

### **Where to Start – “Let’s Start at the Very Beginning.....”**

- Find out as much about the piece as you can: style, time period, performance practice, **define all terms**, composer, form, instrumentation, tonality, etc... There is NO EXCUSE for not knowing these things when you have the Internet in your pocket!!
- Listen to different recordings, watch videos, check online forums, where applicable.
- When it’s time to actually start playing, I like to do the following:
  - 1) When possible, read through the piece to get a broad overview. During this read-through, you are identifying technical and musical challenges to create a practice plan.
  - 2) Often, you will decide to start learning the piece from the beginning, but you may not learn the whole piece chronologically. **DO NOT NEGLECT ENDINGS!!**
  - 3) Divide the piece into segments, and begin learning notes in the segment length that is most efficient for you (not too long and not too short).
  - 4) Start as slowly as you need to play to always honor dynamics, articulations, phrasing, and note accuracy. It is much harder to add them in later!!! Gradually increase tempo (stairs analogy).
  - 5) Create a series of warm-up exercises specific to technical challenges in your new piece (or if there are not serious technical challenges, use a general warm-up). Note: this can be done as soon as you identify the challenges.

### **Organizing Your Practice Time**

- **PLAN YOUR PRACTICE TIME**, and then honor your commitment to yourself. I (almost) never hear a student or professional musician say they have plenty of time to practice. You will have to carve out time to practice, or else it will be too easy to say that you just don’t have time.
  - In addition to reserving the time and space, as percussionists, we must also consider what instruments we can play at what time and where, and always make sure that we do not neglect one or more instruments.
- Practice Goals (2 main types):
  - 1) Progress Goals – This type of goal is related to your progress and can be musical or technical, and can be short-term (daily or weekly) or long-term (monthly or for the semester).
  - 2) Time Goals – This type of goal relates to the amount of time you spend practicing each day, week, or month.

I find it healthy to set both – a minimum daily time goal can help you get into the practice room on a set schedule, while progress goals will keep you on track.

\*\*\*It is recommended to keep track of your time and progress goals in a practice journal.

**PRO TIPS:**

- The metronome is your best friend. The metronome is your best friend. The metronome is your best friend.
- Take short breaks regularly – experiment to find out what works best for you.
- Phone in airplane mode!!
- Warming up is important physically as well as mentally.
- PRACTICE SLOWLY and THOROUGHLY.
- Focus on trouble spots (don't start at the beginning and gloss over them).
- Don't waste time "running the piece" more than is necessary.
- Find solutions sooner rather than later – order the mallets you need or create the perfect set-up – it will make things much easier for you!
- Practice hands-part when it makes sense.
- Plan stickings and roll lengths as soon as you can, write them in, and be consistent!