



# Growth Accelerator Guide

Learn to practice music effectively.

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# Preparing for Growth



## When to Practice

Not all practice hours are created equally. You don't work out at the gym for 10 hours in one day and expect **meaningful results**. The same thing applies to learning music.

### Practicing Hierarchy

#### 1) FREQUENCY

What's most important is that you practice **often**. Every day is best.

#### 2) QUALITY

**How** you practice is also important. Use the practice techniques from the IMC to keep your practice time efficient and relevant.

#### 3) DURATION

If you're practicing well every day, putting in **more time** will yield better results. (Obviously.)

## Setting Up for Success

Sure, you can climb this mountain. But let's make sure you are **stacking the odds in your favor**.

### CREATE GOALS

Use the [IMC Goal Tracker](#) to record your goals and track your success. Be sure to set **achievable** goals.

### DESIGN YOUR SPACE

The space you play in should be **designed specifically for your needs**, if possible. Spend some time thinking about how you can make practicing easier by taking down barriers. Keep your equipment handy and decorate your space so that you **want** to be there.

### SLEEP WELL

Good sleep is surprisingly important to all of your endeavours! [Learn](#) about getting **consistent and high-quality sleep** so that you can always be your best.

# Practicing on the Edge

To optimize the learning process, always put yourself at the edge of your abilities.



Practicing what you already know keeps you on solid ground, but there's *no growth* there.



Practice on the *EDGE...*  
**THAT'S** where growth takes place.



"Jumping in" to skills way beyond your current abilities is exciting, but those leaps just cause you to *fall flat*.

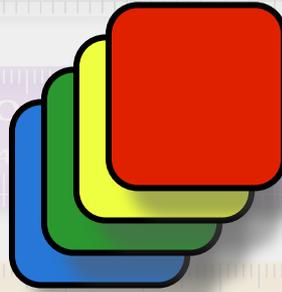
The "edge" is where the learning takes place. This is the sweet spot. Work on your skills here to extend that edge little by little each time you play.

# STANDARDS

## Set Your Standards

**Standards** are extremely **specific and measurable goals** that you work to achieve.

You can focus on a **single standard** or you can mix **many of them together**.



The highest standard is always the **Performance Standard**. This brings together all standards at the highest level of expectation for any particular piece of music.

I also call this **Ready to Record**, because if you are 100% confident about your performance, you should be ready to record it.

**Preliminary Standards** are *first*. Start with one of these and then add the other one.



## NOTES & TECHNIQUE Standard

Type: PRELIMINARY Standard

### Goals for this Standard:

- \*Play the correct notes in the correct order.
- \*Create a plan for your technique.

### Levels

- 1) Find the location of the notes.
- 2) Develop a plan to play the notes with perfect technique, balancing the way the music sounds with your ability to execute.

## RHYTHM Standard

Type: PRELIMINARY Standard

### Goals for this Standard:

- \*Develop a complete rhythm plan: how to think, tap, and count
- \*Understand and execute the rhythms in chunks (no tempo - timing controlled by your "tap")

### Levels

- 1) **Understand:** Execute in very small chunks (1 or more beats at a time)
- 2) **Variable:** Execute the section at a variable tempo
- 3) **Steady:** Execute the section at a steady tempo

## SECTION Standard

Type: REQUIRED Standard

You always set this standard. Think of this as your **“chunks.”** It’s all about **quantity**. How much of the music do you expect to accomplish at this time?

### Goal for this Standard:

\*Choose sections of appropriate length to execute along with other specific standards

### Levels

- 1) One or more bars
- 2) One or more sections
- 3) The entire song or piece

## TEMPO Standard

Type: FINAL Standard

The Tempo Standard is added **last**, after the preliminary standards have been accomplished.

### Goal for this Standard:

\*Perform without flaws along to a click, song, or drum track

### Levels

- Levels are continuous between the slowest tempo on up to the desired performance tempo.
- Measured in BPMs and/or as a percentage of the performance tempo.

# Patience

***“The problem with patience and discipline is that developing each of them requires both of them.”***

Thomas M. Sterner

[\*The Practicing Mind\*](#)

If you are learning something, there should be some **struggle** involved. That means you’re doing it right. But struggling can be frustrating, so ***the skill of patience is required.***

## Two Steps to Finding Your Calm

- 1) Be in the present
- 2) Except that there is no destination, no realization of perfection, no arrival

If your goal is to play the song, you will be **frustrated**. If your goal is to ***be learning*** the song, you will ***always succeed***. Setting your goals so that you can always achieve them is not a cop out, it’s a way to keep moving you forward.



