is your organ playing overdramatic? It is important keep it natural because often overdramatic performance sounds simply too distracting and comical to the listener. In addition, such playing style is not good for the player. Because of this, the instrument may also suffer some serious damage. In this section, you will discover 5 most common signs of organ playing offenses.

### 1. Tension in the body

When your body is all rigid, shoulders raised, fingers and upper thighs tensed, you cannot play in a natural way. Your music becomes also tense and rigid. If you feel some tension in your body, it even gets difficult to breath. We can't relax without breathing and we can't breath without relaxing. So naturally deep breathing is the key for relaxing the entire body.

### 2. Hitting the keyboard with excess force

I often see organists make this mistake which comes from their background as a pianist. They imagine that the louder they want the organ to sound, the harder they have to hit those keys which is absolutely incorrect and may even result in some serious damage to the organ key action. The ideal way would be to play with a gentle mezzo piano touch. The technique which helps to achieve that is keeping the fingers in contact with the keys at all times.

### 3. Playing the pedals too loud

Organists who hit the keys too hard, often make this mistake as well. They bounce and kick the pedals with excess force which also makes it difficult to control the releases and articulation and this forceful movement of their feet may damage the pedal action.

### 4. Doing unnecessary movements with your body

From time to time many musicians make this mistake - they lean forward or backwards too much. I am not suggesting that the body should be stiff. A little of body movements is

fine but too much swinging back and forth may throw your playing off balance.

## 5. Making agogical accents in the piece too often

This mistake is especially obvious if one plays a short composition imagining that it is a grand symphony. If the piece is short, it is illogical to make those ritardandos and accelerandos very often. Besides, certain type of musical style (early music) does not allow unnatural alterations of tempo.

Remember these signs of overdramatic playing when you practice or perform your organ pieces today. Be careful to use your body in a natural way without tension and without unnecessary movements. Do not use excess force when hitting the keys or the pedals. Instead, keep your fingers and feet in contact with the keys at all times. This technique will allow to minimize your efforts and your performance will become natural.

## Why There Are No Shortcuts?

Very often young organists tend to search for some magical recipe to practice organ which will position them into expert level within a short period of time. In other words, they want to find some method which will help them to learn to play the organ confidently in the shortest amount of time possible. In this section, I will explain why there are no quick solutions and shortcuts in organ practice.

There is no "push-button-magic-become-virtuoso-overnight" method. But many young people tend to think there is one. A lot of times I hear about some incredible system which will teach you to play the organ in just 2 hours. This is of course a simple marketing trick but it is very far from reality.

In reality, our practice has to have 3 things which are far from shortcuts:

### 1. Quality

This is a pursuit of perfection. Imagine that a master (Herr Bach, for example) is watching over your shoulder. Try to play as if someone you respect so much is listening.

If you had this thought in your mind constantly, would you allow yourself to play with accidental fingering, pedaling, and articulation? Would you play your organ piece with

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incorrect articulation and ornaments or would you rather pay attention to every detail mentioned above and correct every mistake you made? I think you get the picture.

### 2. Quantity

The more you play - the better (with some exceptions, of course). At least of 30 minutes a day of organ practice is needed to begin to see some positive results. If you have time, you can practice for an hour or even longer but especially long practice sessions are not healthy. Try to rest and stretch for 5 minutes every 30 minutes or so.

In general, it is believed that someone who wants to become an expert in any field, needs to spent at least 10 000 hours practicing. So if you practice for 2 hours everyday, which is an optimum duration in many cases, you will approach the expert level in 5 000 days or 13.7 years (if you have quality in your practice, of course).

Here I don't mean you should spend this entire time only playing organ. Piano playing, music history, ear training, music theory, harmony, counterpoint, fugue, and improvisation are all included in the total number of hours.

### 3. Consistency

Practice every day or at least 3 times a week constantly. Get into practice routine. After 1 month it becomes a habit. So stick to your routine for a month and later you will find it quite enjoyable.

Imagine that your practice is like a large train. To move such a train will require an enormous amount of energy but to keep it moving is much easier. That is why you should try not to skip practicing.

Remember the above key points when you sit on the organ bench. I am fully aware that you will have to show some perseverance in your practice and efforts but if you truly want to become good in organ playing, I can assure you, it is well worth the effort.

## Is Consistency Good for Your Organ Practice and Playing?

There is an ongoing debate among organists about the strengths and weaknesses of consistency in organ playing. In this section, I will give you my opinion on this topic.

Let me start by explaining what kind of consistency there is in organ practice. Consistency in playing the organ can be seen in many ways. One of the most obvious instances of consistency is sticking with one piece for some time until it is thoroughly mastered. An advantage of this approach is an increased in depth knowledge of this particular composition which would not be otherwise possible if you just played many new pieces over the same period of time, unless you want to master sight-reading.

A possible weakness that consistency reveals is that for some people practicing one piece for a long time is quite boring. They argue that they want to learn something new every day. However, they tend to forget that while staying consistent and practicing one piece until the full mastery in reality opens up new horizons in organ playing and helps to see many new things in the same composition as your knowledge of this piece deepens.

If practicing one piece at least for a couple of weeks is a challenge for you, I recommend you choose your organ piece wisely. If you are going to spend much time with one work, this composition should be of really high artistic quality.

In addition, you can be consistent in your practice, if you are keeping all the important details of your piece in one style. Such details could include fingering, pedaling, articulation, ornaments, tempo, phrasing, registration etc.

So all of these elements should be consistent over the course of the piece. For example, if you are working on a Baroque composition, the general articulation in this piece should be articulated legato which means having small distances between each and every note. However, this articulation should not sound too detached or choppy. Instead, you should perform such piece in a singing (cantabile) manner.

So if you want to be consistent in articulation, try to keep the same kind of spaces within each measure but try to emphasize the alternation of strong and weak beats. In other words, the organist should strive for consistent articulation in every voice and not allow some measures to be played legato while others might sound staccato or articulated legato.

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The real skill of the organist shows in his or her ability is to articulate consistently and not allow even slightest discrepancies and accidental slurs.

As you can see, consistency in organ practice leads to success and helps you focus on a specific organ piece to increase your skills and mastery.

Keep in mind the above strengths of being consistent in organ practice. Go now and consistently start to practice an organ piece of your choice today. In order to achieve the best results, make sure you are consistent in your all musical details.

