



the PRACTICE ROOM

OPENING MEASURES PRACTICE COMPANION



A Cellist's Monthly Guide for Discovering
Mastery Between the Notes

BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES

NINTH EDITION



DR. SOPHIE'S CELLO LAB

WELCOME



HELLO, CELLIST AND WELCOME TO

the PRACTICE ROOM

Whether you're brand new to the Practice Room or returning for another topical training, I'm so glad you're here.

This practice companion is your musical sandbox for the month: a place to explore, stretch, refine, and occasionally laugh at the strange things our hands do when we aren't paying attention.

You'll find a mix of technical focus, real-world application, and gentle prompts to help you listen more closely as your practice — not just to your cello, but to the areas that help us in connecting more intuitively with our wonderful cellos.

Here, we care about tone and tension, yes — but we also care about joy, curiosity, and the kind of attention that leads to lasting growth and artistry.

This is not about checking boxes. It's about showing up with your whole self (awkward shifts and all) and making real progress between the notes.

Take your time.
Bring your experience.
Invite curiosity.
Leave room for lasting discovery.

Let's begin. *Sophie*

“Every note has meaning rather as a look or a touch does;
the resulting conversations she has with the music are endlessly absorbing
~LAURENCE VITTES | GRAMOPHONE ”

WELCOME

ABOUT SOPHIE AND THE CELLO LAB

SOPHIE WEBBER



Dr Sophie has performed across the States and in the UK, has received numerous awards and prizes for her playing, and has released three critically acclaimed albums.

With over 25 years of teaching experience, she is a sought-after pedagogue and is frequently invited to give masterclasses across the USA and beyond.

She is also the Founding Artistic Director of Fused Mused Ensemble, a music and mixed media non-profit organization with a mission to amplify voices too often left unheard.

THE CELLO LAB



Inside the Cello Lab, you'll find two distinct paths to grow your playing and artistry: one for deep, foundational focus (*the PRACTICE ROOM*), and one for expressive exploration with high-level support (*the INNER STUDIO*).

the PRACTICE ROOM: For cellist of all levels seeking fresh, focused and foundational exploration for their “practice room” with access to a community of other adult cellists.

Offers monthly themed practice companions, topical trainings, live Q&A interactions, a supportive community, as well as community cello chats.

the INNER STUDIO: For cellists ready to explore artistry, expressive themes, score analysis, interpretations along with foundational focuses.

Offers a creative growth space in a professional online studio environment that includes master classes, small group instruction, private lessons and performance opportunities.

DAILY PRACTICE TRACKER

BEFORE YOU START: Choose an aspect from the Motivation/Scheduling/Journaling Section to integrate into your practice!

.....

ORGANIZE YOUR MUSIC READY FOR PRACTICE: Each day, spend a few minutes breaking down something you're working on into colour coded sections. A few bars, or a longer passage, it all adds up.

.....

NOTES & REFLECTIONS:

THE ROPE METHOD: Apply the "ROPE" method (or a part of it) to a tricky section in a piece you're working on and observe how things become easier afterwards.

SELF-RECORDING: Make as detailed observations as possible about a recording you make (it can be very short).

NOTES & REFLECTIONS:

EXPLORE/LOOK UP SOME RESOURCES: past notes, online videos, etude books, other. (also see "Additional Resources")

BREAKING DOWN INTONATION, RHYTHM, SPEED AND/OR

MEMORIZATION: Choose one of these topics to focus on and apply the tips given to a tricky section in something you're working on.

NOTES & REFLECTIONS:

(optional) LISTENING INTEGRATION: 1 x YouTube performance (of your choice).....

(optional) NOTES/OBSERVATIONS: other observations/ any Aha moments:

TIP: Do keep in mind the immense value of taking breaks... standing up, a quick stretch, brisk walk or cup of tea can do wonders for recentering our focus and gaining a fresh perspective

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Turning Challenges into Manageable Steps

Do any of the following scenarios sound familiar to you?