3-Step Growth Process  
**Step 1: FIND the Gap**

Start by *finding* the **gap** in your skills.

Are you having trouble with the **fingering**?  
Can you play the notes but not the **rhythms**?  
Can you play the song slowly, but just aren't up to **tempo** yet?

Get really *specific* about what it is you are working on,  
because you can't fix it if you don't know what it is.



3-Step Growth Process  
**Step 2: ISOLATE the Skill**

Once you know what skill you are working on,  
take out everything that's holding you back.

**Isolate the rhythm** by playing it with just a single note...  
**Isolate the notes and fingering** by moving through them without the rhythms...  
**Isolate notes and rhythms together**, but without a fixed tempo...

Don't take it all on at once. Work through it slowly, fixing just ***one thing at a time***.



The F.I.L.  
Technique

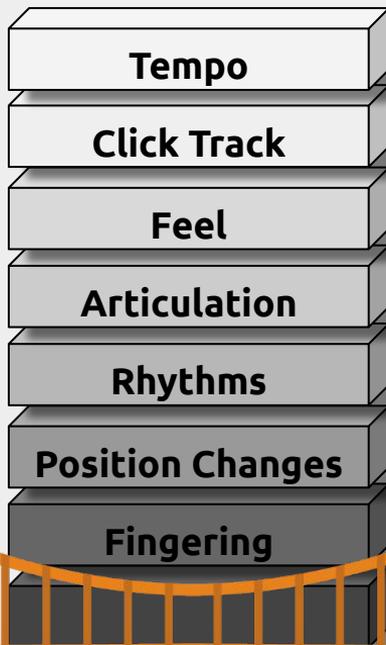
### 3-Step Growth Process

## Step 3: LAYER the Elements

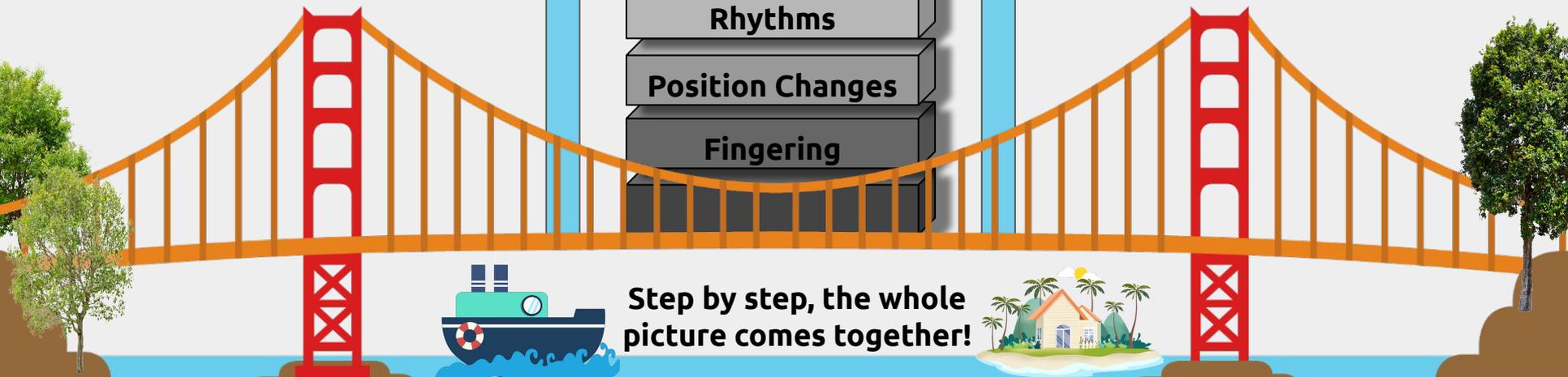
Find  
Isolate  
Layer

Once you fill in the gaps for each skill set, put them together ***one layer at a time***.

There's no one single path to victory here. You may need to experiment by **adding and removing various layers** in different combinations. As you progress you'll be able to bring all of the different skills onboard.



Remember, just go slow, be patient, and keep yourself right at **the edge of your abilities**. That is the frontier of your growth and your path to success.



