

Keys2Play Handbook

PERFORMANCE MASTERY SKILLS SUMMARY

1. MANAGING NERVES

When it comes to managing performance nerves or anxiety the goal is not to eliminate them as this does not necessarily improve performance. Some nerves or anxiety can actually benefit your performance even if they are making you feel uncomfortable. Nerves can give you an added Edge, heighten your senses, sharpen your reactions and help you achieve your Best performance.

You can control your anxiety, reduce muscle tension and improve your concentration and focus simply by learning to relax. There are three stages to consider:

1. The preparation stage when you are learning repertoire, and developing technical skills needed for your next performance;
2. The moments right before you begin your performance; and,
3. During your performance

The KEY is to develop an automatic relaxation response.

Modules for managing nerves include: Tuning-In to a GREAT start, Fine-Tuning

2. CONFIDENCE

Confidence is crucial to doing your best. Confident people tend to be the most successful achievers regardless of whether or not they are the most skilled or talented in their area of expertise. How confident are your students to perform? Confident performers approach performances knowing that they are going to play their best from the very first note. Our students' natural tendency however, is to play it safe, by starting their performances tentatively and hoping for the best.

Module: Coach-to-Critic 1, Coach-to-Critic 2, Making the Unfamiliar, Familiar 1, Making the Unfamiliar, Familiar 2, Strike a Pose

3. FOCUS

Whether your students are learning repertoire, developing their technique or giving a performance, the ability to focus on the right things is critical to being productive and performing their best. It is a KEY factor in performance success. Untrained, however, our attention tends to behave like a toddler let loose in a toy store. It's all very well to tell your students to focus or concentrate. It's quite a different matter to know how to develop these skills.

When our thoughts are scattered or preoccupied with other matters practice tends to become less productive. Furthermore you can hardly expect to concentrate during a performance when your practice sessions run on autopilot. Yet it is this fundamental skill that serves as the foundation for playing to the best of your ability when it really matters most.

Modules: Sharpen-Up, Making the Unfamiliar, Familiar 2, Fine-Tuning

4. PREPARATION

Good solid preparation is crucial to playing well but even the best prepared students can still have difficulty on the day. This is because playing your best under pressure requires two types of preparation:

1. Practicing to learn and improve (i.e. learning repertoire, developing and refining technical and musical skills). This requires the ability to self-monitor, correct, analyse and self-instruct.
2. Practicing to perform (i.e. learning how to trust in what you have trained, and have the confidence and courage to let go of conscious control and just allow it to happen). Best performances occur when our mind is focussed and quiet. In other words you need to be able to switch off the self-monitoring, instructions, over-analysis, and criticism that are our constant companion in the first type of practice as well as have well developed skills to deal with the spike in self-doubt, fear, tension and heightened anxiety that inevitably accompany a public performance.

Most students are aware of the importance of practicing to improve and learn (even if they don't necessarily dedicate enough time to this process!). Few, however, understand how to practice efficiently (i.e. how to get the most out of their practice sessions) and what it takes to actually prepare for a performance. Learning music and performing music are two entirely different processes and require different skills. So, regardless of how many hours of effort your students dedicate to practicing it will only get them so far if they haven't developed the skills:

1. to be productive in practice (well developed performance mastery skills can significantly improve productivity in practice); and,
2. to switch from practice mode into performance mode. Remember, this is a big ask for any musician (not just students) when you consider that musicians (unlike athletes) spend the vast majority of their time with their instrument in practice mode. Opportunities to perform are rare, particularly in the more exacting performance situations such as exams and auditions.

To further complicate this issue is the fact that many students don't really know what it takes or feels like to be 'well prepared'. Unfortunately it often takes the actual performance for them to realise that their preparation has been less than ideal or inadequate. 'Practicing to perform' will not only significantly improve preparation but has the added advantage of highlighting any weaknesses in preparation well ahead of time so the necessary steps can be taken to deal with any problems before the actual performance.

Modules: Making the Unfamiliar, Familiar1, Making the Unfamiliar, Familiar2, Rock Solid Memory

MODULE OVERVIEW

Coach-to-Critic1 (basic)

What we say to ourselves about ourselves has a big impact on how we think, perform and achieve. Our self-confidence and our belief in what we can do is directly linked to the way we talk to ourselves. We can build or destroy self-esteem through helpful or unhelpful self-talk. In this module participants learn how to:

- Differentiate between internal and external sources of confidence and why it is critical to develop internal sources of confidence;
- Evaluate self-talk (helpful vs. unhelpful vs. irrelevant or idle chatter);
- Banish the critic and welcome the coach through some simple rephrasing strategies; and,
- Tune into and understand their internal dialogue in order to build confidence even when things are not going as planned.

