



# THE ULTIMATE BASS PRACTICE GUIDE

FOR SESSIONS FROM 30 MINS TO 3+ HRS

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# Introduction

Hello! My name is Dominic, and I am a professional musician and Content Lead at tonebase.

For many of us, the largest barrier to improving at our instrument is also one of the most basic: **knowing how to practice effectively and what to do during our precious practice time.**

While educational resources like tonebase and private instructors are wonderful for teaching you the actual skills you need to learn in order to develop, they often don't go as far as explaining exactly what you should be doing in your practice. To remedy this, I wanted to create a tool that would help you organize your time and make progress in every session, regardless of how much time is available in a given day.

Where did this idea come from? Well, in one of our most popular live-streamed events last year, I discussed the process of reaching your practice goals through specific systems and routines. After the live-stream ended, I wanted to take it a step further and put them down in writing for passionate bassists like you to easily reference at any time.



In this PDF, I first provide some general guidance and practice advice for bassists of any level. These cover the **3 primary components of any good practice session**:

1. Warming Up
2. Technique work
3. Repertoire work

Additionally, you will learn about what kind of tempo to practice in (and the exact, different benefits of slow/medium/fast practice) as well as learning systems that professionals follow, such as the 7/5 or 20/10 systems.

Then, we'll get into the actual Practice Breakdowns themselves!

Every time you pick up your bass to start practicing, all you will need to do is ask yourself, *"How much time am I committing to practicing today?"* and you will be able to follow a template depending on these following options:

- 30 minutes (*Yes! You can see huge benefits even with such short amount of time!*)
- 60 minutes
- 2 hours
- 3+ hours

You can feel free to adjust these templates to taste, but they are all organized methods that are guaranteed to keep you on track, while moving across the core aspects of bass playing to **make sure your practice sessions are efficient AND well-rounded!**

Happy practicing and stay tuned for many more Practice Breakdowns from your favorite tonebase artists coming your way!

# General Practice Sections & Advice for Any Level

## 1. Warming Up

- Warm up your body – stretch shoulders, arms, back, and neck
- Consider making sure that you are “literally” warmed up. Drinking hot tea, taking a shower, turning on a heater, etc... It can all help!
- Start by playing through a few easy warm up exercises that get yourself reacquainted with the bass and bow

## 2. Technique

- Always recommended to warm-up before technique work. Technical exercises, scales, and arpeggios are demanding on the body, so do not underestimate them!
- For the most part, bass technique can be broken into left and right
  - **Left:** intonation, shifting, vibrato, etc.
    - *Recommended Exercises:*
      - One-finger scale up the top string using both non-vibrato and non-stop-vibrato.
      - Isolating and practicing challenging shifts from the piece you plan to work on (eg: practice the octave A-to-A shift in Rachmaninov's *Vocalise*)
      - Practice chords involving both open strings, harmonics, and major/minor thirds and perfect fifths for intonation
  - **Right:** bow strokes & sound production
    - *Recommended Exercises:*
      - Start with open strings. Make sure you start by warming up the rosin already on the hair before adding more, as it often takes around 30 seconds of playing to get the rosin working, especially in colder times of the year.
      - Once you are satisfied with your bow setup and sound, practice string crossings with open strings.
      - Incorporate some different bow strokes and bowing patterns into the open strings to make sure it's easy to make your instrument's strings speak the way you want them to.
      - For those who play primarily pizzicato, start by playing open strings, and get the feeling of a relaxed arm weight hanging through your finger's connection to the strings, and initiating the sound with relaxed weight.

## 2. Technique (cont.)

- It's important to identify and work on exercises that develop the particular techniques that you need to improve
  - Look to your repertoire to identify techniques that you need to develop. For instance, if you're playing a piece with lots of long shifts, it could be good to isolate them and become familiar with the sound of certain intervals, like sixths, sevenths, ninths, etc.
- In addition to focusing in on specific techniques that you need to develop, it's also good to dedicate a portion of your technique practice to more general exercises like scales and arpeggios which can help keep your technique "tuned up" and overall functioning efficiently.
  - Don't just mindlessly play through your scales and arpeggios. For example, use scales with different bowing patterns to develop the coordination between your left and right hands, checking up on intonation, shifting, and even sound production. Look for moments of tension (shifts for example) and find ways to execute them more relaxed. Develop your speed by playing with a metronome and gradually increasing the tempo. Those are just a few ideas of ways to get benefits from scales and arpeggios – there are many more!
- *Recommended Technique Books*
  - Rufus Reid: The Evolving Bassist
    - Presents a range of techniques and skills needed for a successful jazz musician.
  - Joel Quarrington: Canadian School of Double Bass
    - Presents a comprehensive technique and scale/arpeggio system perfect for classical players