~You **plan to practice** but somehow **never find the time**

~You feel **unmotivated** to get your cello out of its case, even though you **ardently want to progress**

~You know you had a mini **breakthrough** in your last practice session, but **can't quite recall what it was**, or how to get there again

~You sit down to practice but **don't know where to start**

~You know something doesn't sound the way you want it, but **can't identify exactly why** that is

~You work consistently on intonation/rhythm/speed or something else, but it always seems to **fall apart when you are in performance**

These kinds of challenges are exactly what is explored here, and what we will be trouble shooting together.

We'll start with ways to create an **environment for successful and strategic practice** *even before you start*. We'll consider **motivation, planning what and when to practice**, and different ideas for inspiring and helpful **journaling**.

We'll learn how to **organize our music**, breaking it down in different ways, in particular considering **intonation, rhythm, speed and memorization**.

You'll apply the **"ROPE" method** to some tricky passages, and make **video recordings** for immediate powerful feedback and insights.

I can't wait to dive in with you and to integrate these ideas into real music (including **Bach's C Major Prelude**) together!



OPENING REFLECTION

Let's set your intention and mindset for the month.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT RELATIONSHIP WITH BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES?

IN WHAT AREAS DO YOU WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR ABILITY TO TURN CHALLENGES INTO MANAGEABLE STEPS?

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS:



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Welcome to turning challenges into clarity.

Are you ready to **approach challenging passages in a new way**? Challenges aren't something to "push through", but **something to understand, organize, and bring into focus**.

Rather than repeating and hoping for improvement, you'll slow the process down, notice where coordination begins to shift, and **separate what feels tangled into clear, manageable steps**.

Every "challenge" holds specific information to decode: where coordination needs support, where movement needs clarity, and where timing needs to settle. As you begin to **see these details more clearly, what once felt overwhelming will start to feel structured and approachable**.

You will not be "doing more," you will be "noticing more".

Want **clarity**? Break the passage into smaller units and define what is happening.

Want **coordination**? Isolate and allow each element to settle before combining them.

Want **confidence**? Build gradually so each step becomes reliable.

Over time, challenges begin to feel less like obstacles and **more like something you know how to navigate**.

Let's begin when you are ready...



Incorporating This Companion Into Your Practice Routine

To get the most out of this companion, approach it with a sense of curiosity and patience.

Treat each section as a building block in your tool kit development. Feel free to focus on just the topics which can be most helpful to you at this time.

Challenge yourself to apply some of the ideas in this companion to a piece/pieces you are working on.

As with everything we do in the Practice Room, AWARENESS and ENGAGEMENT are key.

Strive onwards for inwards motivation (hint: while external sources —such as the Practice Room —can help, the best way to find inspiration and motivation is to practice in an engaged way (journaling is also great for helping to keep you on the path).

Let's keep aiming for that "healthy stretch" :)



WARM-UP PREPARATION

Preparatory Tips for Body Awareness:

- ♪ Breathe (long, slow breaths out)
- ♪ “Soften” your body (relaxed stomach, arms, neck)
- ♪ Stretch (eg. windmill arms, wriggle fingers, rotate wrists and forearms back and forth, squats, light jogging on spot --get circulation going!)
- ♪ Shoulders should be low and passive throughout the full length of bow (TIP: be especially cognizant of this in the upper half!)
- ♪ Feet should be grounded (like the roots of a tree!)

Tips for Tone Connection:

- ♪ A firmer approach will generally give you a better tone. This tends to mean A LITTLE MORE WEIGHT and, often, A LITTLE LESS BOW
- ♪ Explore finding a NATURAL WEIGHT (vs “pressing down”) with passive heavy shoulders and arms. The bow should feel like it is sinking into the string.
- ♪ We are looking for an “ENGAGED” SOUND rather than a superficial/skating one where the bow is too fast/too light.
- ♪ Careful your bow direction is parallel to the bridge and not moving up and down.
 - On the A string, the point will move a little closer to you (while your arm moves a little further from your body).
 - On the C string, the point will move a little further away from you (while your arm moves a little closer to your body)



BEFORE YOU START...

