



Lesson 12

The Speed-Up-Slowly Practice Method

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LESSON 12:

THE SPEED-UP-SLOWLY PRACTICE METHOD

I told you earlier that we were first going to work on precision, and then work on playing faster.

You've done the work on precision. That involved playing slowly.

Now it's time to *speed up your playing*, so you're able to play a tune fast when you want to. Some tunes only work well when played fast.

This is a bit like progressing from driving a car around town to becoming a racing car driver. The need for split-second precision is much greater.

You are about to surprise yourself with how fast you can play while still playing with precision and sounding good.

And how are we going to achieve this miracle? Well, we're going to use a little invention of mine called the Speed-Up-Slowly practice method.

MUSIC THEORY

BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Speed-Up-Slowly practice method

The Speed-Up-Slowly practice method has three steps:

1. **Start slowly**
2. Gradually **speed up**
3. Find your **top speed**.

Sound too simple? Maybe so, but if you can master this and really apply it in your practice, it will serve you well in developing your skill as a musician.

The metronome will really come into its own here. It will allow you to do step 2, gradually speeding up, with much more precision than you could without it. And that leads to more satisfaction and less frustration in learning new music.

Speed-Up-Slowly practice method - more detail

Here's a bit more detail about how you do each of the three steps:

1. **Start slowly**
 - a. Have a guess at your starting speed: a speed slow enough that you'll be able to play the music with precision.

- b. Set your metronome to that speed, and try playing the music along with the ticks.
- c. If you make mistakes or your playing is not crisp and accurate, try a slower speed.
- d. Once you are playing accurately, that is your starting speed. You may be surprised how slow you need to start, to play perfectly.

2. Gradually **speed up**

- a. Do this very gradually. For example, if you have mastered playing the music at a speed of 60, maybe try it now at 64, or even 62.
- b. Repeat at that new speed until your playing is precise, before cranking the speed up another notch.
- c. If you make a mistake or two, cut back the speed a little. You may have made too high a jump.
- d. When your playing is accurate again, carry on speeding up.

3. Find your **top speed**

- a. Eventually you'll reach a speed at which you simply cannot play precisely no matter what you do.
- b. At this point, take the speed down several notches and play with great precision at that slower speed. That is your top speed for now.
- c. However, if that speed is too fast for the tune, you may not want to take your speed up that far. For example, you probably wouldn't play 'Yesterday' by the Beatles at top speed! kk

Tip: You should end up feeling relaxed and in control. If you don't, take the speed back down a bit lower.

I promise you, if you keep applying this day by day and week by week, you will find your top speed gradually increasing without having to push it. And you'll be playing perfectly all the time.

Tip: Some tunes of course are not meant to be played fast – tunes such as 'Michelle' by the Beatles, or 'Old Folks at Home' by Stephen Foster. In that case you may not want to keep pushing your speed higher and higher. Just end off at a speed that sounds good to you.

PRACTICAL

BUILD YOUR SKILL

Here are some exercises and tunes to give you practice in applying the Speed-Up-Slowly practice method.

Exercise 1:

Single pitch

We're going to apply the Speed-Up-Slowly practice method:

1. **Start slowly**
2. Gradually **speed up**
3. Find your **top speed**.

I'll walk you through it step by step.

1 Start slowly

- a. Have a guess at your starting speed: a speed slow enough that you'll be able to play the music with precision. You could try 60 BPM initially.
- b. Set your metronome to that speed. Play the music below, while counting aloud in time with the ticks: kkk do this together: remove 'count aloud' from images and text

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

- c. If you make mistakes or your playing is not crisp and accurate, try a slower speed.
- d. Once you are playing accurately, that is your starting speed. You may be surprised how slow you need to start, to play perfectly.

2 Gradually speed up

- a. Do this very gradually. For example, if you have mastered playing the music at a speed of 60, maybe try it now at 64, or even 62.
- b. Repeat at that new speed until your playing is precise, before cranking the speed up another notch.
- c. If you make a mistake or two, cut back the speed a little. You may have made too high a jump.
- d. When your playing is accurate again, carry on speeding up.

3 Find your top speed

- a. Eventually you'll reach a speed at which you simply cannot play precisely no matter what you do.

- b. At this point, take the speed down several notches and play with great precision at that slower speed. That is your top speed for now. You should feel relaxed and in control.

Exercise 2:

Single pitch, left hand

Apply the Speed-Up-Slowly practice method:

1. **Start slowly.**

In the first measure the notes are legato, so join them together as smoothly as you can.

In the second measure the first note starts on tick 1 and ends with the rest on tick 2. Take care to end the note exactly on tick 2.

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑
the beats: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

2. Gradually **speed up**.
3. Find your **top speed**.

Reminder: When counting aloud, you may need to count very softly so you can hear both the metronome and the notes.

Exercise 3:

Different pitches

Apply the Speed-Up-Slowly practice method.

The first note is a pickup note. Since the time signature is 4/4 (4 beats per measure), there are 3 imaginary beats before that pickup note, making 4 beats total. If you find it helpful, you can count '1 2 3' aloud on 3 ticks, and then start playing on the 4th tick as you count '4'.

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats: 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

Exercise 4:

Different pitches, left hand

Apply the Speed-Up-Slowly practice method.

The pickup measure has 2 beats. Since the time signature is 3/4 (3 beats per measure), there is one imaginary beat before the 2 pickup notes, making 3 beats total. If you find it helpful, you can count '1' aloud on one tick, and then start playing on the 2nd tick as you count '2'.

ticks: ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

the beats: 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

Tune 1:

Song by Stephen Foster

Stephen Foster is known as ‘the father of American music’.

Apply the Speed-Up-Slowly practice method.

I have stopped indicating the ticks and beats under the music. Just make sure you continue using your metronome and counting the beats aloud.

Camptown Races

Tune 2:

A Christmas Carol

Apply the Speed-Up-Slowly practice method.

O Come, All Ye Faithful

