

PRACTICE

PRO



## But-the-Pieces Plan: 4 Week Practice Pro

## Overview

This 'But-the-Pieces' lesson plan is designed to level-up your late beginner and intermediate students' practice quality.

While some mention is made in the beginning about routines and regularity, improving this is not the primary focus here. This plan will work best with students who are already practising (at least a little) to increase the effectiveness of the practice they are doing. This doesn't mean that they need to be practising an hour a day 6 days a week...whatever practice they are doing, we can make it count!

Follow these lesson plans and after a month your students will have a better understanding of:

- What good practice is
- Why they should care
- Solid practice strategies
- How to prioritise what to work on

All this will lead to better practice, if you keep up with these systems in the long-run. These 4 weeks are about setting the wheels in motion, after that it's up to you and your students to keep fuel in the engine.

But-the-Pieces Plans cover aspects other than repertoire. These plans will work well one on one with a student, or in partner, buddy, overlapping or small group lessons. Wherever there would be a modification for working with multiple students, this has been noted. All other activities will work with multiple students sitting side by side at one piano or at separate keyboard without much alteration.

## Quick Look Lesson Plan

WEEK	FOCUS	ACTIVITY	NOTES:
Week 1	<i>Understanding quality practice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number game</li> <li>• Recordings</li> <li>• 3 levels poster</li> </ul>	
Week 2	<i>Level 2 practice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recording review</li> <li>• Practice Hero</li> <li>• Edge backwards</li> </ul>	
Week 3	<i>Level 3 practice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recording exchange</li> <li>• Practice Hero</li> <li>• Practice Doctor</li> </ul>	
Week 4	<i>Level 3 practice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recording review</li> <li>• Practice Doctor</li> </ul>	

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
5 min	The number game: Setting the scene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write down 7 two-digit numbers on a piece of paper (e.g. 17 51 89 56 32 88 97) and another 7 on another piece of paper.</li> <li>• Set up a timer for 1 minute, put one piece of paper on the music stand and ask your student to say the numbers out loud as many times as they can for the full time.</li> <li>• Take away the piece of paper and ask your student to recite the numbers from memory. Put a mark under the number they get to (if all put a mark under the last number).</li> <li>• Tell your student you're going to do another set of numbers, but this time with a different tactic. They're going to try to learn in smaller chunks and close their eyes to test themselves as they go.</li> <li>• Turn on the timer and direct them through the following process:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say the first two numbers</li> <li>• Close their eyes and say them again</li> <li>• Say the first three numbers</li> <li>• Close their eyes and say them again twice</li> <li>• Say the first four numbers</li> <li>• Close their eyes and say them again three times</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• When the time is up, take away the paper and see how many they can remember. Mark this on the sheet.</li> <li>• If you have 2 students together you can do these exercises with one student as the "timer".</li> </ul>
5 min	Recording	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask your student to play one of their pieces, exactly as they would in their practice at home.</li> <li>• Turn on a recorder on your phone, tablet or recording device and move out of the student's eyeline.</li> <li>• When they're finished, play it back to them and ask them what they think they could have done better in this practice session. Many students will point to note errors or missing details, rather than anything to do with the way they practised.</li> </ul>
2 min	The number game: Checking in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask your student to try and recall the first set of numbers. Mark how far they get this time.</li> </ul>
5 min	The three levels of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show your student the 3 levels of practice poster and explain the different stages.</li> <li>• Ask them what they think a level 1/2/3 practice pro might do in their practice time.</li> <li>• Explain that your goal for this four weeks is for them to become a <i>Level 3 Practice Pro</i> so that they can improve their skills in less time each week.</li> </ul>



TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
5 min	Recording review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to some bits of their practice recordings together.</li> <li>• What level of practice do they think this was? If they say “level 2” or “level 3” ask them to follow-up questions about what problems they were trying to solve and what their plans were to solve those problems.</li> <li>• Guide them (without reproach or negativity) to realising the actual level of their practice.</li> <li>• If you have 2 students together they can listen to and comment on each other’s practice recordings.</li> <li>• Save these recordings to your own device. You’ll need them later!</li> </ul> <p><i>Note:</i> If they didn’t make any recordings, or made less than three, they’re at level 0 – practice is not regular. You’ll need to work on their practice routine if that’s the case, getting their parents involved and finding times that work in their schedule. You can still continue the other work in this plan, but the routine and regularity needs to be there for this to be effective.</p>
10 min	Practice Hero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select one of your student’s current pieces to work on.</li> <li>• Choose the <a href="#">Practice Hero</a> board that will fit best with your student’s piece (or make your own using the blank boards).</li> <li>• Play the game together, rolling the die and doing each task as you go.</li> <li>• Which level of practice do they think this is? Explain or confirm that it’s level 2. Their practice is varied and interesting and requires thought, but it is not planning specifically for the piece they’re working on and the challenges they’re having.</li> </ul>
1 min	The number game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just for fun, see if they can remember any of the numbers in the patterns last week.</li> <li>• Probably not, but do they think they would have if they’d done the second method practice every day?</li> </ul>
4 min	Edge backwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You’re going to teach your student this strategy now – but don’t show them the <i>Practice Doctor</i> sheets and prescriptions. This is just a preview!</li> <li>• Ask your student to pick out a small section in the piece they were working on that is tricky or causes them to stumble or slow down.</li> <li>• Mark the troublesome spot with sticky notes or page markers.</li> <li>• Repeat the tricky bit until they can do it successfully.</li> <li>• Move the first sticky note or marker one note back. Now practice this new section until they feel confident.</li> <li>• Continue backing away from the tricky spot one note at a time until the part they’re practising is at least double the length of the original troublesome bit.</li> </ul>



TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
2 min	Recording exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play one of your other students' practice sessions for your student.</li> <li>• Get them to critique it and decide what the other student should have worked on that day – what plan would they make for them if they were their teacher?</li> </ul>
3 min	Practice Hero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to some of your student's recordings with the <a href="#">Practice Hero</a> assignment. Take note of things they found challenging and things that worked well.</li> <li>• Discuss how it went for them. Did they feel that they made more progress this week than usual? Did they find it more fun than their regular practice routine?</li> </ul>
15 min	Practice Doctor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take out the Practice Doctor chart which is at the end of this pdf (put it on a clipboard if you have one to really sell it!).</li> <li>• Talk about each of the symptoms in the left column and then ask your student to play one of the pieces they're working on. Which symptom do they think is showing the most in this piece?</li> <li>• Look up the prescription for this symptom and follow the directions. Make sure you take the time to complete the full practice directions – they need to know that they should follow these to the letter!</li> <li>• Do this for as many piece as you have time for during the lesson.</li> </ul>

**HOME ASSIGNMENTS**

Recording + Practice Doctor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign practice using the Practice Doctor system. Review how to use this before they go get them to explain to you how they're going to set it up and practise with it at home.</li> <li>• Ask them to record for one last week and try to make this the best, most efficient practice ever.</li> </ul>
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Notes to self:

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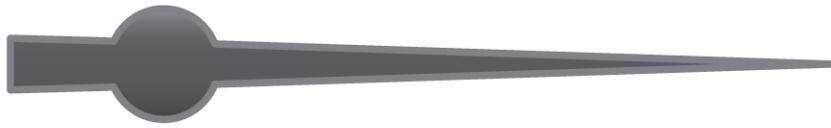
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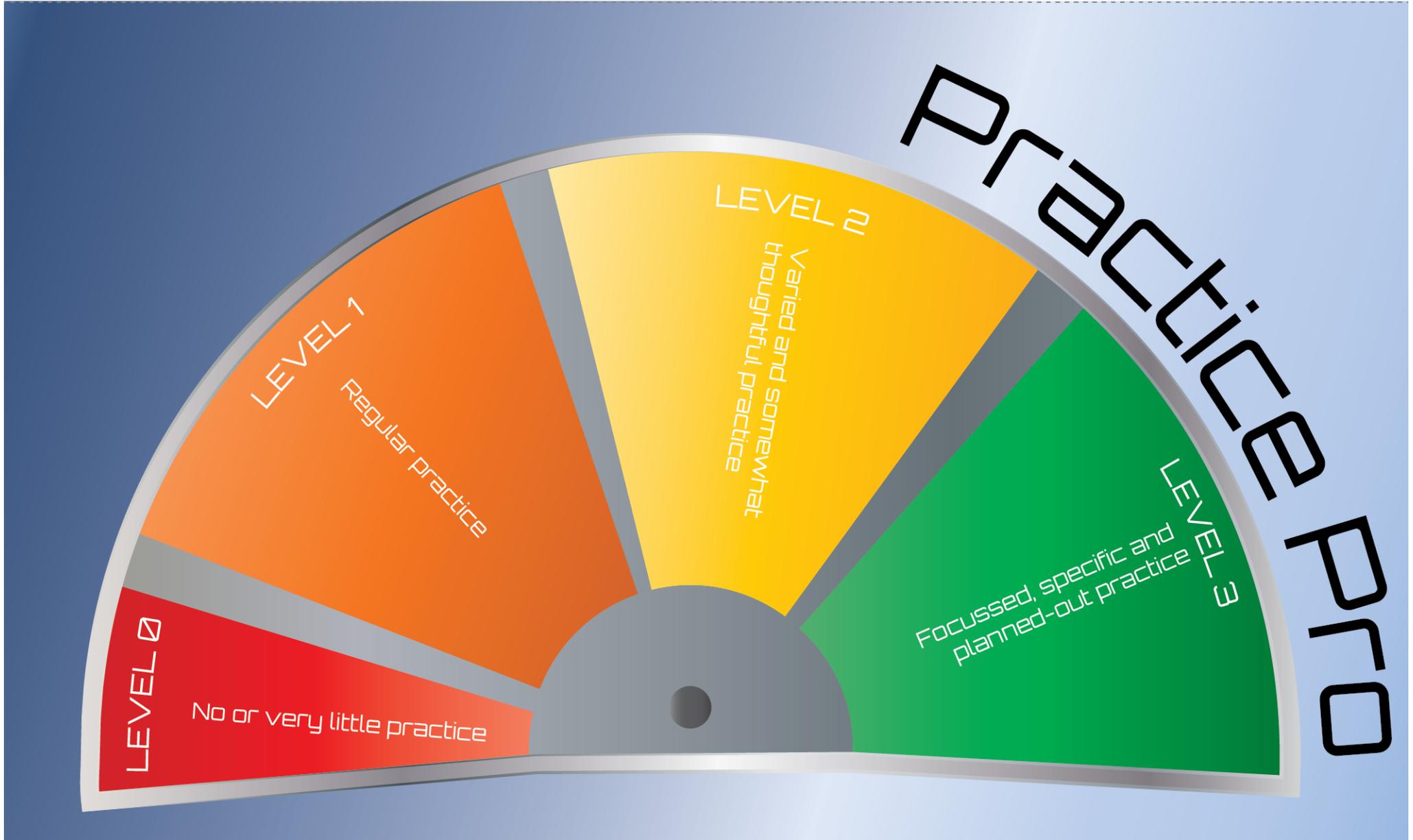
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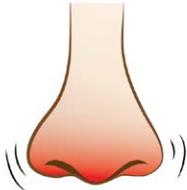
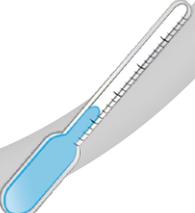
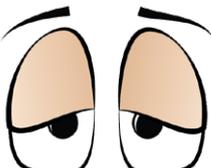
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This can be used as a spinner for the Practice Pro gauge.  
This is not necessary at all, just a fun extra!