MOTIVATION

In order to practise well, we first need to be motivated to do so! If you have not already, take a moment to consider what draws you to playing the cello; what do you love about it and what motivates you to play. **Identify your reason and write it down.**

One of the most difficult things about practising is getting started. Once you're already practising, it's much easier to just keep going. It's important to **set up routines and linked activities** to your practice to help get you started (like always practising directly after you eat, or before you go for a walk, or before you have a cup of coffee, or after you go for a walk etc...).

Try to **decide when you'll practice ahead of time.**

In addition, **plan what you will practice ahead of time.** Just **two minutes** at the end of each practice session is enough time to jot down a couple of thoughts of where to start/what to do in the next practice session

For lasting motivation, we need to work. The best ideas and inspiration come from hard, honest work.

If you are struggling with motivation to practice, you might like to consider a **practice partner** -- someone who you can commit to practising with at the same time (in different places!) or a weekly check in/play through --or both. *If this is something you're interested in, let me know, and I'll pair you up :).*

SCHEDULING

Alongside deciding when and what to practice, do also plan realistically for **how long** each practice session will be —as well as the tremendous value in **taking breaks**. Data shows that **we focus best in 20 to 30 minute increments**, followed by a **short break (ca 5 mins)**. Regular **mini breaks** within those 20 to 30 minute sessions (**10 to 15 seconds** to reflect, regather, and refocus) are also highly valuable.

During any of these break sessions, our brains are able to reinforce good practice by “myelinating” the neural pathways we have been developing. Myelination essentially speeds up electrical signals, akin to insulation on a wire. This process is explained brilliantly by Dr Molly Gebrian, violist, neuroscientist, and author of the bestseller “[Learn Faster, Perform Better.](#)”



BEFORE YOU START...

JOURNALING

In the “Motivation” section on the previous page, I mentioned how planning *what* you will practice *ahead* of time can really help create **structure and motivation** in your work (and that you only need two minutes to do this!).

In addition, be careful not to underestimate the usefulness of a Practice Journal! Taking those extra few minutes before, during, or after (it's **your** adventure!) typically creates another level of **clarity, focus, and commitment** in our practice. Over time, a Practice Journal can become a **powerful problem solving tool**.

Here are some ideas for how you might use a Practice Journal to help get you started:

- 1) Take notes directly **after your one on one lessons**. The information is freshest at this time, and you don't want to lose it.
- 2) Set and **keep track of your goals**, big and small.
- 3) Write down your **top three priorities** at the end of each practice session.
- 4) Jot down any **aha moments**, or things that help or hinder you during your practice time.
- 5) Take two or three minutes at the end of each session to **plan what you will practice in your next session**.



BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS

ORGANIZING YOUR MUSIC –MUSICALLY —FOR PRACTICE

It's so easy to look at a new piece of music and just feel overwhelm. **Where to start?**

A great method to organize your practising, at the same time as deepening one's musical connection to a new piece from day one, is to take the time to...

- **BREAK YOUR PIECE UP INTO SMALL SECTIONS** and **GIVE EACH SECTION A NUMBER**

This can be done on many different levels (bigger or smaller sections), but a great starting point is **around 4-8 measure sections** (particularly in baroque and classical music), using the **natural phrasing** as much as possible to delineate each section.

Natural phrasing can easily be likened to the **cadence of speech**, so use your knowledge of speech as a guide, asking questions that also deepen our understanding of the musical meaning from the outset, like,

***Where is there a pause** (is that more like a comma, period, or something else)*?*

***What is the melodic contour** and **what is its expressive effect?** What is the effect of the music rising or descending in a given place?*

***Is there ever a sense of dialogue in the music?** How does the composer create this conversational aspect? Is there a question-answer feel, a sense of debating ideas, or more a feeling of agreement between different voices?*

*These tiny or bigger pauses (even when there is an elision to another idea/part of the phrase) are typically where we can mark the end of a section.

Once you have broken your piece down into numbered sections...

- **COLOUR CODE EACH SECTION IN RED, YELLOW AND GREEN (based on difficulty)***

Green should be the equivalent difficulty of your “comfort zone,” yellow of your “stretch zone” and red of your “panic zone” (ie. the trickiest spots needing most attention :)).