## 3. Repertoire

- Consider choosing and practicing from one of these 3 general tempo options. In addition, pay attention to the benefits found in each type of tempo practice.
  - a. Slow** (Best for Analytical, Visual Practice)
  - b. Moderate** (Best for Analytical, Visual, Aural, Muscle Memory Practice)
  - c. Fast** (Best for Muscle Memory, Visual, Aural Practice, and building confidence leading to performance)
- For Slow Pieces:
  - *(Practicing at Slow tempo)* Practice under tempo, even if it is extremely slow. It allows the brain to be analytical and track fingerings, intonation, dynamics, articulation (and more) in a controlled way.
  - *(Practicing at Moderate tempo)* This may be close to "in tempo" but should be a hair slower than your desired tempo. This allows you to process information at a similar speed to performance but still have the extra amount of time for the brain to be very actively thinking about what is happening on the bass.

### 3. Repertoire (cont.)

- (*Practicing at Fast tempo*) Yes, it is sometimes good to practice “slow pieces” at “fast tempos” – playing them faster than you normally would. It actually forces your brain and body to be sharp and fast-thinking! It can also show the piece in a different light, illuminating structure, macro harmonies, and phrase lengths.
- For Fast Pieces:
  - (*Practicing at Slow tempo*) Practice under tempo, even if it is extremely slow. It allows the brain to be analytical and track fingerings, intonation, dynamics, articulation in a controlled way.
  - (*Practicing at Moderate tempo*) For Fast pieces, it is GREAT and actually ideal to practice under tempo, at a comfortable tempo. This way you can develop confidence that you DO have a tempo that is comfortable and acceptable for performance!
  - (*Practicing at Fast tempo*) This would be “in tempo” practice or even practicing fast pieces at a higher tempo to build greater technical “bandwidth”. For example, if your goal tempo is 108 bpm, consider practicing at 120–136 bpm to push yourself, and then have 108 feel even more comfortable.
- Consider using a “learning rule”
  - 7/5 rule: Practice a section for 7 minutes, take a 5 minute break, practice a DIFFERENT section for 7 minutes, 5 minute break, practice a DIFFERENT section for 7 minutes, etc... (you can revisit a previous section after cycling through 2 other sections)
  - 20/10 rule: Practice 20 minutes, take a break for 10 minutes. This is ideal for those that may be struggling with stamina, injury or looking for variety in their practice. After each break, try and start from a different spot in your piece!
- Consider spending time doing the following:
  - Record yourself during practice and listen back (either in excerpts or in “play throughs”)
  - Play for someone (friend, family, etc...)

# Practice Breakdown #1 – 30 Minutes

With this short amount of time to practice, you should be hyper-focused in moving through all the below sections in this session! It can be very easy to spend too much time in one section (which you can still do if you really want) but consider that your brain continues processing information/developing even after you have moved on from something that you just worked on.

## 1. Warmup and Technique (5 minutes)

- Warm up before pick up your bass!
- Choose one exercise to practice that focuses on a technique you need to develop
- If there is available time, practice your scales and arpeggios

## 2. Repertoire (20–25 minutes)

- With only 30 minutes of practice (overall) we need to get to your repertoire quickly!
- Tips:
  - Ask yourself which part you are most nervous or concerned about (That is a good place to start!)
  - Don't always start at the beginning of the piece
  - Consider sectionalized practice: spending 5 minutes each on 4 different sections (or any other division of time by section...this allows you to cover more ground and it is proven that your brain continues processing information/developing even after you have moved on from a passage). This is efficient practice.

# Practice Breakdown #2 – 60 Minutes

This is the most typical practice routine for bassists. It is important to get good at maximizing this particular practice breakdown for great benefits!

