

Utilizing the Technique Progress Chart

The answers to the questions regarding practicing on page 11 can definitively and quantitatively be answered by utilizing the Progress Technique Chart at the back of this book. Nothing works as a shortcut to great improvement better than thoughtful, efficient practice. The Technique Progress Chart has worked wonders for many students because it tracks progress and aids in establishing goals that are measurable and attainable. It also shows an individual when they are to the point of diminished returns (the point where their practice time is not yielding the best results.) It becomes fun to practice when we can see tangible results.

The Technique Progress Chart is designed to help with technically difficult passages and with techniques that require increasing speed such as double tonguing, the scale exercises on pages 21 to 44, and flexibility exercises.

When a passage that needs work has been found, enter the description in the "exercise" blank on the chart (see the sample on page 48.) Write in today's date.

Establish the starting M.M. (metronome marking) by adjusting the metronome to the speed that will allow the passage to be played without mistakes. Be sure it is being played as it will be when it is up to tempo (double tonguing, articulation, alternate positions, etc.) In the sample, the trombonist started with the quarter note at m.m. 68.

Write in what the goal is to be. The trombonist wants to be able to play the double tonguing section of Stars and Stripes Forever with the half note at m.m 144.

Always increase or decrease the metronome by increments of two.

Play the chosen passage, with the metronome beeping, at the starting tempo. If it is played without mistakes, increase the metronome speed by two beats. Because it is difficult to perceive a change in the tempo when making changes in increments of two, we are tricking ourselves into playing at a gradually increased rate, without continually practicing errors. If a mistake is made, decrease the metronome speed by two beats. Always play the passage in it's entirety. Continue playing the exercise, raising or lowering the speed by two, until satisfaction is achieved that day.

Now it is time to mark the progress. Write in the number of minutes practiced under "Day 1" at the bottom of the chart. Next, place a dot above "Day 1" at the tempo you finished that day. If you neglect to practice on "Day 2" enter a zero at the bottom and put a dot above at the same metronome marking as the previous day.

After you have worked on your passage a few days, connect the dots. Look for trends. Establish a goal date. At what point did you get the maximum results? In the sample, the goal was attained over a ten day period. During this period, the player actually worked on the passage seven times for a total of forty-five minutes. The completed graph indicates that five to ten minutes was the optimum amount of practice for the return on time (this person's tongue got tied in knots after ten minutes.)