

Practicing is an art. Each person must find his or her own way to accomplish the necessary tasks to become better. I like a disciplined approach that utilizes several big components.

1. Technique: scales, arpeggios, chord voicings, right hand picking, etc.
2. Reading music: jazz etudes, classical violin etudes, classical guitar etudes, etc.
3. Repertoire: applying some of number 1 to chord progressions, learning comping voicings, learning the melody, and harmonizing the melody, transcribing lines from a recording of the tune.

Decide how much time you have to practice. If an hour is your allotted time, spend 20 minutes on technical exercises, 10 minutes reading and 30 minutes on tunes. Ideally, strive for more time and lengthen each segment proportionally if you wish to improve.

Here is a mini practice session.

1. Technique

Chord voicings, arpeggios and scales: Major 7, dominant 7 then resolve up a fourth and repeat the exercise. Do it in all keys.

The image displays four staves of musical notation for a technical exercise in 4/4 time. Each staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff starts with a Major 7 chord voicing (B-flat, D, F, A) and is followed by an arpeggiated line. The second staff starts with a dominant 7 chord voicing (B-flat, D, F, A, C) and includes a first ending bracket over the final two measures. The third staff continues the exercise with a different arpeggiated line. The fourth staff starts with a dominant 7 chord voicing and includes a second ending bracket over the final two measures. The exercise concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

After this technical exercise has been practiced for a while, relax for a minute and choose an etude or exercise to read.

Presto from the Sonata 1 for Violin by J.S. Bach



Now work on a jazz tune like Autumn Leaves.

Cm7 F7 BbMaj7

EbMaj7 Am7(b5) D7(#5) Gm G7

After learning the melody and chords, try working out the exercise in number one of this mini practice session over these changes. Listen to Miles Davis' version on the album *Something Else*.

To review, this practice session has had three goals:

1. Major 7 and Dominant 9 voicings with an arpeggio and scale pattern to outline the sound.
2. Reading and studying a great line written by Bach.
3. Learning a standard jazz tune.

Practice every day. An hour of focused practice six days a week will help you get better. Two or more hours each day will yield great results. Do not settle for mediocrity.

If you do not have a teacher, try to find one who will challenge you and give you the critique and guidance necessary to grow. If you have one and are not being challenged to improve technically, musically and in the areas of jazz and improvisation, look for someone else.