Coach-to-Critic2 (advanced)

This module focuses on the irrational beliefs and detrimental thought patterns that can negatively impact our student's ability to perform and achieve, leading to uncomfortable feelings such as anxiety, embarrassment and self-downing. Participants learn how to:

- Tune into and identify common detrimental thought patterns that tend to occur during the four stages of the performance process;
- Understand the importance of 'learned' and rehearsed positive coping statements for any situation at any point in the performance process; and,
- Construct an individual Self Coach Manual where negative and unhelpful self-talk statements that are likely to occur in a range of scenarios are identified and then rephrased to form a manual of positive coping statements for any situation.

Making the Unfamiliar, Familiar 1 (basic)

There are many things that happen only in a performance that are not part of our students' daily practice experience. These elements not only feel uncomfortable but they can be very distracting. The problem is that there are not many opportunities to practise performing in a pressurised situation where there are plenty of distractions (such as on stage in front of an audience).

The KEY is to help your student's acclimatise themselves to the many differences that exist between practice and performance.

This module encourages participants to consider the various types of solo performances they may be required to give and the unique combination of elements that make up that performance. Participants will learn how to assess the demands of a particular performance situation and develop strategies for eliminating many of the differences that exist between practice and performance. Making the unfamiliar elements of an upcoming performance, more familiar is crucial for building confidence and control.

Making the Unfamiliar Familiar 2 (advanced)

Not only do we constantly talk to ourselves but we also have a tendency to replay movies of past events and play out future scenarios. Are you familiar with the saying a picture is worth a 1000 words? Well it turns out that these mental movies are even more powerful than our self-talk. Successful people dream big. They picture themselves doing whatever it is they want to achieve as if it is already happening – a technique known as visualisation.

Visualisation is a powerful tool that can help your students' to prepare for their next performance in advance without stress. It can be used to build confidence, improve preparation and focus, perfect skills and reduce anxiety. In this module participants will learn :

- Their individual visualisation style;
- A series of simple visualisation exercises;
- The Keys to successful visualisation;
- How past successes can be used to prepare for and influence future performances; and,
- To override negative past experiences by creating new images of success using their imagination

*Audio recording available

Strike a Pose

Stage presence is always a component of the best performances. Poor stage presence can leave both the performer and audience feeling awkward, nervous or distracted. Acquiring or refining stage presence skills can increase self-confidence, self control and help overcome nerves so that the performer can focus their full attention on the music. Although it may seem unimportant when compared with the complexities and demands of learning to perform a musical work it is a vital element that no performer can afford to overlook. Your student's can actually build confidence just by learning how to act and look confident.

In this module participants will explore:

- The Key elements of stage presence;

- Why our body language is responsible for how other people think and feel about us and how we think and feel about ourselves;
- What elements of a performance account for the biggest impact on an audience;
- Why first impressions are so important; and,
- How a simple, two-minute, pre-performance pose can produce chemical changes within our body that will increase confidence and decrease anxiety.

Sharpen-Up

The main aim of this module is developing the skills of focus and concentration. Performing requires you to keep your thoughts present in the here and now, on the notes you are playing right now, NOT the mistake you just made, the difficult passage coming up or how you should have practised more. Participants will learn the KEY elements of focus and work through a number of activities designed to help them enhance their focus and be more productive in practice. They will also develop an understanding of what they should be thinking about when they perform and learn some KEY strategies for minimising mistakes and distractions under pressure. More specifically, participants will learn how to:

- Develop an understanding of what distracts them during practice and performance;
- Goal set for sharper focus;
- Deal with mishaps, mistakes or other unplanned events during a performance; and,
- Differentiate between performance enhancing process variables and performance degrading outcome variables ;

Fine-Tuning

This module helps participants develop an understanding of the importance of breath awareness and tension release during practice and performance and introduces some more advanced techniques to strengthen the second and third steps of the Tuning-In process.

Participants will learn:

- Squeeze Em' – a relaxation technique that has been proven to be very effective for musicians in managing nerves and anxiety. This exercise increases awareness of all the various muscle groups and enhances the ability to relax specific muscles as necessary; and,
- Switch Off to Switch On – a technique that develops breath awareness and tension release and highlights how our breathing can significantly influence the levels of tension we hold in our bodies.

Rock-Solid Memory

Memory is such an important part of performing. To be able to trust and let go to your memory, and to be able to pick up from any point in a piece is one of the critical skills for musicians to mastery. Rock-Solid Memory is targeted at people who would like to develop their memory skills. This module is currently under development, and will be available shortly.