## How to Stay on Track With Your Organ Practice?

Many organists find it hard to practice regularly. With so many activities and tasks an average person has to do during the day, practicing organ every day is a challenge. However, regular playing is absolutely a must if you want to achieve great results as an organist. In this section, I will give you tips and advice which will help you to stay on track with your organ practice.

Do you find yourself pushing off organ practice for today? Keep on track by assigning yourself organ practice deadlines! Having a schedule and giving yourself a due date for a certain task is one of the best ways you can think of to keep up your regular practice and motivation.

For example, if you are learning a new composition, create a step-by-step plan which will help you to master this piece. Then assign yourself a deadline for each step. This will help you to stay focused in your organ practice.

If this composition is 10 pages long, your plan for upcoming 10 days might look something like this:

On the first day, try to learn the first page of music. Subdivide this page into several shorter fragments of about 4 measures and master each individual fragment. Then combine the fragments together. Work on separate voices and combinations of 2 and 3 voices, if necessary before putting everything together.

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On the second day, start your practice by repeating several times the first page which you have learned yesterday. Then master the second page.

On the third day, reinforce pages 1 and 2 several times and practice page 3. Continue the learning process for 10 days in a row by repeating the previously learned material and mastering 1 new page each day.

As you can see, as long as you master 1 new page every day, it is possible to learn a new piece which is 10 pages long in 10 days. After 10 days, devote several more days to play the entire piece without stopping.

In order to reap the best results, it is important you stick to this schedule for 10-14 days in a row. If you use these kinds of deadlines, the learning process will be focused, simple and fast.

Use the above tips to keep your organ practice concentrated for the best results. Now go find a new piece that you want to master, create a practice plan, give yourself a strict deadline for completing your learning process. You will be surprised what kind of tremendous changes you will begin to notice in your productivity.

## What Is the Best Way to Learn a New Organ Piece? Pedals First or Manuals First?

Are you frustrated because you don't know what is the best way to learn a new piece for the organ? If you want to succeed in organ playing it is important you choose the learning method that is both efficient and easy to implement. In this section, I will teach you what is the best way to learn a new organ piece.

If you want the quick answer - then it doesn't matter if you start learning manual parts or the pedal parts first. What really matters is that you follow these 4 simple techniques that make your learning process efficient, fast, and enjoyable.

### 1. Practice in a slow tempo

Resist the temptation to play at the concert tempo right away. Instead, choose the tempo which allows you to play fluently and without mistakes.

## **2. Practice 1 voice, 2 voices, 3 voices etc.**

When you take a new piece, unless it is easy to sight-read, do not attempt to play all the voices together right away. Instead, learn solo parts and various combinations of 2 and 3 parts before playing both hands and feet together.

## **3. Practice in short fragments**

It is wise to resist the temptation to play a piece from the beginning to the end very often. Instead, take a fragment of 4 measures or shorter and master it.

## **4. Correct your mistakes**

Do not play the next fragment unless you can perform it at a slow tempo fluently and without mistakes in fingering, pedaling, rhythms, notes, and articulation at least 3 times in a row correctly.

Consider the above 4 points when you practice your new organ music today. These techniques will help you to develop correct practice habits. If you consistently are trying to incorporate them into your daily practice, you will have more chances to succeed in organ playing.

## **How to Overcome Lack of Patience Which Slows Down Progress?**

Do you ever feel like practicing organ the right way is a really great burden? Or perhaps you are frustrated that you can't master some particular place in your organ piece? If this happens, very often people feel lack of patience and want to stop practicing organ or they might take another piece without properly learning the current one. Fighting this problem is easier than you think. In this section, I will give you tips and advice on how to overcome lack of patience when practicing organ playing.

First of all, let's imagine that your dream in organ playing is being able to play the great works of Bach. This is a great dream, of course, which requires a great plan and wise practice. Obviously, this dream is a long-term one because it will take at least several years of concentrated effort from your part. So it is only natural that sometimes you might get

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frustrated and have a feeling of impatience which slows down your progress.

If your lack of patience is holding you back from realizing your dream, then of course you have to persevere. I'm not immune from this problem either. However, it helps if I remember my goal which might be very specific, like master a specific piece, prepare for a recital etc.

So I guess if you experience lack of patience, remember your grand dream of being able to play on a good level big Bach's organ works. Or even better, subdivide your big dream into several others of a smaller scale, like learning a particular piece in a particular number of days. This will be your short-term goal or dream. Then think of what steps you should take in order to realize your dream.

For example, your dream might be to master Bach's Prelude and Fugue in C-major, BWV 553 in 2 weeks. This fantastic composition, the first from [8 Little Preludes and Fugues](#) has 3 pages of 4 lines each which makes 12 lines total. In order to learn this piece in 2 weeks, you will have to learn 1 line a day and repeat the previously learn lines every day. So in about 12 days you will have learned this prelude and fugue.

This will be your plan. However, you are probably aware that the fugue is usually more difficult than the prelude to learn because of its polyphonic imitative writing style. It may well happen that you run into several problematic places while learning the fugue (especially when there are pedal entrances). And all of a sudden you want to quit practicing this piece and take another composition which is easier to learn. That's a very realistic situation for many organists.

So if you ever face a problem of losing patience and running away from the organ bench, think of your plan. Then no matter how impatient you might be or how boring it may be to practice this piece, all you have to do is to stick to your plan and continue practicing the right way which will lead you to success.

You just have to remember that sticking to your plan is like going from place A to place B on a train. Your plan is like train tracks and if you just follow these tracks, you will inevitably reach your destination.

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On the contrary, if you give up practicing for some reason, lose patience or switch to an easier piece without properly mastering the current one, then you are sacrificing your progress. This is a very good thing to remember because your time is very limited and precious.

## Mindless Practice

Playing mindlessly through the organ piece from the beginning until the end with a hope that it somehow get better is really frustrating for many people.

If this is the situation you are currently in, I feel your pain.

If you are hoping that these difficult pedal passages will get better on their own, you are hoping in vain. Or if you think that this complex imitative texture in the fugue will get any easier with time, think again.

Maybe that works for people who only enjoy sight-reading the pieces that they love. For a serious organist, this is not good enough. But even if you only want to be able to play the composition, wouldn't it be more enjoyable to be able to play it well? How would it feel for you to achieve the level of competence when you can play the piece you love with precision, clarity, and ease?

Here is a thought: always have a goal for your practice. It might be very small one (in fact, it's usually better to have a definite, precise, and measurable goal). Then think if each repetition of the piece gets you closer to the goal or away from it?