*as advocated by Dr Molly Gebrian



BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS

THE “ROPE” METHOD

The following is a great initial approach to any new piece (it can also work well for a more familiar piece, but is especially efficient and effective for getting us off to a great start with a piece). This approach primarily focuses on **developing good rhythm, intonation, and coordination between the hands**, although there are also *many* other great side effects that typically happen along the way!

You can use this approach for the whole piece or just for tricky sections.

You can also use this approach either in its entirety (ie. all four parts in the order laid out below) or just the part (s) that you know you need to give most attention to (eg. Open Strings —Part ii) —for string changes or Pizzicato —for improving a Left Hand First approach for better coordination between the hands, left hand/arm form, or intonation).

However you decide to use it, do make sure to start with a **slow working tempo** (it should feel easy, around half the final tempo)

The “ROPE” Method

- i) **R-hythm** (clapping/taa-ing/speech cues)
- ii) **O-pen String Bowing** (smooth string changes)
- iii) **P-izzicato** (LH first, intonation and form)
- iv) **E-verything together** (gradually marking increase in tempo, 3-7 clicks more at a time)



BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS

SELF-RECORDINGS

THE POWER OF THE IPHONE!

Recording oneself and watching it back can feel like one of the most terrifying and uninviting things we could possibly think up to do. Multiply that feeling by ten if you've never done it before! But if we lean a little closer into why we may feel this way, it quickly becomes apparent that we are **afraid of facing reality or the unflattering truth (and believe me, we all feel this way)**. It's funny because this fear is rooted in our **implicit awareness of the power of the recording** —we know it will highlight our mistakes and that we won't be able to hide from them. Notice how much more comfortable it is to hide in the dark.

BUT, do you really want to stay oblivious to your mistakes? How can we possibly hope to improve from our own feedback and improve if we don't see what is going on, and acknowledge what we do and don't like, our errors AND our progress?

Lean in a little further and the objectivity we can gain in watching our own performance can all at once be recognized as **a powerful tool for self-improvement**. Which is of course exactly what it is.

Time and again, I have witnessed cellists dramatically increase their progress as they embrace this working tool and start to find more comfort with it (disclaimer: it is *never* entirely comfortable). But keep in mind that **awareness (of the good and the bad) is ALWAYS the first step**.

The amount of **detailed information** we can gain from a self-recording (what we like, what we don't like, percolating about ways to make small but significant changes to attain our desired results) is IMMENSE. Quite simply, **the sooner you dive in, the sooner you will swim**. This is a tool NOT to be missed. Turn off the judgment. Turn on the problem identifier and problem solver. And keep in mind that teachers/trusted colleagues are there precisely for this —to help you problem solve and fill in the gaps.

INITIAL GUIDELINES for VIDEO RECORDING ONESELF

- **Turn off judgment as much as possible! Turn ON detailed objectivity!**
- Position the camera about **5- 6ft from you** with the **camera facing directly at you** at **about eye level**. Try to position yourself so that the camera image includes the **bridge of the cello and both arms completely** (including when the bow arm is outstretched at the point).
- Record oneself and listen back carefully.
- Rather than a blanket "I don't like it" response, **work to identify exactly what bothers you**. Try to pinpoint exactly where the issue is —is there one main issue, or multiple smaller issues, or both. **Write down everything you notice**.



BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES OVERVIEW

The path to overcoming obstacles can essentially be distilled to the following:

1. **Identify problem**
2. **Identify the cause (and possible root cause) of problem**
3. **Create clear, step-by-step method to fix**
4. **Integrate the method CONSISTENTLY**

GENERAL ROOT CAUSES OF PROBLEMS

- Uncertainty around breaking down challenges
- Holding one's breath/not breathing freely
- Holding unnecessary tension
- Lack of anticipating (eg string change/LH first/next bow)
- Excess motion

BOW-RELATED ROOT CAUSES OF PROBLEMS

- Bow hold
- Bow arm motion (eg. raised shoulders)
- Jagged bow changes
- Squeezing R thumb

LEFT HAND-RELATED ROOT CAUSES OF PROBLEMS

- LH form
- Squeezing and stiffness in the LH
- Squeezing L thumb in shifts



BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES

INTONATION

Playing out of tune is an incredibly common —and frustrating —occurrence. The good news is that most often, the cause of bad intonation is **not that we can't hear if it is or isn't in tune**, but rather that we have allowed ourselves over time to get **complacent with bad intonation and habits**. As Pablo Casals would say,

“intonation is a question of conscience.”

