

ASSESSMENT OF MY DELIBERATE PRACTICE - SPICE

Use this checklist (✓) to evaluate how you learn, train, or practice. This will help you reach a much higher level of performance. Identify the gaps then make your training more effective by adding a dose of SPICE!



Specific performance targets

“Deliberate practice involves well-defined, specific goals and often involves improving some aspect of the target performance; it is not aimed at some vague overall improvement.” – A. Ericsson

- All my learning and training has specific performance goals or outcomes
- My major learning goals are broken down into smaller intermediate goals
- When I practice, the results are measured, tracked, and build one upon another
- I plan and guide my training by following how the best in this field train

Periods of intense focus



“Deliberate practice is deliberate, that is, it requires a person’s full attention and conscious actions. You seldom improve much without giving the task your full attention. It isn’t enough to simply follow a teacher’s or coach’s directions.” – A. Ericsson

- I control each session by giving full attention to what I am practicing
- I focus my concentration on the goals or outcomes of the practice session
- I monitor fatigue and distractions (I practice good energy management)
- I use shorter learning bursts during training sessions with short recovery breaks

Immediate feedback



“Without feedback— either from yourself or from outside observers— you cannot figure out what you need to improve on or how close you are to achieving your goals.” – A. Ericsson

- I get immediate and specific feedback to identify mistakes and make adjustments
- We have eliminated lags or delays in feedback – my feedback is timely
- I do frequent testing and skill demonstrations that mimic real situations
- I build mental representations and get feedback on how close I am to them
- I have learned to get feedback by myself and I frequently monitor my progress

Cycling between comfort and discomfort



“Deliberate practice takes place outside one’s comfort zone and requires a student to constantly try things that are just beyond his or her current abilities. Thus, it demands a near-maximal effort, which is generally not enjoyable.” – A. Ericsson

- I believe my brain learns best when it is pushed slightly outside of my comfort zone
- We design practice sessions to continually push me in and out of my comfort zone
- I frequently change activities and adjust the degree of difficulty to stay “in the zone”
- I approach skill development the same way as a bodybuilding does, by “lifting a little more than I can handle”, then allowing for recovery

Expert coaching



“Deliberate practice develops skills that other people have already figured out how to do and for which effective training techniques have been established. The practice regimen should be designed and overseen by a teacher or coach who is familiar with the abilities of expert performers and with how those abilities can best be developed.” – A. Ericsson

- I get coaching that provides me with immediate and specific feedback
- My coach holds me accountable and raises the pressure on me to perform
- My coach pushes me further than I would on my own
- The coaching I get ensures new learning builds upon existing fundamental skills

Anders Ericsson (1993) coined the term and has researched expert performance for over 30 years. He refers to **deliberate practice** as those practice activities that maximize improvement throughout the development toward expert performance.

Thanks to Nathan Lozeron for inventing the SPICE acronym

Prepared by James P. Hauptert

Deliberate practice is a “keystone habit” you can leverage to improve other study strategies. But it takes time and practice to master. People who coach for a living are familiar with it. When your child learns to do this, you gain the added benefit of improved learning as the skills naturally cascade down into other everyday learning practices.

To get better at it, start by selecting a learning subject or activity where the payoff is large such as practicing a musical instrument, training for a sport, or learning a second language. Choose a skill *where the student desires to get much better* because student motivation will be needed to sustain it. Learn to use it where you desire performance breakthroughs.

Coaching Points to Emphasize

1. To begin, **evaluate your practice** or training sessions against the five components of deliberate practice. Examine closely the methods you are using. Identify the gaps.
2. **Focus on the process** (the way you spend your time) when you train instead of the product (that which you want to accomplish). Aspire to make today’s training thorough and tight; the exam or the final goal may be months away and too distant to motivate you.
3. **Adopt the new mindset** that learning is growing your brain - When you first begin to learn something, you are making new neural patterns and connecting them to existing ones. The student will initially find this to be *harder* and learning to *feel* slower.
4. **Develop measurements and frequent skill assessments** that can prove to the student how much more effective this type of practice is for them. Numerous studies prove deliberate practice yields much better learning results and higher levels of performance, but at the time students report it feels *no more effective*. This illusion is overcome by looking at the data.
5. **Effective training connects new information with existing networks** in the brain. Help your child relate new materials or techniques to things they already know. Discuss how new training fits to existing skills.
6. Emphasize how the underlying models, concepts, and representations fit together as a whole. Understanding, at multiple levels, is the *superglue* that holds all the underlying memory traces together.
7. **Practice in a way the student gains context** so they know how and when to use the new information in real-world situations. Go beyond learning and practicing a skill in isolation, and train with related, and unrelated problems so the student can see when to use it, and when not to use it.
8. **Interleave the training** and vary the activities in the practice sessions so they mimic the situations and skills you are training for.
9. **Discuss how the student will get more frequent and immediate feedback**, and how much of this will source from the coach, and from the practice itself.

Hint: One way you can start your journey to more deliberate practice by beginning the Pomodoro technique with a timer.