Now that would improve results of your practice, wouldn't it?

## How to Change Incorrect Practice Habits?

For many organists forming the right practice habits is a real challenge. This is because very often they are stuck in a practice routine which is inefficient and does not produce the results they want. In this section, I am going to teach you how to change the wrong practice habits into the ones that will lead you to success.

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Imagine that you really like playing organ and spend time with this instrument every day. In fact, you might be so in love with the organ and its music that you play it for several hours. However, as it often happens, somehow you don't see the good results of your practice. Sounds familiar?

The thing is your practice has to be not only regular but also wise. Because your time is limited, you have to apply only the most efficient practice methods there are. In other words, it would be foolish to hope to see the results of your efforts if you just play the pieces in a casual way.

But many people make this mistake. They just play the compositions from start to finish without proper attention to details, without correcting mistakes and without forming the right practice habits.

Is that what happened to you? Don't despair because you know what is the most beautiful thing in all this?

That despite all our mistakes we made while practicing incorrectly in the past, a year ago, a month ago, a week ago, even yesterday... we can start a new chapter in our life today, remember our goal, devise a plan with the steps necessary to achieve this goal and start implementing these steps every day in the correct way.

That's it. It's that simple. Is it easy? No.

Because when we have to apply these steps in practice, our incorrect practice habits we build up in the past just dictate the way we behave today.

But we can surely fight back and don't give up because there is so much to learn and so much to discover.

I think practicing wisely might be also fun. If you truly love the music that you are playing, then it all comes naturally. You just need to speed up the learning process.

One of the best ways to practice is to take a slow tempo and work in small fragments of about 4 measures each. Don't just jump right into playing all parts together as it will not sound nice right away.

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Instead, practice solo voices, then combinations of two voices, three voices, and only then the entire four-part texture (if it is a four-voice composition, of course).

Try these tips in you practice today and remember that even if you spent many years practicing inefficiently and incorrectly, you can start forming your right practice habits from now on.

## Go Wide or Go Deep?

Many people ask me about whether it is better to practice many pieces at the same time or just one or few for best results. In other words, is it better to go wide or to go deep in organ practice? In this section, I'll give you my thoughts about this topic.

You see, it all depends on the situation you are in. If you are preparing for an organ recital and you have some 9 or 10 organ pieces, then you have to find a way to practice all of them from time to time. But if you are playing organ just for fun, it is probably more beneficial to you, if you could practice just a few pieces at a time. Let me explain why is it so.

The thing is that every fragment of your piece, every combination of 2 and 3 voices requires at least 3 correct repetitions to successfully master it. I would say that even playing solo voices at least 3 times in a row correctly is a very first step. And all of this has to be done in a slow tempo.

Then the answer to the question about wide vs. deep practice is quite clear. If you have time in your day to practice many pieces at the deep level like I described above, then of course you can play 9 or 10 of them in one practice session.

But be aware that this kind of practice would require at least 4 hours a day of your time. Not everyone has this kind of perseverance, right? Plus we all have other different responsibilities during the day.

So what is the best solution in this situation?

I suggest subdividing your entire program into blocks of 3 or 4 compositions. Then

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practice one block on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and leave the rest of the program for Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. In other words, you can alternate the two parts of your program so that you can easily practice them on a deeper level in each practice session.

Note that here I don't mean the sight-reading practice. The sight-reading should be done by playing new and unfamiliar compositions once or twice in a systematic manner. By practicing sight-reading, you don't need to master each piece and play it many times correctly. But with practicing organ repertoire, deep practice is much better than wide practice.

If you are preparing for an organ recital, then playing the entire program occasionally is also necessary. This will give you the required stamina and endurance to perform a long program without breaks.

Use this advice in your organ practice today. Try to go deep and you will begin to notice some tremendous improvement in your pieces and your technique in a matter of just a few weeks.

## How to Measure Your True Progress?

Some organists have a difficult time measuring their true progress. If they practice every day, they might see very little day-to-day progress. Therefore, it gets very frustrating for them when they make mistakes in organ playing. However, there is one experiment you can make to see if you are making a true progress.

Don't feel discouraged about your mistakes in some pieces. Stay the course and you will find that the progress is usually just around the corner. I understand that it might be difficult to see the progress for yourself because you are measuring yourself everyday.

There is one thing that is used in measurements and testing of all kinds in many educational systems which you can take advantage of. Take an unfamiliar piece and play it through just once. Record yourself playing this piece. You will make many mistakes, of course. Too many, actually. And that's the point. Then leave this piece alone and practice your own compositions which you normally practice daily. After several months you come back to that new piece and play it once again (and record it). Then you'll see what happens.

The thing is, because you are practicing many different pieces now, your overall level improves and because of that your sight-reading abilities also improve gradually. So when you come back to this new piece after a few months, you will be able to sight-read this new piece at a higher level than before regardless of whether you practiced it or not. Does it make sense?

So that's why it is better to stay positive when you are noticing yourself making mistakes in your organ playing. Because you meet yourself practicing every day, you just can't appreciate how much you are progressing in reality. It is kind of similar if you meet a person and go away for a few months, come back and you notice how much he or she has changed. But if you spent that time with this person every day, you just couldn't notice many important changes that took place.

The same is with organ practice. You just have to give it time and test your progress after a few months and you will notice some tremendous changes in your abilities and technique. Just test the two different recordings of the same piece. And that's when it gets really inspirational and exciting.

Try this technique in your organ practice today. Test yourself and you'll be surprised about your true skills and progress.

## **Why Some Parts Of Your Piece Are Easier to Learn Than Others?**

Are you frustrated because some of the lines of your organ pieces are easier to learn while others take so much time just to get the basics down? Are you wondering why is it so and how to overcome this challenge? In this section, I will explain it in more detail.

You see, a lot of this to me is simple mathematics. Some parts of the piece are easier than others. For example, if the fugue starts with just one voice without pedals, this will naturally be much easier to play.

If you can play one voice smoothly and without interruptions after just several careful repetitions, it doesn't mean you will have the same success when you have 4 voices with pedals.

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Adding one more voice adds just one more constrain to your practice. It is like just one step further. Especially having pedal part in you score can complicate things because naturally you are much better with your hands than you are with your feet.

You have to be ready for the next step. For example, if you take 3 voice combination without mastering 2 voices and separate voices first, then the success will not be as great as it might be.