Below are some tried and true methods that can help you to up your intonation game.

1. AUDITORY:

i) **Cross-reference RINGING TONES**

(focusing on the notes that correlate with our open strings, As, Ds, Gs & Cs which do NOT occur on the string with the same note name). When ringing tones are truly centered in pitch, they will ring more and you will also see the string with the correlating name moving from side to side.

ii) **AUDIATION** (for pitch): start with scales... only play next note in scale after you can clearly hear it first in your head

2. VISUAL:

LOOK at how far the left hand has to move (or how far the fingers need to be spaced apart in the same position) between notes. Find external reference points to help gauge this distance (eg. the rim of the cello, the distance from the nut, the distance from the cello button etc).

3. TACTILE:

i) **FEEL (and measure through touch and movement)** how far the fingers need to be apart in a single position/how far the left hand needs to move between positions. Closing one's eyes can be especially effective for heightening this sense.

ii) With shifts, pay attention to the **SIZE OF PREPARATORY MOTION** needed to propel you to your destination (in particular, note the shoulder motion).

4. CONCEPTUAL/ANALYTICAL:

i) Increase clarity around shifts and between notes by **IDENTIFYING THE INTERVAL** in question.

ii) Look for anywhere you can map one position onto another with **FINGER SUBSTITUTION**.

IMPORTANT: Use a tuner with discretion. While a tuner can be very helpful in small amounts, it's easy to become overly reliant on it so that it becomes near impossible to play in tune without it. When this happens we are in effect training ourselves not to rely on our own ear, but rather the tuner.



BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES

RHYTHM

Developing an inner sense of pulse and good rhythm is something that takes time, patience and work, but it is also one of the most rewarding things you can do as a musician. **Good rhythm and pulse both grounds and liberates us.**

Below are some methods that can help you to up your rhythm game (and not rush!!).

1. SOUNDING RHYTHMS:

I) **CLAPPING**

ii) Your choice of **SYLLABLES** (“ta”/jazz scatting/improvising with non-lexical vocables

iii) **SUBDIVISION** (See Additional Resources on Rhythm, p.30)

iv) **SPEECH CUES** (See Additional Resources on Rhythm, p.30)

2. METRONOME:

i) Generally, it is a good idea to start with the metronome click at a smaller beat (such as the quarter note or even eighth note). As you progress, try reducing the number of clicks to just one or two per bar. From there you can reduce to one click every two (or more!) bars. This tests how well you are keeping the pulse on your own between the clicks.

ii) Try setting the metronome both ON AND OFF THE BEAT to really challenge and improve your groove!

3. RHYTHMIC EMBODIMENT::

Moving to music is our most natural response, but too often we suppress this instinct... I highly recommend experimenting with the following ideas:

i) **WALK** the beat of your piece, one step per beat, noting the character of your movement and how it correlates to the character of the piece. Pay attention to BEAT HIERARCHY as you move (which beats are more emphasized within the meter) and show this in your walking/movement too

ii) **MOVE FREELY** around the room in response to your piece. Allow yourself to dance, wiggle or just tap —whatever feels most comfortable and appropriate for the character of your piece. Explore ways to find more freedom in your movements. NB. Freedom doesn't have to mean bigger movements.

iii) Try to “**CONDUCT**” your piece **AS YOU PLAY**, stamping each foot in turn to the beat or by showing conducting patterns with your head. This will likely be pretty tricky at first, but stick with it, and notice the results...

IMPORTANT: Strategic use of a metronome can be extremely helpful, but similar to one's use of a tuner, it is important not to overly rely on it. Our ultimate goal (which we should work to cultivate from the beginning) is to develop an innate sense of inner pulse and rhythm.



BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES

SPEED

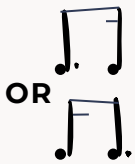
Speed and agility are two of the most commonly sought after aspects of playing. Everyone wants to play fast with more ease and fluency! The irony is that in order to play fast we must first be able to play slowly and cleanly. Finding the right starting tempo for speed work (one that may feel very slow, but that allows us to play very cleanly and with ease) is essential.