# Chunking

## 4 Simple Steps



How do you eat an elephant...?  
***One bite at a time!***

Even though we aren't eating elephants, learning a difficult piece of music can certainly feel like a monumental task! Music is made up of many various sections that can be broken down into smaller and smaller **"chunks."**

Rather than playing a song from the beginning only to make the *same* mistake at the *same* spot *every time*, we can **"chunk"** the music together, not by playing it correctly from the beginning, but by playing each chunk correctly at our own chosen standard.

This puts YOU, the musician, in control of the music. All you have to do is **learn each chunk** and keep **raising the standard** until it sounds the way you want it to.

Use the [IMC Progress Tracker](#) to track your chunks.

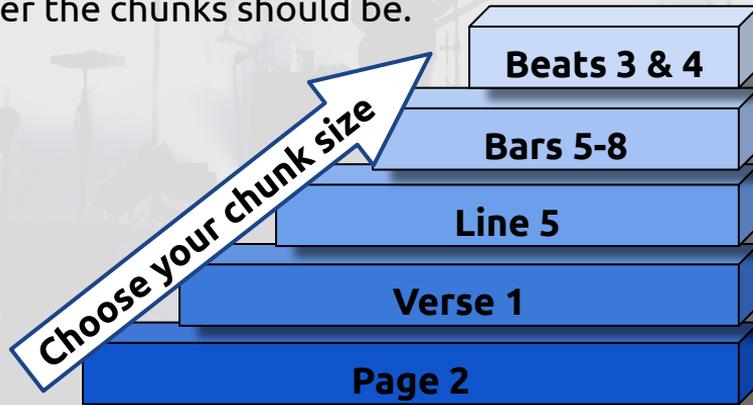
## Chunking Step 1: Chop It Up

### Chop up the music into chunks

The size of your chunks will depend on how hard the music is for you. Each chunk should be challenging, but **achievable**. If your chunks are too big or too small, you can always adjust them later. When in doubt, start smaller.

Not every chunk needs to be the same size. It's more important that each individual chunk represents an **equal challenge**, though some will inevitably be more challenging than others.

Chunks can be pages, sections, lines, bars, or even beats. The more challenging the music, the smaller the chunks should be.



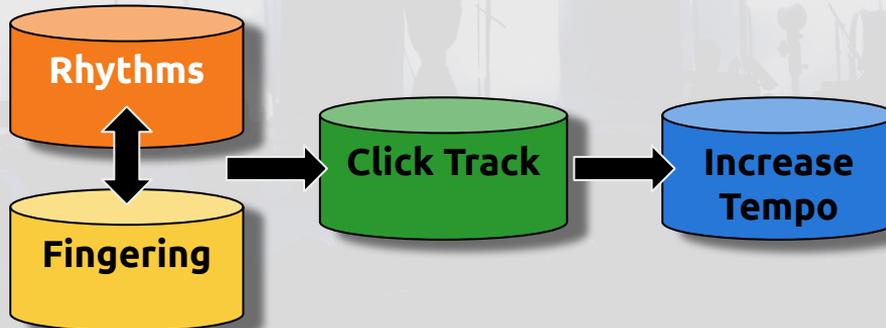
## Chunking Step 2: Set Your Standards

### What is your standard for completing a chunk?

There can be many different standards for completing a chunk of music. Unless the music is very easy for you, *“Ready to Record”* is not usually our first standard of completion.

- 1) **Identify** where the **edge** of your abilities are.
- 2) **Isolate** the skill to work on by making it your Standard.

Generally, this means starting with either rhythms, fingerings and position changes, or both. If those are easy for you then you add a click or a drum track to keep the pace steady. Then you adjust the tempo to meet yourself at *your* edge.



## Chunking

### Step 3: Play It Three Times



Complete each chunk at your chosen standard three times consecutively

To be honest, the “three times” rule is arbitrary. But if you can’t play a chunk at least 3 times in a row without mistakes then you aren’t ready to move on.

Create ***Patterns***, Not ***Events***!

If you play something 9 times in a row without success and then nail it on the 10th try, that’s an event - possibly even a fluke! We don’t want to barely make it through our chunks, we want to create a ***pattern*** of playing each of them with confidence and reliability, hence the “three times” rule.