My advice is not to advance to the next combination unless you can play the current one fluently and without interruptions at least 3 times in a row correctly (with correct fingering, pedaling, notes, rhythms, articulation, and ornamentation).

So you see how in reality there is no need to be frustrated about slow progress. You have to understand that there are no shortcuts in organ playing. If you want the fastest possible progress, just stick to the systematic practice method when you learn by voice, by two voices, by three voices, and by four voices one short fragment at a time in a slow tempo.

## Is It Better to Learn One Piece at a Time or Several at Once?

If you have several organ pieces in your practice list or if you are preparing for a recital, you naturally have to face a question about what is the best way to practice them. In other words, if you have a due date, do you work on one piece at a time until you master it and only then take another composition? Or perhaps is it better to practice several pieces every day. Whatever the case might be, it is important you are ready for your performance of all the pieces on time. In this section, I will give you my take on this subject.

First of all, we have to understand what practice is. An old saying teaches that a practice is like a boiling water - without heat it cools down. In other words, you have to constantly add some effort which facilitates the progress in whatever it is you are trying to excel.

In the case of organ practice, you have to practice regularly. Your organ piece will become much better over time if you practice regularly and wisely.

Now let's return to the question if you have several pieces to prepare. Many people practice sporadically and without a system. In other words, they just play the pieces on

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their list from the beginning until the end.

However, they are never sure if they will prepare them by the due date. This type of practice will not lead you very far in organ playing.

Let's pretend you have 2 hours a day set aside for practicing. I recommend you approach practicing systematically and methodically in one of the following ways:

### **1. Treat all the pieces on your list as one long piece**

In one practice session, learn several lines or a page for 2 hours in a slow tempo. Then the next day repeat the previously learned material and learn several new lines of music. It is best if you learn one short fragment (up to 1 line of music) at a time.

This way you will eventually approach the last page of the last composition on your list while practicing for 2 hours daily. Remember to reinforce the pieces that you have mastered so far regularly. If learning new music would require you to repeat a certain passage up to 10 times, it is enough to repeat the previously mastered music 3 times.

### **2. Practice several pieces every day for 2 hours**

With this approach, you will have to alternate the pieces on your list every other day. For example, take one half of your program and practice it on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Then take another half of your program and practice it on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

Again, when learning new organ music, repeat each fragment 10 times slowly in separate parts, combinations of 2 voices, 3 voices, and finally all parts together. When you repeat the music that you already know, repeat all parts together 3 times in a slow tempo.

Whether you choose the first or the second approach, for the best results, make sure your fingering, pedaling, notes, rhythms, articulation, and ornamentation are correct in each repetition. Do not forget to take a break every 30 minutes or so, stretch and relax for 5-10 minutes.

## How to Refocus Your Organ Practice?

Many of my organ students are struggling with regaining focus in their organ practice. They find themselves searching for shortcuts, doing meaningless tasks, or just playing the pieces without the necessary attention to detail.

They might also skip practice for a few days, which in turn slows down progress but creates an urgency to see the results faster. So they play the easy spots only without mastering the difficult place.

In the end, results can be very disappointing and even dangerous in the long run. If you find yourself in a similar situation, you need to refocus your organ practice.

1. Identify your goal in organ practice. Let's say you want to learn to play some particular piece fluently and without mistakes.
2. Think about what's holding you back from achieving your goal. It might be that you are having difficulty finding practice time each day. Another common challenge is the difficult spots in your music.
3. Think about what results will you get from practicing the wrong way. Just think what would happen if you continue to practice the way you are used to. Perhaps skipping some days without practice or playing only the easy spots in your music. Would you think the results will be great or not?
4. Think about what's need to be changed in order for you to reach this goal. If your challenge is practicing every day, then obviously you have to find a way to practice every day, even as little as 20-30 minutes. Perhaps you should limit your distractions which are not essential?

Think also how you can force yourself to play and master the difficult spots in your music? Yes, you just need to show some will power and play the challenging episodes first.

5. Think about how you will feel when you overcome this challenge. Will you be proud of yourself? Will you be able to play this piece for your friends or family? What would they say to you? I bet they also will be proud of your achievement. But most importantly, you

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will develop correct practice habits which will set you on the right course for the future.

6. Think about what it would mean for you to overcome your challenge. Are the benefits of the final result will be worth to you to push yourself one step further each time?

7. Take action - just practice the correct way. If you did all the previous steps in your mind, now it is time for action. Reading these tips won't give you the results you want. Practicing the right way will.

Use these steps to refocus your organ practice today. Show some persistence and perseverance and you will succeed.

## How to Avoid Piano Touch on the Organ?

Many organists who come to the organ from having played piano for some years find it difficult to get rid of the piano touch. This is important because piano and organ actions are inherently different so they require different approaches on how to play each instrument. If you struggle with avoiding piano touch when playing the organ, I recommend you apply these 4 tips.

### 1. Keep the fingers in contact with the keys at all times

Try to force yourself to remember this tip constantly because it is very important not only for getting rid of piano touch but also for accuracy in playing.

You see, when you play piano, you lift the fingers high to prepare for crisp motion downwards. On the organ you have to use completely different approach - you must not allow yourself to lift the fingers off the keyboard.

### 2. Play mezzo piano

How many times I see organists play the organ like they would play the piano. When they want to increase dynamics, they use more force. When they want the organ sound loudly, they play it as piano with lots of force.

This is an incorrect approach which not only makes your playing look like pianist's but also you will find it extremely difficult to coordinate the releases this way. So use only as

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much force as is needed to depress the key and not more. Dynamics on the organ are made by changing stops and/or opening and closing the swell box or crescendo pedal and not through the touch.

### 3. Keep the upper body straight

When you play piano, it is quite common to move your upper body when you feel the rising tension in the music. On the organ it is quite the opposite. The calmer you sit on the bench, the better you will be in control of your hand and feet movements.

You have to feel like conductor who is only giving directions to his/her orchestra. You see, the best conductors make their body movements very minimal because it is not them but the members of the orchestra who have to do the job of playing.

The same is with organ playing - you have to let your fingers and feet do the job. You just give them directions what to do. Therefore, there is no need to move your upper body like you would in playing the piano.

### 4. Coordinate the releases

One of the major differences between piano and organ playing is that pianists usually only pay attention to how the key is depressed but not how it is released. This is because piano sound fades very quickly and organ sound can last indefinitely.

