



Lesson 14: Practice Journal: Owner's Manual

In this lesson, we'll discuss one of the most effective practice tools: your journal, or musical diary.

Keeping track of the things you practice, your current regimen, your victories, failures, breakthroughs and lessons is of utmost importance. What gets measured gets improved and here's how to do it.

First, I want to *insist* that there is no right or wrong way to do it. I will share with you some of the most effective ways I've personally been using a practice journal. But it's really up to you to experiment and see what is most comfortable, most practical and realistic for your situation.

So you can have your diary on paper, which is what I do. Or have it fully electronic (some people use softwares such as Evernote or even a simple word processor). The important thing is that you can understand yourself and find a way around your own mess! Nobody else should read your practice journal anyways!

For years, I used a loose-leaf journal, where I would add 3-hole punch pages in a binder as I needed them. Nowadays, I use a paper journal I bought in a stationary store. When I run out of pages, I just go get another fresh one. Moleskine, anyone?!

Secondly, here's how to jumpstart your practice diary in a few easy steps: start with what you wrote down in one of the the previous lessons (taking inventory, long term goals, 6-month goals, practice program, etc.) on the first few pages. That's a great way to start and set intentions for your musical goals!

Then take a few minutes and dedicate an entire page or more to your current jazz guitar practice routine. This will become you reference for the next few weeks, where you'll be working on the same exact program every day. Always write the date at the top. And then write the time-splits and the percentages for the exact exercises you plan on working on.

And thirdly, from now on, make it a habit to have this document with you at all times when practicing. Before even plugging the guitar, on turning on the amp, just open your practice diary at the most recent page. I like to keep a bookmark. Review what you practiced last, and review your current jazz guitar training program.

Then write out the date on a fresh new page to start a new entry for today's practice. Look at the time splits and convert the percentages into minutes right away. For instance, a 10% warm up if you have 60 minutes to practice ahead of you is 6 minutes.

This little protocol for starting a practice session will become part of you and really set the tone for your learning. Your brain will start to go in *practice mode* almost automatically. Much like Pavlov's dog, right!?

With this in mind, remember once again to use your timer and stop yourself when warm up time is over! You'll see, sticking to your plan becomes easier when you have your journal, like a little practice companion.

Furthermore, while you practice write down what you are doing and for how long. Often, just a few words suffice. As mentioned earlier, so long as you understand yourself that's fine. Often, you'll only need more words when you *digress* from the program.

And as last step in each and every practice session (whether it gets interrupted or is prolonged for several minutes) should be a 3-minute wrap up summary. Write down what went well, what didn't go well and what you want to work on (or change) in the next session. This way, you can feel confident that you'll "hit the ground running" next time you pick up the instrument.

Feel free to leave yourself other comments too! Remember, you're basically talking to your future self when writing these things down. You're telling your future-self "*Hey, this is what you need to practice now. And this is what you're getting really good at, and why.*"

Over time, documenting the whole practice process will show you how much (or how little) of the actual program gets done. Also, the areas that need more practice, and the most difficult aspects of your musicality, your challenges and goals will become very obvious: when you document what you do, these things stick out like a sore thumb! And that's exactly what you want to know for your next review.

Lastly, we will get back to using your journal to process your own "reviews" (or, as I like to call them, little "lessons with yourself") in other lessons in this course.

Stay tuned! But for now, make a commitment to yourself to document your practice. You'll be so glad you did!