Symptom	Diagnosis	Remedy
Stopping & starting	Cough	Crossing the river
		
Inconsistent rhythm	Sniffles	Rhythm repeats
		
Specific sticky bits	Aches & Pains	Edge backwards
		
Too fast or rushed sounding	Fever	Tempo trials
		
Too slowly	Chills	Metronome ladder
		
Missing articulations and/or dynamics	Drowsy	Expression exaggeration
		

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### **PRESCRIPTION:** *Crossing the river*

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- Put three dice, erasers or other small object on the left side of your music stand.
- Play your chosen section/piece.
- If you played it correctly move one item to the right side of the music stand.
- Play it again.
- If you played it correctly move another item to the right side. If you played incorrectly move an item back to the left side.
- Continue until items are on the right side.

*\*If this is too difficult you are either playing too fast, or your section is too ambitious. Slow down or pick a new section.*

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### **PRESCRIPTION:** *Edge backwards*

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- Mark the troublesome spot with sticky notes or page markers.
- Play the tricky bit until you're happy with it.
- Move your first sticky note or marker one note back. Now practice this new section until you feel confident.
- Continue backing away from the tricky spot one note at a time until the part you're practising is at least double the length of the original troublesome bit.

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### **PRESCRIPTION:** *Metronome ladder*

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- Find a tempo that you can play your piece/section at with the metronome.
- Play it at this tempo.
- Increase the tempo by 5bpm and play again.
- Increase the tempo by 5bpm again and play again.
- If you make a mistake at any stage return to the previous tempo and play again.
- Continue until you get stuck going back and forth between two tempo marks.

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### **PRESCRIPTION:** *Rhythm repeats*

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- Clap the rhythm of the right hand.
- Clap the rhythm of the left hand.
- Tap the rhythm of both hands together.
- Play the rhythm on just two repeated notes. (E.g. right hand plays C C C C and left hand plays G G G G in the correct rhythm.)
- Play the piece with the correct notes – making rhythm your priority. Did you play the same rhythm or did you change it in parts? If it altered when you played the correct notes you need to slow down!

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### **PRESCRIPTION:** *Expression exaggeration*

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- Sing the melody of your piece, making the dynamics and articulation as obvious as possible.
- Play with all the dynamics and articulation while singing along.
- Play with the opposite dynamics and articulation i.e. when it's forte play piano and when it's staccato play legato.
- Sing the melody of your piece, making the dynamics and articulation as obvious as possible.
- Play with all the dynamics and articulation while singing along.
- Think of a story or image that matches your piece.
- Play once more, keeping this story/image in mind and showing it in your playing as clearly as you can.

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### **PRESCRIPTION:** *Tempo trials*

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- Play as SLOWLY as you can. Snail speed.
- Play as quickly as you can.
- Play at a comfortable tempo.
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- Play as quickly as you can.