So people who come to the organ with some piano experience also forget to focus on the releases. However, this is a vital point to remember. Since much of the organ music is polyphonic, you have to be precise at how you release the keys.

When the note values indicate that the notes should be of the same length, release all of the keys exactly together. But when some notes should sound longer while others - shorter, be very precise in holding these notes.

Use these tips in your organ practice today. If you are conscious about them every time you sit down to play, with time you will notice how your organ technique improves and your touch becomes organistic.

## 6 Tips For Keeping Correct Rhythms in Long Pieces

Do you struggle in keeping the steady tempo and correct rhythms in organ pieces that are more than 2 pages in length? Or perhaps you are frustrated because your teacher says your tempo and rhythms are off but you just can't seem to notice it? In this section, I will give you 6 tips which will help you to keep correct rhythms in longer pieces.

### 1. Feel the constant pulse

The most important thing which helps me in playing with steady tempo and in correct rhythms in short or long compositions is feeling of the pulse. Regardless of the difficulty level of the piece, your rhythms will be fine if you will keep the track of the pulse.

### 2. Count the beats in the measure

When the complicated rhythms throw your playing off balance, try counting the parts of the measure. Make sure you do not miss a single measure because if you do, very likely this is going to be a place where your rhythms are incorrect.

### 3. Subdivide the beats

Count not only the quarter notes but also the eighth notes. If the meter is 4/4, count "one-and, two-and, three-and, four-and". If the smallest rhythmical unit is a sixteenth note, count "one-eh-and-ah, two-eh-and-ah, three-eh-and-ah, four-eh-and-ah".

### 4. Count out loud these subdivisions

Very often we imagine that our rhythms were correct when in reality they were not. To make sure you are counting correctly, practice saying the numbers aloud.

### 5. Do not use metronome when practicing

Use it only to check the starting tempo. Imagine that metronome is something similar to a crutch. You can't learn to walk by using a crutch. The same rule is valid in music when you want to learn to play in correct rhythms. You have to use your ears, not metronome.

### 6. Record yourself

This is a very powerful tip which I hope you will take advantage of. By recording yourself and attentively listening to the recording you can discover the mistakes you just made which otherwise would be difficult to spot. Unfortunately, far too few people are

recording themselves in practice.

Use these tips when practicing to keep correct rhythms in longer pieces today. They will help you to overcome rhythmical problems in your organ playing.

## How to Learn to Play Triplets Against Duplets Correctly in 5 Minutes?

Many organists struggle in playing complicated rhythms correctly. One such situation is when you have to play two notes (duplets) against three (triplets) in the same beat. Because it is quite difficult to hear two different rhythms simultaneously, very often organists either speed up the triplets or slow down the duplets which is obviously incorrect. In this section, I will show you how to practice playing two notes against three correctly.

If you want to master correct playing of duplets against triplets (two against three) try this exercise:

1. Imagine that triplets will become a group of 3 eighth notes in 3/8, 6/8, 9/8 or similar meter.
2. Then add an extra sixteenth note to the second note of the triplet, e.g. the entire group will look like this: eighth-sixteenth-sixteenth-eighth.
3. Keeping in mind the rhythm from the previous step, try tapping the triplets with the right hand while tapping duplets with the left hand. Notice how the second note of the duplet in the left hand will be inserted exactly in the middle of the last two notes of the triplet. Practice this group repeatedly (100 times).
4. Repeat the previous step by switching hands. Now the left hand will tap triplets and the right hand - duplets. Practice this version repeatedly (100 times). Shift your focus from duplets to triplets and vice versa and try that each group will sound exactly even.

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5. Then take an episode from an actual composition with such rhythms and try to recreate the rhythms you just tapped. If you tried to play duplets against triplets before in this piece, you will notice how much easier the whole business of keeping correct rhythms becomes now.

Use these steps in mastering complicated duplets and triplets in your organ piece today. At first, you may find the task of 100 repetitions daunting but don't worry - since the group of three notes is very short, it will take less than 5 minutes to master.

## On Making Mistakes in Organ Playing

People often get discouraged when they make mistakes. They feel that there is something wrong with their practice. While it may be truth sometimes, very often it is a natural part of how we learn.

For example, it can often happen that you play correctly the 1st time, the 2nd time and you make a mistake on the 3rd time. Is that what happened to you in your organ practice?

That's OK. Failing and making mistakes is an integral part of our learning process. So please don't get frustrated when you make mistakes. In fact, if you don't make a mistake at the beginning stages of your organist training, then something is likely wrong with your [organ practice](#).

If you don't fail enough times, you will not know what success is. If you feel you are not making any mistake at all, it probably means you are not looking hard enough and not concentrating on details (such as notes, rhythms, fingering, pedaling, articulation, ornaments, hand and feet position etc.). It probably means your mistakes get unnoticed.

If this is the case, record yourself and listen to your recording. Ask yourself, "would I pay money to get to this concert if someone played like that?".

Practice until the answer is yes. As they say, Practice Makes Perfect. Let's add to it Wise Practice Makes Perfect. Make sure you take a really slow controlled tempo in which you can think of the next note before you play it.

Practice in fragments of 4 measures as I always recommend (do 10 times each fragment) in

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separate voices and all combinations of 2 and 3 voices before putting everything together.

If you struggled with making mistakes up until now, apply these tips and in just 7 days, you will feel the breakthrough. If not, then it may mean that the piece is too difficult for you at the moment and that you need to work on your [organ technique](#).

Force yourself not to look at your fingers and feet while you are playing. Look at the music. If you play from memory, just close your eyes. This is tough, I know. But trust me on this, it will get easier with time and the benefits of doing so are enormous.

## Pursuit of Perfection

When we practice organ playing, this is what we do - we continue centuries-long tradition of excellence so that future generations can also have a part in this.

If we think about it deeply, almost all of us are students of Bach, Sweelinck, Frescobaldi and many other masters of the past in some way or another. We can trace this genealogy of teachers back 300 or more years ago.

Every single one of the masters did their best to create unique and remarkable art, to pursue perfection even though they knew it can never be attained.

So when we sit down on the organ bench we do the same - we try to push ourselves, be honest with ourselves, and constantly ask ourselves how can this piece be even more improved today.

If this means that in order to fully appreciate the piece and transfer this feeling to our listeners we need to be aware of how the piece is put together, then we analyze the piece.

If this means that in order for the composition to sound as authentic as possible (there are certain limitations, of course) we need to re-create the ideal articulation, fingering, pedaling, ornaments, and registration then we do that, too.

