

#1 The Importance Of Deliberate Practice



How To Play Bass In 50 Songs

HOW TO PLAY BASS IN 50 SONGS The Importance Of Deliberate Practice

How To Play Bass In 50 Songs Course - '10 Years In The Making.'

Briefly here's the story.

In 2008 I gave my then 5 year old son a small bass guitar for his 5th birthday. And I figured: by now, there must surely be a recognized bass method for beginners on the market. ("By now" meaning that in 1995 which was about the time the period I call my 'wilderness years' started - I played bass through this period - there hadn't been a method for beginners that was generally recognized).

I found this out by doing what we all do these days....going to Google.

What I quickly found that whilst there were beginner courses for bass players out there, there was nothing that could be called 'generally recognized.' And the courses that were out there...I looked at several (purchased a few) and thought they were horrible.

So I took to Google again and started researching.

That research led me to a book where I was introduced to the concept of Deliberate Practice. And I then started refining my searching for information on deliberate practice and music education - which meant reading lots of books about other instruments because there was nothing on deliberate practice for bass.

Two years later I wrote a book called DELIBERATE PRACTICE FOR BASS.

That book is no longer available - because in the intervening 8 years I've learned so much about Deliberate Practice that the original book is totally superceded.

But if you're serious about learning the bass (or learning anything for that matter) then you need to know about deliberate practice. I'll share some specific things about deliberate practice in the next few emails.

But there are three books that I recommend that you can buy from Amazon - either .com, or .co.uk or anywhere else for that matter. None of them will set you back more than approximately £10 - so in total the three books will cost less than the price of a good lesson.

Here are the deliberate practice book recommendations:

1. Talent Is Overrated by Geoff Colvin
2. The Talent Code by Daniel Coyle
3. Peak by Anders Ericsson

Here's what you should do:

1. Buy at least one of these books and read it (preferably more than once)
2. When you are looking at a teacher or a course then ask this question of the teacher: How do you incorporate the principles of deliberate practice into your teaching?
3. If the teacher DOESN'T give you a concrete and specific answer to that question, then you should avoid that teacher or that program.

Here's why: applying the principles of deliberate practice is THE ONLY WAY to start learning something and to make constant and consistent progress in your learning journey. If your teachers are not using deliberate practice, there will come a point where you stop learning and you'll be practicing things that are in your Comfort Zone. (You'll understand the concept of Comfort Zone more in the next article).

PAUL'S NOTE if you take away NOTHING from this series of emails apart from the fact that you need to read and implement one of the books on Deliberate Practice...you'll repay whatever investment of time you've already made reading these emails by a factor of literally thousands. Start with TALENT IS OVERRATED or PEAK....it's like Neo taking the red pill in The Matrix.

#2 Comfort Zone - Learning Zone - Panic Zone



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Comfort Zone - Learning Zone - Panic Zone

In yesterday's email I talked about Deliberate Practice and the three books that you should get hold of - for £30 of investment you'll get to know more about learning and effective practice than 95% of bass players out there (probably more but I'm being conservative).

In the first of the books I recommended - Talent Is Overrated by Geoff Colvin - there's something that's talked about in just half a page that I believe is one of the most interesting pieces of information in the whole book.

It's a quote from a guy called Professor Noel Tichy and it's a concept he uses to explain to people what they have to do to keep learning on a consistent basis. Most bass players DON'T do this, instead what they do is reach a point and then despite practicing they never get any better. That's because they are practicing in the comfort zone. Read on and I'll explain.

So imagine three concentric circles. The outer circle represents the totality of bass playing. The innermost - and smallest - circle represents the Comfort Zone. Everything within this circle - the Comfort Zone - contains all the bass playing things that YOU are comfortable with and can do on a repeatable basis without really thinking about.

The second circle has only a marginally greater diameter than the Comfort Zone circle. The space between this circle and the circle that represents the boundary of your Comfort Zone is the Learning Zone.

This Zone is playing activities that you can't currently do - but you can envisage doing with a degree of focused practice.

The space between the outermost boundary of the Learning Zone and the Outermost Circle is the Panic Zone. This is activities that not only can you not do, but you can't envisage being able to do without months or years of practice (and that's if you can envisage how you might go about learning these activities).

So a couple of really important things.

As you work on something that's in your Learning Zone over practice sessions and get to the point where it becomes comfortable, then your Comfort Zone expands marginally because now you've added something to your bank of things that you are comfortable with. When the Comfort Zone expands, so does the Learning Zone. And the space that represents the Panic Zone shrinks slightly.

The second thing to note is that learning ONLY happens in The Learning Zone.

So the key to making your practice ALWAYS effective is to be practicing and working on things that you can't play or practicing them in musical contexts that make them harder. This is a keypoint to grasp - just repeating things that you can already do DOESN'T make you a better player.

If you ever hear someone say...I'm practicing several hours a day and not getting any better, I'm on the plateau man...then you can nod your head, smile and ignore them. The reason they are not getting any better is that they are practicing the wrong things.

