



Fox's
FIRESIDE

Success = How Many Hours?

What does it take to master your craft?

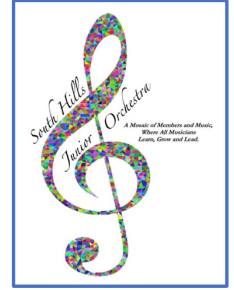


Practice with your fingers and you need all day. Practice with your mind and you will do as much in 1 1/2 hours. — Leopold Auer

If I don't practice for a day, I know it. If I don't practice for two days, the critics know it. And if I don't practice for three days, the public knows it.

— Louis Armstrong

It is a mistake to think that the practice of my art has become easy to me. I assure you, dear friend, no one has given so much care to the study of composition as I. There is scarcely a famous master in music whose works I have not frequently and diligently studied. — Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart



How much **practice** is enough? 2 hours? 4 hours? More or less? What constitutes too much practicing?

To grasp this essential question, a tug-a-war of time vs. attentiveness, Noa Kageyama quotes Arthur Rubinstein, Leopold Auer, Jascha Heifetz, Donald Weilerstein and others in his article “How Many Hours a Day Should I Practice?” (<https://bulletproofmusician.com/how-many-hours-a-day-should-you-practice/>). He centers around the basic premise that **deliberate practice** is more efficient, engaging, and builds self-confidence.

When it comes to understanding expertise and expert performance, psychologist Dr. K. Anders Ericsson (<https://psy.fsu.edu/faculty/ericssonk/ericsson.dp.php>) is perhaps the world's leading authority. His research is the basis for the “ten-year rule” and “10,000-hour rule” which suggest that it requires at least ten years and/or 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to achieve an expert level of performance in any given domain — and in the case of musicians, often closer to 25 years in order to attain an elite international level. Note that the real key here is not the amount of practice required (as the exact number of hours is debatable) but the type of practice required to attain an expert level of performance. In other words, just practicing any old way doesn't cut it. — Kageyama

The famous “**10,000 Hour Rule**” was described in the book *Outliers: The Story of Success* written by Malcolm Gladwell (<https://www.businessinsider.com/malcolm-gladwell-explains-the-10000-hour-rule-2014-6>). Based on studies in elite performance (<http://projects.ict.usc.edu/itw/gel/EricssonDeliberatePracticePR93.pdf>), Gladwell contended that it's “an extraordinarily consistent answer in an incredible number of fields... you need to have practiced, to have apprenticed, for 10,000 hours before you get good.”

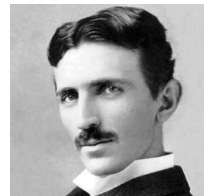
Gladwell's potent message — “people aren't born geniuses; they get there through effort” — was seized upon by popular culture.

There is a lot of confusion about the 10,000 rule that I talk about in Outliers. It doesn't apply to sports. And practice isn't a SUFFICIENT condition for success. I could play chess for 100 years and I'll never be a grand master. The point is simply that natural ability requires a huge investment of time in order to be made manifest. Unfortunately, sometimes complex ideas get oversimplified in translation. — Gladwell

View his explanation on YouTube about his “metaphor for the extent of commitment that's necessary for cognitive-complex fields” (how long mastery takes) here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uB5PUgZeY>.

The 10,000 hour rule was also cited in a book by Sean Patrick: *Nikola Tesla - Imagination and the Man That Invented the 20th Century* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outliers_\(book\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outliers_(book))):

The rule's premise is that, regardless of whether one has an innate aptitude for an activity or not, mastery of it takes around ten thousand hours of focused, intentional practice. Analyzing the lives of geniuses in a wide range of intellectual, artistic, and athletic pursuits confirms this concept. From Mozart to Bobby Fischer to Bill Gates to the Beatles, their diverse journeys from nothing toward excellence in their respective fields shared a common denominator: the accumulation of ten thousand hours of unwavering “exercise” of their crafts. — Patrick



To be fair, many have taken exception to the 10,000 hour rule, in articles like “The Great Practice Myth: Debunking the 10,000 Hour Rule” by Michael Miller (<https://www.6seconds.org/2018/02/09/the-great-practice-myth-debunking-the-10000-hour-rule-and-what-you-actually-need-to-know-about-practice/>).

According to Ryan Branstetter in his November 2019 “The Ultimate Guide to Teaching Habits of Mind” (<https://educationcloset.com/2019/11/01/teaching-habits-of-mind/>), creating or reforming “patterns of thinking” and habits may instead take anywhere from **21 days to a year**:

Have you ever heard someone tell you that it takes 21 days to form (or break) a habit? Well, scientific studies have found that to be unfounded. When it comes to something easy, such as grabbing a coffee at your local Starbucks on your way to school, it might take only a few days for a habit to form. But if it is a habit that is challenging, studies have shown that the 21-day myth may actually more like 66 days. Or for very challenging habits, it could take up to a year! — Branstetter

How about translating this prescription of 1-10 years to a weekly figure of five hours? With *reading* being the major focus for any stellar success in a profession, review the blog-post “Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and Oprah All Use the 5-Hour Rule” by Michael Simmons in *Accelerated Intelligence* (<https://medium.com/accelerated-intelligence/bill-gates-warren-buffett-and-oprah-all-use-the-5-hour-rule-308f528b6363>):

If 10,000 hours isn't an absolute rule that applies across fields, what does it really take to become world class in the world of work? I've explored the personal history of many widely admired business leaders like Elon Musk, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, Warren Buffett and Mark Zuckerberg in order to understand how they apply the principles of deliberate practice. Many of these leaders, despite being extremely busy, set aside at least an hour a day (or five hours a week) over their entire career for activities that could be classified as deliberate practice or learning.