It really doesn't matter if the majority of our listeners don't know the difference about early and modern organ technique.

As long as we stay honest with ourselves and give our best in our [organ practice](#), then we

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are continuing this long tradition of excellence, we are staying on the same path that Bach went when he wrote "the goal of figured bass (like all music) is the glory of God and re-creation of the soul".

## Time, Money, Instrument, and Organ Practice

What to do if you want to practice organ but have to work 40 hours a week to support a family? In such situation it is very difficult to find the necessary finances and/or the time needed to practice organ.

It seems that more than anything a person has to have dedication and yes, it affects the entire family life style.

If no finances are available currently to buy a practice organ/keyboard, such person can apply silent practice, table/floor practice, mental practice without instrument with or without the score. One can even succeed in finding a church organ nearby for practice.

It's all about mentality and attitude. What the mind can envision - the body can produce. Therefore, it's really possible to hear the notes being played on the table or on the floor.

Also, it's possible to practice early in the morning, later in the evening when the family is asleep. You can even practice during TV commercials while watching a movie or a show. In fact, if organ playing is so important to you, cut down your TV time. Perhaps practicing longer on the weekends will also be a good possibility.

We need not only a better time management but also task management as well to do the things that matter most first and more efficiently.

After a few years, if the motivation to practice continues, one can even save up the money to buy a small practice organ, or electronic or virtual organ with a full range pedalboard.

It's like saving money for the car. At first it seems like a big deal but little by little your money-box begins to fill up. The vision is the most important thing. It lets you believe that in the end your efforts will be successful.

## Practice, Motivation, and Commitment

Imagine a person who hasn't played an organ for 40 years and wants to come back to it since he or she is retired now. Such person wants to commit only to 30 minutes a day of practice.

Would you think he will succeed in reaching his or her goals in organ playing?

We never know the inside of the person so it's hard to tell whether this person will have the inner motivation necessary for continued practice and keeping this commitment.

But the fact that he WANTS to come back to organ playing after being away from it for 40 years means that this WAS his dream once. This dream probably never left him only the circumstances were not in his favor for many reasons.

When people retire, some of them have more time to do things which they longed to do for a long time but just couldn't. I wish them success in organ practice because it is their dream.

I think it's better to commit to 30-60 minutes a day at first rather than to force yourself to practice for 4 hours. In the long run, these 30 minutes will do more good than 4 hours a day because after 1 week the person will be burned out and could not keep up the practice at this pace anyway.

## Practicing Organ Playing Without a System

You have probably met some organists whose approach to practice is neither systematic nor methodical. They don't use any textbooks, special exercises, or any particular method.

They start playing organ with repertoire. They play a lot of Bach, Franck, some Buxtehude, maybe Widor, Mendelssohn and other composers. Basically everything which is popular in many countries.

What they do is they play their pieces from the beginning until the end over and over with the hope that SOMEHOW they will perfect them. They don't pay attention to detail, to slow tempo, to fragments, to separate voices, their combinations, and most importantly, to

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correction of the numerous mistakes. In fact, they don't even notice many of these mistakes.

Sadly, but because they don't have a step-by-step system, their level is not very high. No wonder why many of them get frustrated and eventually, quit organ playing altogether because it's not leading them anywhere.

I hope you can do better than that.

## Organ Practice and Old Age

I hear this question a lot: can you learn to play the organ if you are 79 years old?

I don't know. I'm not 79. But keeping in mind people who have reached this age and still continue to practice, I think, yes you can.

You see, when people are young, they are always rushing - trying to achieve their goals. But when you are 79, you don't have to rush anymore.

You just have this tremendous life experience behind you. So you can enjoy organ practice - every minute of it, every single moment, every breath you take.

Don't try too hard - just make this activity as pleasant as possible. Don't think about those 10 000 hours needed to excel in organ playing.

Just do one hour today. That's it. If tomorrow comes, practice one more hour.

If you think about it, we don't know if we will be here tomorrow. Regardless of our age.

So the best we can do is to treasure the day that we still have - today. If you do this every day for one year - you will move a mountain.

## Fast Progress in Organ Playing

Slow/fast is a relative thing.

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For some people fast progress is when someone can learn how to play the organ in 2 hours. To me fast progress is if someone can learn to play the organ in 10 years.

I don't believe in shortcuts in organ playing. Of course, we have to practice smarter and not harder. More efficiently, but still it takes years to develop your technique. And technique is only the beginning in the art of organ playing.

Just think of organ practice as basketball. Just imagine how many times does a basketball player from NBA has to make those throws into the basket?

At least 10 000. That's from every different angle and position.

Did you know that Thomas Edison made 10 000 failed attempts before he succeeded inventing the light-bulb? He believed in himself and never gave up.

It is said that if you want to excel at something, you have to put in at least 10 000 hours of practice in order to become an expert.

If we practice 2 hours a day, that 13.6 years.

For 4 hours a day of practice, that's about 7 years.

You would think it is frustrating to wait so many years until you reach your goal?

Yes, it is. Don't wait - enjoy the process.

I think you just have to enjoy every single minute on the organ bench.

Result is not a goal.

Process is a goal.

Never ever give up.

## How to Practice More Effectively on the Organ?

Organists rarely have patience. A lot of times we want to see the results of our practice now instead of later.

Therefore there is a temptation to play the music without stopping as if at the concert. Or attempting to play the thick polyphonic texture right away. Or getting too bored with the slow practice speed. Or practicing until our backs start to burn.

This might work fine if you are a seasoned organist with solid education, training and experience. But if you are just getting started or getting back to the organ after being away from it for years, you won't see the results you are after.

Here are my recommendations which will help you practice more effectively on the organ:

- 1) Don't play the piece from the beginning until the end at first.
- 2) Don't go to the next fragment until you master the previous one.
- 3) Don't play all parts together at first.
- 4) Don't take a fast tempo at first.
- 5) Don't jump from one piece to another without first mastering it.
- 6) Don't neglect short stretching breaks.

Occasionally we can turn these points upside down if we are getting close to a public performance but it must be on purpose. You have to be able say "I do this, because right now it is my next step towards my goal. It is part of my plan".

## How to Practice Organ for Longer Hours?

Practice length is one of the main concerns of aspiring organists. In particular, inability to practice for larger amount of time means less satisfactory results in the long run.