## 1. Warmup and Technique (10 minutes)

- Warm up before pick up your bass!
- Choose one exercise to practice that focuses on a technique you need to develop
- If there is available time, practice your scales and arpeggios

## 2. Repertoire (45 minutes)

- Tips:
  - Ask yourself which part you are most nervous or concerned about (That is a good place to start!)
  - Don't always start at the beginning of the piece
  - Consider sectionalized practice: spending 10 minutes each on 4 different sections (or any other division of time by section...this allows you to cover more ground and it is proven that your brain continues processing information/developing even after you have moved on from a passage). This is efficient practice.
  - If you have 2 pieces to work on, consider focusing on 1 today, 1 tomorrow, or bouncing between both pieces (around 20 minutes each)
- IMPORTANT: after practicing for 30 minutes take a 5 minute break! It will keep your brain fresh and allow you to be hyper focused when you jump back into practicing!

# Practice Breakdown #3 – 2 Hours

This practice time is for intermediate to advanced students. The longer the practice sessions get, the easier it is to “waste time” and play “in circles”. In other words, getting stuck playing the same passage over and over with diminishing results, vs. working on many aspects of our technique and repertoire.

## 1. Warmup and Technique (20 minutes)

- Warm up before pick up your bass!
- Choose one exercise to practice that focuses on a technique you need to develop
- If there is available time, practice your scales and arpeggios

## 2. Repertoire (90 minutes)

- It is assumed that most likely you are playing more than one piece! The breakdown of these 90 minutes could be:
  - i. all 90 minutes spent learning one new piece
  - ii. 45 minutes spent on each piece (2 total)
  - iii. For More than 2 pieces (or pieces of varying levels) break down the 90 minutes into prioritizing one piece (maybe the most difficult or weakest piece for you) for 45 minutes, and use the remaining 45 minutes on the other pieces.
- Tips:
  - Ask yourself which part you are most nervous or concerned about (That is a good place to start!)
  - Don't always start at the beginning of the piece
  - Consider sectionalized practice: spending 10–20 minutes each on several different sections (or any other division of time by section...this allows you to cover more ground and it is proven that your brain continues processing information/developing even after you have moved on from a passage). This is efficient practice.
  - Remember you don't have to play each piece, every day. You can focus on multiple pieces across multiple days!
- IMPORTANT: after practicing for 30 minutes take a 5 minute break! It will keep your brain fresh and allow you to be hyper focused when you jump back into practicing!
- Consider using one of the following learning rules, explained in the “General” section
  - 7/5 rule, 20/10 rule

# Practice Breakdown #4 – 3+ Hours

For advanced or very serious players, this is a substantial amount of time! It's important to take frequent mental and physical breaks if your practicing goes much over 3 hours in a day.

## 1. Warmup and Technique (20–30 minutes)

- Warm up before pick up your bass!
- Choose one exercise to practice that focuses on a technique you need to develop
- If there is available time, practice your scales and arpeggios

## 2. Repertoire (2.5+ hours)

- It is assumed that most likely you are playing more than one piece! The breakdown of this time could be the following
  - i. all the time spent learning one new piece
  - ii. 45 minutes spent on each piece
  - iii. Any other time breakdown
- Tips:
  - Ask yourself which part you are most nervous or concerned about (That is a good place to start!)
  - Don't always start at the beginning of the piece
  - Consider sectionalized practice: spending 10–20 minutes each on several different sections (or any other division of time by section...this allows you to cover more ground and it is proven that your brain continues processing information/developing even after you have moved on from a passage). This is efficient practice.
  - Remember you don't have to play each piece, every day. You can focus on multiple pieces across multiple days!
- IMPORTANT: after practicing for 30 minutes take a 5 minute break! It will keep your brain fresh and allow you to be hyper focused when you jump back into practicing!
- Consider using one of the following learning rules, explained in the “General” section
  - 7/5 rule, 20/10 rule
- Remember: Work (sometimes) takes as long as you plan for it, try and practice as efficiently as possible!

# tonebase Double Bass – Coming Summer '24

We hope you have enjoyed this guide to practicing! Ready for more helpful bass resources?

Stay tuned for the release of tonebase Double Bass! Over the next few months, we'll be sharing updates ahead of the launch including new artists added our roster, courses we're filming, and more. Whether you play professionally or just for your own enjoyment, there's going to be something for you on tonebase!

Feel free to write to [team@tonebase.co](mailto:team@tonebase.co) with questions, comments, or corrections. We can't wait to share with you all what we've been working on!



DOUBLE BASS

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