1. METRONOME:

Start at a tempo that feels comfortable and at which *you can play cleanly* (if you're still making any mistakes, it's too fast). **INCREMENTALLY INCREASE THE NUMBER OF CLICKS** per minute (ca 3 -7 clicks at a time). Starting around half tempo is a good rule of thumb.

2. RHYTHM PATTERNS:

Apply different rhythms to a tricky passage. The most popular of these rhythmic variations for speed practice are **DOTTED RHYTHMS** —

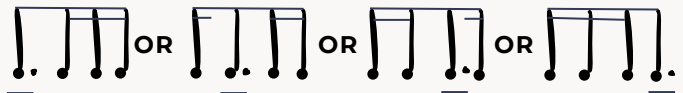


—the idea being that for each pair of notes, you focus in turn on the speed of the second, then first note.

Other useful rhythm variation patterns include:



i) 2 short notes + 1 long note (and vice versa)



ii) 1 long note + 3 short notes

3. SLURRING PATTERNS:

Slurring patterns are essentially to make a passage harder so that it ultimately feels easier! We force the brain to jump through more hoops so that the “simpler” version feels more straightforward than it did initially.

Two notes slurred -two notes separate is a great way to try this method. Change the pattern as you practice so that the slur is placed between different notes. Also, try starting your patterns on both a down bow and an up bow.

Dr Molly Gebrian has developed a new advanced method for increasing speed effectively which she calls “**Interleaved clicking up.**” For those looking for an extra stretch (!), you can see her explanation of this method on her YouTube channel [here](#).

IMPORTANT: While strategic use of a metronome can be extremely helpful, similar to one's use of a tuner, it is important not to become overly reliant on it. Our ultimate goal (which we should work to cultivate from the beginning) is to develop an innate sense of inner pulse and rhythm.



BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES

MEMORIZATION

1. START MEMORIZING EARLY

We tend to live under the myth that memorization is something that the process of memorization should only start when we are pretty familiar with a piece. Don't believe it! Starting to memorize in very small chunks (a measure or two at a time) **from Day One** of learning a new piece is a fantastic example of a "healthy stretch" in your practice. Plus you are guaranteed to memorize your piece MUCH faster (and better).

2. SCORE STUDY FROM THE BEGINNING

The clearer the task (and the piece we're working on) is the better. So it makes sense that a little score study starting in the earliest days is needed for the most reliable memorization.

I recommend starting by deciding on the **form of the piece**. It doesn't have to be perfect. Just make it yours. Add a story line, characters, moods or all the above, as you like.

A great way into form is to consider the following three factors:

- i) **Repetition**
- ii) **Contrast**
- iii) **Variation**

3. BREAK YOUR PIECE INTO SECTIONS FOR MEMORIZATION

Consider starting with the last section, or perhaps a middle section, or just keep the order you work on sections fresh. Our goal is to always stay engaged and "healthily stretched" when we practice. If it feels too exploratory, dial it back a notch.

4. TAKE REGULAR BREAKS

Keep in mind the immense value of taking breaks, both mini ones and longer (multiple hour/the next day) ones. Breaks are when our brains really get to **process the puzzle** we have been working on—to "**mylenate**" (essentially "make more efficient") the correct neural pathways we wish to encourage.

Small, regular (and played in a different order each time) checks ins with sections we wish to memorize are generally the most effective. Again, we are looking for that healthy stretch.

Trust the process and enjoy the results!

IMPORTANT: While strategic use of a metronome can be extremely helpful, similar to one's use of a tuner, it is important not to become overly reliant on it. Our ultimate goal (which we should work to cultivate from the beginning) is to develop an innate sense of inner pulse and rhythm.



BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES

APPLICATION EXERCISES

BEFORE YOU START

~**MOTIVATION (p.10):** Challenge yourself to plan *when* and *what* you'll work on *ahead* of each practice session for a full week or more (if you like the results, hint hint, keep going!)