Here I don't mean the situation when a person can't practice for long enough because of the busy schedule at work or family responsibilities. Instead, I'm talking about an organist who wishes to spend more time on the organ bench but is either bored or otherwise can't commit to longer practice hours.

Let's discuss a little bit what happens when we practice. This way you will see the situation in a different light, I hope.

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When we first sit on the organ bench and start working on some exercises, we notice right away how rigid and inflexible our hands and feet are. If we keep playing the instrument gently for 15 minutes, the feeling is that our hands and feet start to feel a little better - we are starting to warm up.

In the next 15 minutes we can start to see the actual immediate results of today's practice. For example, we can learn a fragment of 4 measures which will be one step towards our long-term goal.

Of course, we can stop here and start doing something else. If we do, then what we have accomplished today is only these 4 measures. What about the previously learned material that we mastered in the past practice sessions? Have we had time to play it at least once in a slow tempo and refresh our memory?

No, we only mastered these new 4 measures. Of course, we can repeat the old material before learning something new but the situation is the same - we either haven't learned anything new today or learned some new fragment but forgot older fragments.

Can you see the problem here? If we want to start learning something new and at the same time build on what we have already mastered, we need to put longer hours for practice.

Let's say we spent 15 minutes for warm-ups and exercises, then another 15 minutes for repetition of older material. So after half an hour only we can start learning something new today.

A lot of people stop practicing right here. The question is why? To answer it, we must ask ourselves, how do we feel after these 30 minutes?

Well, if we play with pedals, our back starts to feel a little tired. What happens with our mind? If we honestly were focusing on the music for half an hour, then surely our mind starts to feel tired, too.

If we want to continue to practice, we could either push through the feeling of being tired or we could take a short 5-10 minute break. In order to not overexert ourselves I recommend a break.

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Drink a glass of water, relax a little and stretch your upper and lower body for 5 minutes. That's it. All you need is some air, breathing, and you will start to feel refreshed.

Then come back and practice for 30 more minutes. After that, take another short break and so on. This way, your practice will become more enjoyable and not become tiresome. If you have enough time, you can easily practice for 2 hours a day this way.

Is it OK to push through and practice longer without resting? Yes, it is great to do it occasionally because your mind also needs to have the ability focus for longer periods of time. In fact, you may want to learn to focus for at least one hour - that's an average time of the organ recital. If you practice this way, don't forget to rest more after this hour.

However, your normal everyday practice should be fun and easy - your goal is to practice for years to come and not to burn yourself out.

## Getting the Most Success Out of Organ Practice

I hear people describing this situation - they practice organ playing a lot (1-2 hours) every day but it doesn't seem to get them results they are after. After such an hour or two spent on the organ bench they tend to feel a sense of frustration rather than tranquility, completion, and that they achieved something remarkable today.

If you are in such a situation, here is what I recommend you can do:

Make sure you have your fingering and pedaling written in (at least for 4 measures at a time). Practicing organ piece without the predetermined fingering and pedaling will make your playing very insecure, unpredictable, and not fluent.

Play slowly only 4 measures at a time. If you make mistakes, make a mental note of them and start practicing these 4 measures one more time. Fix the mistakes and aim for at least 3 correct repetitions in a row (5-10 repetitions if you are really serious about your progress).

Practice separate voices or parts first. Don't attempt to play two voices unless you can play solo lines slowly but perfectly repeatedly. Only then practice all available combinations of two voices. If you did the previous step honestly, then these two voices are going to be just a little more difficult but not out of reach.

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The same holds true with playing combinations of three voices - do the two parts first. In a four-part piece, remember to play all four parts together only after you did all these preparatory steps.

You can also check if the piece you are working on is not too difficult for you at the moment. Try to play it at 50 % slower tempo than a concert speed. If you make more than 3 mistakes in one system while playing slowly - there is a good reason to believe that you need to take an easier piece for practicing now and work on improving your [organ technique](#).

Apply these tips in your [organ practice](#) today. They really work. But don't expect fast results. Instead celebrate each conquered four-measure fragment. Then little by little you start putting them all together and your piece will begin to sound much better.

## Patience in Organ Practice

When everything is going smoothly, it is easy to be patient in your organ practice. It is easy to reduce the tempo up to half speed and really focus on playing every note correctly. When things go as you planned, it is relatively easy to work in smaller fragments because you hear correct results right away.

But what to do if the episode you are working on is extremely difficult and you make too many mistakes, despite the fact that you hear the perfect performance in your head? Is it possible to keep your patience and faithfully practice as if nothing is bothering you? Is it possible to really let go that tension and stress rising inside of you and just to enjoy your practice?

I think what you can do if you are feeling impatient is to focus on the basics. Here I mean correct notes, rhythms, fingering, pedaling, ornaments, articulation, tempo, and hand and feet position.

Check if any of these elements need correction and simply repeat the excerpt 5-10 times with the aim to improve them. These repetitions could be your immediate goal.

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Having a clear goal in mind while practicing really does help to calm down and relax. Don't forget the power of slow and deep breathing through the nose which improves the focus of your mind. This in turn will help you to avoid mistakes, and consequently, unnecessary frustration.

You have to understand where your frustration and impatience are coming from. A lot of times they come from unrealistic expectations of wanting to play perfectly the entire piece too soon. What you can do if you run in such problems is to focus on playing separate voices or parts for a while.

This again will help you to calm down and be happy with your [organ practice](#) because the texture will be easy enough to manage and you will begin to see the results you like right away. When this becomes easy, slowly add one more voice. By doing so, little by little you can master even pieces which currently might seem out of reach for you.

## It Doesn't Count Unless You Practice

Reading about how to practice organ doesn't count as practice.

Planning to practice organ doesn't count as practice.

Wishing to practice organ doesn't count as practice.

Thinking about yesterday's organ practice doesn't count as practice.

Listening to organ music doesn't count as practice (it only counts, if you are listening with a specific goal in mind).

Discussing with a friend how to practice organ doesn't count as practice.

It only counts, if you actually show up and do the next step which brings you closer to your goal.

So I hope you have practiced your organ music today already. If not, go do it now.

Even if it's only 15 minutes during that TV commercial. Even if it's these 4 measures which give you most trouble. Even if it's only on the table when the family is asleep.

It counts.

Then when you go to bed and think of what you have accomplished today, you can say, "yes, I have just made one baby step towards my goal."

## **Why Do We Practice Playing the Organ?**

Sometimes I get asked for an advice on practicing by people who are not sure anymore if they can continue to practice organ playing. In their student years they had lots of time and motivation to play their instrument at the highest level, perform concerts and seek a professional organist career.