I'll finish with a quick story: back in the day I was taking keen to improve as a bass player and I was taking lessons with a guy whose reputation was 'the best private teacher in the UK.' For over a year I was practicing between 4 and 6 hours a day, 6 days a week. AND I DIDN'T GET ANY BETTER.

The reason? I was practicing activities that were 'Comfort Zone' activities over and over. (Plus even when they were learned they didn't make me a better player because scales and arpeggios learned and played by rote don't have anything to do with playing the bass).

Anyways.

I recommend you read this email several times and remember the three concentric circles and your different zones. Maybe print out and pin up in your practice space a sign that says:

“LEARNING ONLY TAKES PLACE IN THE LEARNING ZONE.”

Ok, tomorrow I'll be back with some counter-intuitive advice about slow motion practice.

#3 Slow Motion Practice



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Slow Motion Practice

Earlier I recommended that if you're really interested in learning about how people get better (at anything) you read three books. Those books were *Talent Is Overrated* by Geoff Colvin, *Peak* by Anders Ericsson and *The Talent Code* by Daniel Coyle.

In *The Talent Code* there's a story about a tennis academy outside Moscow called The Spartak Tennis Academy. This academy is a girls only academy and at one point in the mid 2000s there were more Spartak graduates in the top 20 ranked women players than there were from the entire US.

Now you're probably thinking: OK, this is probably some high tech practice facility with state of the art facilities and bells and whistles on top of the state of the art facilities. That's certainly what I thought - but I was wrong. The Academy is a ramshackle building that has just ONE indoor tennis court.

Just one.

Let this sink in for a bit: More Graduates in the Top 20 than the entire US and only one indoor court.

That's pretty crazy when you think about it.

One of the things that I found really interesting about Spartak was that one of the things that its students do - and all of them do it irrespective of age or current ability - is they spend one hour a day practicing 'slow motion' shots without a ball in view of their coaches.

Now "slow motion practice" - which sounds highly counter intuitive - is actually a really smart way of learning to add to your toolbox of learning tips and tricks. I won't go into the neuroscientific reasons why it works, but it does. The bottom line is that for certain parts of your bass learning there are times when slow motion learning is absolutely the quickest way to learn something properly. (I know, highly counter-intuitive.)

Here are the kinds of things you should practice slowly:

- Any kind of technique work - ESPECIALLY when first starting a technique
- When learning songs, learn the different parts out of time and slowly to start with

Here's why slow motion practicing is so effective:

- Practicing slowly and out of time allows you to focus on all the moving parts and the minutia of technique and ensure that you've got it right - and repeated it several times - BEFORE you start adding a metronome or a time keeping device
- Most players by instinct start trying to practice things at tempo and if they get something wrong they kind of gloss over it and think that it will come good with repetitions at tempo
- What ACTUALLY happens when you do the latter is that the part of your brain that deals with learning via repeated activities gets trained to think that the way you are playing it (with mistakes) is the way you ACTUALLY want to play it, and you'll play it that way pretty much forever

If you learn something wrong and have to go back to correct it, my rule of thumb is that it takes between two and four times the amount of time to fix something learned badly as it would if you had learned it correctly the first place.

There are specific examples about a classical musical school in The Talent Code too....you should definitely check it out. No-one really talks about slow motion practicing in the bass world....I don't understand why as it's a critical learning tool and it's so useful. As an example, the classical musical school example I mentioned....it's a residential summer school for high level players....they reckon to get a years worth of progress in six or seven weeks!!!

In the next email I'll talk about the importance of feedback (and not the kind you get from every guitarist's amp because they turn their amp up too loud!).

#4 Feedback



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Feedback

In today's email I want to share one of the biggest discoveries I made whilst developing the HTPB50 Course with the beta students who first joined me.

There are several assignments built into the course - two or three per module - and the reason is that these are points where the the beta students take a little pause, check what they've been working on, and film specific short assignments for me to critique.

I don't remember exactly when (or why) I asked this question of the beta students. But I'm so glad I did. The question I asked in one assignment was this:

1. Film yourself playing this example.
2. Leave it 24 to 48 hours without watching it.
3. Now watch the clip of the assignment again and write out a critique as if you were the teacher.
4. And suggest exercises to work on to improve things that need improving.

I was bowled over by the responses I got.

Here's why.

Up until this point I'd "assumed" that giving yourself feedback on your playing was something that only high level intermediate players and beyond could do.

Turn out that provided you've got some kind of guideline/structure that you're working towards at your current level that this assumption is very

wide of the mark.

But the biggest learning for me was to see the beta students identifying problems and then coming up with solutions to work on those problems. In any discipline that's an incredible skill to have because it means you'll never get stuck, you'll always be able to work out exercises that move you forward.

Back in the day it was very hard to give yourself feedback on your playing - because video capability was expensive and the only other way to see what you were doing was to stand in front of a full length mirror (Darryl Jones of Miles Davis and Rolling Stones used to do this).

But now it's ridiculously easy to film yourself for the purpose of giving yourself feedback. The cameras in most current smart phones or tablets not only can be set up to record with push button simplicity, but the actual quality of the camera and ensuing footage is very high. If you don't have a smart phone you can get an iPod Touch for around £150/\$200 that will do what you need to do.