~**SCHEDULING (p.10):** Plan not only *when* you'll practise, but also *how long* each session will be. Try organizing your practice into *20 or 30 minute blocks*, with multiple *15-30 second mini breaks* within these.

~**JOURNALING (p.11):** Take a few minutes during or after practice to write down anything you find helpful, unhelpful, or even the occasional "aha" moments. Enjoy and document your progress, and create some objectivity around frustrations.

BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS

~**ORGANIZING YOUR MUSIC READY FOR PRACTICE (p.12):** Choose a piece and select one or two sections **ONLY** to focus on to begin. Identify the trickiest spots. Map out music in red, yellow and green sections (based on difficulty)

~**THE ROPE METHOD (p.13):** Apply the "Rope" method, or parts of it to a tricky section of music you are working on and watch the improvement.

~**SELF-RECORDINGS (p.14):** Challenge yourself to make a self-recording at least once per week. Watch it back as objectively as you can, making detailed observations (writing them down). Be sure to recognize a few things that you do like, as well as what you wish to improve.



BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES

APPLICATION EXERCISES (cntd)

BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES

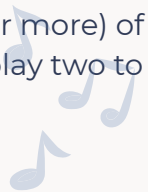
~**IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM (p.15):** Look through the list of possible root causes of problems (in the blue sections of p.15) and see if any ring true for you. Try to identify any hurdles that you feel may be holding you back, and what their root cause be.

~**INTONATION (p.16):** Try incorporating one of the methods for intonation improvement that you would NOT normally use for a couple of tricky intonation passages.

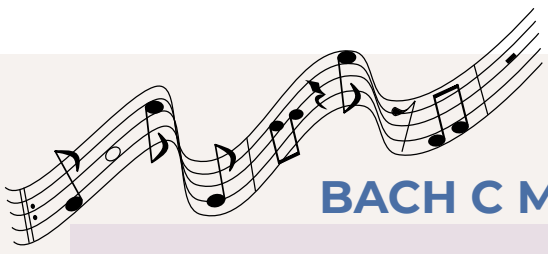
~**RHYTHM (p.17):** Experiment with the rhythm method that you feel is weakest for you, or that you believe can help you most.

~**SPEED (p.18):** Apply one of the speed methods to a short section of music you wish to speed up with precision. Be careful to start at a slow enough tempo for ease and clean-playing.

~**MEMORIZATION (p.19):** Apply the methods, or some of the methods given to a section (or more) of a piece of music you wish to memorize. Alternatively, you can simply challenge yourself to play two to four measures from memory each day and gradually add more measures each day.



PRELUDE
SUITE FOR SOLO CELLO NO.3 IN C MAJOR
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750)



BACH C MAJOR PRELUDE SCORES

[BACH ACCOMPANYING SCORES]

- **BLANK Cello SCORE**
- Cello Part with
 - i) **Less FINGERINGS & BOWINGS**
 - ii) **More FINGERINGS & BOWINGS**
- Cello Part with **SHIFTS & POSITIONS** (see *Fingerboard Positions Geography PDFs below*)



For deeper familiarisation with the **Cello Fingerboard Positions and Notation** across the strings, please download the following two PDFs:

1. [Fingerboard Positions Geography Chart PDF](#)
2. [Fingerboard Positions Geography Notation PDF](#)



REPERTOIRE APPLICATION

REFLECTION ...

WHICH ASPECTS OF BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FOUND MOST HELPFUL AT THIS POINT IN YOUR CELLO JOURNEY?

WHICH ASPECTS OF BREAKING DOWN CHALLENGES DO YOU STILL WANT TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS:

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LISTENING & INSPIRATION

THE FOLLOWING RECORDINGS ARE SUGGESTED TO ENCOURAGE LISTENING SKILLS, AND TO DEEPEN MUSICALITY.

As you listen, pay attention to how each artist allows us to feel we are in safe, deeply competent hands. Notice how each of these recordings conveys both ease and drama, and is carefully paced with no sense of rushing.

What do you notice, like or dislike about each of these recordings?

This kind of critical listening is a great exercise; feel free to explore other recordings too!

1

Prelude

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

~Suite for Solo Cello No.3 in C Major, BWV 1009.