— Simmons

Here are the “three buckets” (principles) of Simmon’s 5-hour rule:

1. Read
2. Reflect
3. Experiment

Specific to number one above, apparently billionaire entrepreneurs like to read a lot, in quantities of time, frequency, and number of sources (quoted in the article):

- Warren Buffett spends five to six hours per day reading five newspapers and 500 pages of corporate reports.
- Bill Gates reads 50 books per year.
- Mark Zuckerberg reads at least one book every two weeks.
- Elon Musk grew up reading two books a day, according to his brother.
- Mark Cuban reads more than 3 hours every day.
- Arthur Blank, co-founder of Home Depot, reads two hours a day.
- Billionaire entrepreneur David Rubenstein reads six books a week.
- Dan Gilbert, self-made billionaire and owner of the Cleveland Cavaliers, reads one to two hours a day.

By the way, how many books do YOU read a month? What publications do you have sitting on the coffee table or bed stand awaiting to be started/finished? A quick glance at my own collection of recent nonfiction acquisitions includes these titles:

- *Fewer Things Better - The Courage to Focus on What Matters Most* by Angela Watson (Due Season Press and Educational Services, 2019)
- *UnSelfie - Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World* by Michele Borba (Touchstone, 2016)
- *The 100-Year Life - Living and Working in an Age of Longevity* by Lynda Gratton/Andrew Scott (Bloomsbury, 2016)
- *The Weekend Effect - The Life-Changing Benefits of Taking Time Off and Challenging the Cult of Overwork* by Katrina Onstad (Harper Collins Publishers, 2017)

(You see, I do not exclusively survey the current best-sellers or today’s fads/trends... ideas, insights, and innovations can come from anywhere and any time frame. Now that I am retired, I can “catch-up!”)

Back to **musical preparation**. You may have heard that saying “**practice makes perfect**,” generally debunked in several of my “Fox’s Firesides” (<https://paulfox.blog/foxs-firesides/>) for music students. I revise this concept to “perfect practice makes perfect performance” promoting “the ten times rule” in applying focus, problem solving, and repetitive drill. Check these out:

- “Does Practice Makes Perfect?” (<http://paulfox.blog/2017/02/22/does-practice-make-perfect/>)
- “Goals for the Musical Road for Success” (<http://paulfox.blog/2017/05/11/goals-for-the-musical-road-to-success/>)
- “Pizza, Batting Averages, and the Ten-Times Rule” <http://paulfox.blog/2017/09/24/pizza-batting-averages-and-the-ten-times-rule/>
- “Life Hacks for Musicians” <http://paulfox.blog/2019/01/27/life-hacks-for-musicians/>

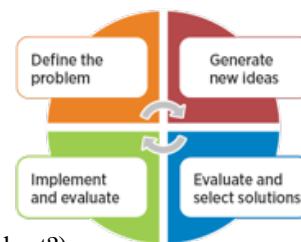
Finally, citing the initial reference in this blogpost by Noa Kageyama, here are five tips for deliberate practice by which we should all abide:

1. Keep practicing limited to a duration that allows you to stay focused.
2. Utilize times during the day when you tend to have the most energy.
3. Write down and keep track of your performance goals and what you discover during your practice sessions.
4. Work smarter, not harder.
5. Apply various techniques of problem-solving to practicing.

He also recommends this 6-step general “problem-solving model” as adapted from various online problem solving processes

(<https://www.google.com/search?q=problem+solving+process>):

1. **Define** the problem (what do I want this note/phrase to sound like?)
2. **Analyze** the problem (what is causing it to sound like this?)
3. **Identify** potential solutions (what can I tweak to make it sound more like I want?)
4. **Test** the potential solutions to select the most effective one (what tweaks seem to work best?)
5. **Implement** the best solution (make these changes permanent)
6. **Monitor** implementation (do these changes continue to produce the results I’m looking for?)



More ideas can be researched by reading Daniel Coyle’s book *The Talent Code*, or *The Practice of Practice* by Andrew Mason, or visit these links for further study:

- Katie Zhukov: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ912405.pdf>
- Donna Schwartz: <https://nafme.org/maximize-your-practice-time-using-the-rule-of-10s/>
- Leila Viss: <https://www.learningscientists.org/blog/2017/3/28-1>
- Christian Howes: <https://christianhowes.com/2009/10/29/perfect-practice/>
- Musicnotes: <https://www.musicnotes.com/now/tips/how-much-should-you-practice-your-instrument/>
- Cal Newport: <https://www.calnewport.com/blog/2010/01/06/the-grandmaster-in-the-corner-office-what-the-study-of-chess-experts-teaches-us-about-building-a-remarkable-life/>

The bottom line? Working “brainlessly” does not promote significant improvement. However, use of sufficient repetition, exploration, problem solving, and mindful and deliberate practice will stimulate your success in the pursuit of anything worthwhile... especially **the self-realization of creative self-expression**.

Please enjoy a warm, healthy and festive holiday season!

Paul K. Fox, Artistic Director

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