Filming yourself and learning how to critique your playing and then learning how to devise exercises to deal with what you've found is a skill that players of ANY LEVEL can learn. If you combine this skill with the concept of The Learning Zone that we talked about recently, you'll always be moving forwards, always be improving.

John Patitucci (who if you don't know is one of the top 10 upright jazz players in the world) was asked about how he practices on the upright. His answer was this:

“I spend an hour each day finding holes in my technique and fixing them.”

If that concept is good enough for one of the world's best, it's good enough for us.

There are two more emails in this series....the next is about “the Learning Staircase.”

#5 The Learning Staircase



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The Learning Staircase

If you remember the logo for the HTPB50 course you'll recall it's a picture of a silhouetted man walking up a staircase - and you might have wondered if that was some random choice I made.

The answer is no.

Because it represents a learning concept called 'the learning staircase.' (This is something that's talked about at greater length in *Peak* by Anders Ericsson).

It works like this:

- You have a goal to learn something/get better at something
- Improvement is built in small incremental steps
- That improvement over time can be likened to a series of incremental steps - and a series of small incremental steps is often called a staircase.

With learning though, your learning (remember the learning zone concept) builds the 'learning staircase' and it's almost impossible to jump this process. You can't go from Step 2 in the staircase to Step 10 WITHOUT working on the sequential steps in between.

This last point is really important to think about.

Because most learning programs (in any discipline, not just bass) have 'gaps' in the learning that are almost impossible for the student to get over because they are too big. And the student gives up because they think the fault is with them ("I'm not talented enough, I'll never get this, it's too hard for me..." etc etc) and don't realize the fault is with the system.

Think about when you were learning to read as a child. If you were at the small word stage (so reading works like book, farm, dog, sea, sky and so on) and you were given a book with longer words with difficult meanings like emphasize and metaphorical and tenacious then not only would you NOT have been able to read those words, but the meanings associated with those words would have been beyond your level of understanding.

Without a detailed 'learning staircase' that connects the two extremes you'd give up and never develop reading comprehension sufficient to understand those words (which now you probably think are relatively simple).

When I developed the HTPB 50 course I made sure there were no missing steps on my learning staircase by going through with a program of beta students and where necessary making corrections when the gaps between two sequential parts of the course were too great. The classical music education system - that remember has been systemized over hundreds of years - has also done this.

The other bass programs for beginners that I've looked DON'T seem to know about this or have built it into their program. So if you come to a point where you can't connect Lesson X with Lesson X+1 then it's probably because there are some necessary (but missing) intermediate steps needed to make that step up.

So you can either design those missing intermediate steps yourself... or ask the original instructor to fill in the gaps (good luck with that...the fact there is a gap shows they are not even aware of it)...or find a private instructor and explain the issues and get them to show you how to fill in the gaps.

The main takeaway here (apart from reading Peak by Anders Ericsson!) is to keep the idea of the learning staircase in mind....and realize that if you get to a point where the NEXT step seems too hard it's probably not a reflection of you or your abilities, but that what you're being taught either hasn't been thought out properly or hasn't been tested on students (with feedback from the students) to ensure that it works.

Or both.

In the next email I'll close out this series with some final thoughts.

#6 What To Do Now



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What To Do Now

You signed up to this series of emails because you are either a bass beginner or you've been playing for a bit and not really making any progress.

Now if you're serious about improving your bass playing you KNOW that you have to put in some practice in order to get better.

There are two ways you can organize this:

Option #1. You can find a teacher who has a structured method of learning that you can take one to one lessons from - either in person or on Skype. Said teacher's structured method should embody the principles of deliberate practice that we talked about (and once again - at least until I've finished writing my "DELIBERATE PRACTICE FOR BASS" book - you should read Peak by Anders Ericsson).

Problem here: teachers like this are hard to find.

Option #2. You can find an online course that's organized in the manner I've suggested and follows the principles of deliberate practice and take that. There may be others that I'm not aware of - but you should by now have some criteria and tools which you can use to 'audit' those courses.

What Not To Do....

If you're serious about making improvement what you shouldn't do is to try and cobble together your own program by watching youtube videos - it would be impossible to put together a structured learning program that delivers constant and consistent improvement this way.

Nearly all of the beta students in the beta program of the course suffered from this to some degree or other...and the results in every student were different. I'm not knocking YouTube by the way....instead I'm knocking the belief that you can put together a program by stitching videos from

different players together. Everyone who posts bass videos has different goals, different teaching systems and so on.

Trying to make a coherent program that delivers constant and consistent improvement from materials not designed for this is like Dr Frankenstein trying to create a living, breathing person from stitched together body parts. If you try this you too will end up with a 'frankenstein's monster.'

I repeat: if you're serious about making improvement in your bass playing scroll up and pick Option 1 or 2.

This Email Series Is Now Done....

...so I want to thank you for your time and I hope you learned some important information in this series of emails. My advice is to print out the last few emails and read and re-read them - there's some information I shared in there that could make a vast difference to your bass playing if properly applied.

If you have any questions then hit reply and let me know.

Good luck on your bass journey!