But later in life after they finished their training and studies situation changed. They might have dreamed about having a successful international recitalist career and make a living out of it, but in reality, only very few individuals ever achieve this level.

Most of the organists I know have to combine 3 things to survive: teach (both privately and/or at an institution), play paid concerts (in their own country and abroad), and play church services.

Of course, that's a generalization, and certainly there are people who can do only one of these activities to make a living but I have a feeling that they are not in the majority.

A person might have a life-long dream to play regular concerts and when that doesn't seem to work, a motivation to practice organ might diminish. So we have to search for an answer of why do we keep up our efforts at becoming a better organist.

I think the answer has to come from within the individual. Money, fame, and career, although they might seem like a vital part of the organist's life, all these things are only the result of many years of diligent practice. The real motivation is within us, not from external stimuli, such as paid concerts.

Imagine a situation where a person has to play church services every week (or even every day) but his/her duties don't include playing more difficult organ works. So it's easy to fall into the trap of playing just the hymns because there is no need for more advanced music (at present).

That might be fine for an organist who doesn't have extensive training, experience, and

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skills. However, I believe, if the person has the necessary skills to do a better job and to improve, it is already a responsibility for him/her to keep these skills sharp and to advance them even further.

We never know when the situation changes, when somebody will offer us a paid concert (or when we will find such opportunity ourselves) but if we continue to practice and improve, when the time comes, we will be ready.

Did you know that many young conductors began their international career by substituting on the spot a regular conductor who couldn't show up at the concert? They couldn't do that if all they did was waiting for that moment and did not practice because nobody paid them money for doing so.

So I guess, we have to earn that trust, earn attention from potential concert organizers, and become better and/or more remarkable than our competitors.

And how do we earn trust? By practicing, giving our best, staying sharp, and most importantly, by being remarkable.

Don't wait for somebody to find you, become proactive in building relationships and networking. Don't just send your resume and your proposed concert program to churches. This approach rarely works anymore because of the increased competition. Instead, think of how you can be different and more remarkable than other organists and position yourself that way.

## What to Do When We Get Stuck?

We all have situations when something is not right, when things are not working the way we want.

It could be a tricky spot with that long double pedal trill in the pedal part (like in Liszt's B-A-C-H). For a lot of people it may even be as "simple" as putting hands and feet together in the chorale preludes from Bach's *Orgelbuchlein*. Even playing left hand part and pedals combined in many cases where different rhythms are employed might be a very complex task.

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If you are an organ improviser, things can go out of control very quickly - having no interesting ideas to play on, having interesting ideas but limited technique may lead to frustration.

If you compose for the organ, a search for originality might be a daunting task. Or we think we wrote something clever, but it sounds dry and unmusical.

So we get stuck. What to do then? Should we quit and do something else? Should we continue the task no matter what?

These are hard questions to answer. I think, you can try to imagine the end result. If the end result doesn't feel exciting enough, perhaps it isn't worth pursuing. The really remarkable things are supposed to be difficult.

Sometimes it means that you have to find easier piece and come back to the difficult one when you are ready for it. Sometimes it also means you have to push yourself one step further and stick to the plan.

But the most difficult thing in such situation is to face ourselves strictly and honestly. Remember, it's not really the music we are struggling with, it's we and our weaknesses.

Our biggest opponent is ourselves.

## Organ Practice Length

Have you heard stories about organists who practice all day long? Or perhaps about students who stay all night at the conservatoire or another school and practice without stopping until morning? I know some organists do that.

Let's imagine for a second that you have all the time in the world (most people don't) and you are free to practice as long as you want.

Here is the question: are these long practice sessions helpful in the long run? Can you really stay focused all seven hours on the organ bench and put in all your effort?

I think that it is counter-productive to practice for seven or more hours a day regularly.

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I personally have practiced that much or even more when I had to prepare for a recital in 2 days. That was a marathon practice. Very difficult for the mind to endure. But I had no other choice.

However, I would say an organist can achieve good results with 2 hours of regular, focused and wise practice. It's not really the length but quality of the [organ practice](#) that matters.

After 2 hours, your mind and body gets weak and you really have to push. So I don't recommend for the majority of people.

I think it's also important to make breaks of 5-10 minutes every 30 minutes or so (drink a glass of water, stretch etc.). Then you will feel refreshed and never tired.

## Give Up or Not?

Let's give up on making excuses.

Let's give up on paying attention to distractions.

Let's give up on the habit of not finishing tasks.

Let's give up on halfhearted practice.

Let's give up on laziness.

Let's give up on waiting.

Let's not give up on practicing.

Let's not give up on correcting mistakes.

Let's not give up on paying attention to details.

Let's not give up on pursuit of perfection.

Let's not give up on trying even harder.

Let's not give up on reaching our dream.



## **Congratulations!**

You have finished reading this e-book from start to finish. This in itself is quite an achievement since not too many people finish what they start. This is your first step to your organ playing success. Now be sure to implement at least some of my advice in your organ practice because reading alone will not give you results that you want – taking action will.

## **What to do next?**

1. If you are NOT receiving e-lessons from me via email on every aspect of organ playing please subscribe for free at [www.organduo.lt](http://www.organduo.lt). Lessons include topics, such as organ practice, organ technique, organ repertoire, sight-reading, organ registration, organ building and design, organ maintenance, organ improvisation, organ composition, musical analysis, harmony, counterpoint, fugue, ear training, organ literature, hymn playing, music theory, time management, productivity, motivation, personal development and others.

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2. If you liked this e-book and think it would be helpful to others, please share it with your friends:

If you think that this e-book would be helpful to others, please share it with your friends.

If you want to email this e-book to your friends, just send them this link:

<http://www.organduo.lt/organ-practice-is-a-privilege.html>

Thank you for recommending my work!

3. To turbo-charge your organ playing efforts and begin your training that will help you grow as an organist fast, click here to discover my ground-breaking program "Total Organist" - the most comprehensive organ training program online:

<http://www.organduo.lt/total-organist.html>

4. Check out my various organ coaching programs:

<http://www.organduo.lt/coaching-programs.html>

5. Most importantly, implement at least some of the tips and advice you found in this e-book in your practice. When you will enjoy success of any kind, please get in touch. I'd love to hear your story.

To your success in organ playing,

Vidas Pinkevicius

<http://www.organduo.lt>