Play ALL the Chunks

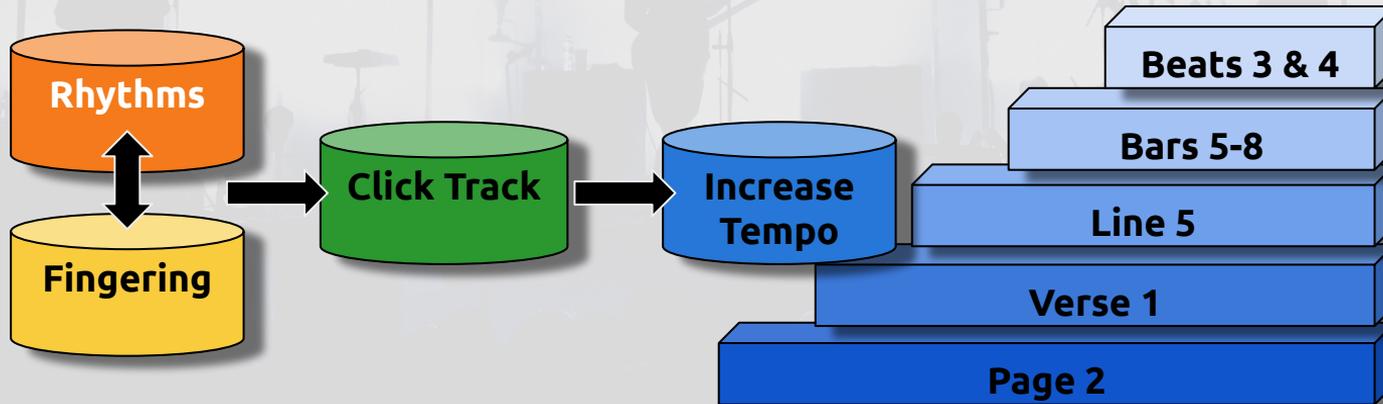
I usually recommend playing through **every chunk** at your current Standards before raising yourself up to the next set of Standards. Don’t get bar 1 *Ready to Record* and then move on to bar 2.

## Chunking Step 4: Raise the Standard

Once you complete **every** chunk at your initial standard, it's time to up your game by raising the standards!

Now it's time to go through all of your chunks again, this time at a higher standard. Take baby steps. Make each new standard just a little bit harder. Remember to keep yourself at the **edge**. Don't move out too far too fast.

To raise standards you can either add elements, increase tempo, or take bigger chunks. If you keep going, step by step, you will find yourself playing the whole song at full tempo.



# Hotspots!

## Patterns and Events

Hotspots are events with a **high likelihood of failure** in an otherwise successful section. These could be things like a note that you miss, a rhythm you don't get right, or a place where you come in early or late.

Hotspots are **patterns, not events**. Events are single mistakes; patterns are mistakes that happen over and over. If it's an event, brush it off. If it's a pattern, ***deal with it!***

## Dealing with hotspots

### 1. Acknowledge the Hotspot

Be honest with yourself. Don't just keep trying the same thing over and over!

Mark it as a hotspot on your music or tracking sheet.

### 2. Drill Down

Use the F.I.L. technique to work through the hotspot.

### 3. Back it up

Once you have smoothed out the hotspot, don't start back at the beginning of the section. Back up into it by repeatedly playing through it successfully from further and further back until you are back at the beginning of that section.

# Deliberate Practice

So you've been able to **FIND** the gap in your playing, take yourself to the **EDGE** of your abilities and **ISOLATE** the skill you are working on, adding and removing each **LAYER** as needed. Now, in that moment of learning...the very moment when you are reaching across the bridge to close the gap, put yourself into a state of **DELIBERATE PRACTICE**.

Daniel Coyle calls this **Deep Practice** in his amazing book [The Talent Code](#). No matter what you call it, this process is known and used by talent hotbeds all around the world. Here's how Thomas Sterner breaks it down in [The Practicing Mind](#). He calls it "DOC."

## Do - Observe - Correct

1. **DO** the thing you are trying to achieve
2. **OBSERVE** the difference between where you are at and where you want to be. Get very specific, drilling down as far as you can.
3. **CORRECT** for the difference. Act with intention, deliberately focusing on the one thing that needs to happen differently.

Make an attempt to **play** the music to your chosen Standard. **Focus** on any mistakes you make in your playing. Then make a **mental correction**, thinking about what you played compared to what you wanted to play. Be specific! Then, **try it again**, slowly and deliberately.

**Stay in the moment**  
**Enjoy the process**  
**And don't forget to breathe**