-Pierre Fournier: [LINK](#)

(burnished, darker tone lovely bubbling tempo)

~Pablo Casals: [LINK](#)

(characterful, expressive agogic emphasis given to certain notes)

~Janos Starker: [LINK](#)

(more measured, bright, resonant sound)

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE ABOUT HOW THESE ARTISTS HANDLE CHALLENGING PASSAGES?



INTEGRATION & CLOSING REFLECTION



PIANO: ANA FAU

01 WHAT CHANGED IN YOUR AWARENESS OR SKILL THIS MONTH?

02 HOW WILL YOU CARRY THIS INTO YOUR NEXT PRACTICE CYCLE OR REPERTOIRE?

03 SET 1-2 GOALS FOR REVIEW OR NEXT EXPLORATION





WHAT WERE YOUR BEST PRACTICE OR A-HA MOMENTS AND HOW CAN YOU INCORPORATE THIS INTO FUTURE PRACTICE SESSIONS?

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WHAT AREA(S) DO YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON AND IMPROVE?

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CLOSING

As you come to the end of this month's exploration, pause and notice how your experience with challenging passages has changed.

You may notice that:

There is more clarity in what you are hearing and feeling.

Passages that once felt overwhelming now feel more organized and within reach.

You've begun to trust the process — breaking things down and building them back up.

Carry this approach forward.

Let each passage show you what it needs, rather than expecting it to resolve all at once.

Allow yourself the time to separate, understand, and rebuild with intention.

Remember, progress is not created through repetition alone.

It comes from recognizing what is happening, making clear decisions, and reinforcing them with consistency.

As you continue, notice how your focus sharpens, your coordination settles, and your confidence grows — **not from forcing the result, but from building it.**

It is now something you can navigate, step by step.

A NOTE FROM SOPHIE:

I believe that playing –and practising –the cello should be a joyous thing. Too often, I hear cellists expressing frustration with their playing and practising, unsure how to move forwards and focus their attention. It is my sincere hope that the PRACTICE ROOM gives you the tools to lean into your practice with intentionality and reflection, at your own pace (which, if you're anything like me, should probably be a little slower). Quality always over quantity...

We all need to make space for ourselves to experiment without judgment (perhaps with a little humour, tho ;) and to embrace the journey. I hope you enjoy the PRACTICE ROOM experience as much as I have enjoyed –and continue to enjoy, with your help –creating it.

Happy Cello-ing!

Sophie





WHAT'S NEXT

This month every intentional note, question, and breakthrough you experienced is part of something lasting.



Thank you!

If you're ready to keep going, I'd love to have you join us for another month of grounded, thoughtful discovery inside the PRACTICE ROOM.

Let's keep building together —
one focus,
one phrase,
one step at a time.

[\[Join the next session here\]](#)



WWW.SOPHIEWEBBER.COM



DR. SOPHIE'S CELLO LAB

This curated space is here to support and enrich your monthly practice.

Here, you'll find practical tools, helpful guides, and gentle reminders to help you move forward with clarity and confidence.

Return to these resources as often as you need — they're here to grow with you as you shape your musical journey.

1. Your Monthly Practice Companion

These resources are here to support you every month, no matter the focus. From a structured daily practice plan to helpful notes on play-along videos, these tools are designed to give you clarity, consistency, and confidence in your practice:

- A GUIDE TO OPENING MEASURES –Your Monthly Practice Companion [Page 32](#)
- DAILY PRACTICE TRACKER [Page 4](#)

2. Resources for Current Companion

- AN INTRODUCTION TO FINGERBOARD GEOGRAPHY (1st to 4th POSITIONS) [\[Access It Here\]](#)
- FINGERBOARD GEOGRAPHY CHART [\[Access It Here\]](#)
- RINGING TONE CHART [\[Access It Here\]](#)

3. Additional Resources on Rhythm

These rhythm-focused tools go beyond this month's core material and are here to deepen your rhythmic awareness across any companion:

- WHAT IS SUBDIVISION? [\[Access It Here\]](#)
- WHAT ARE SPEECH CUES? [\[Access It Here\]](#)
- TIME SIGNATURES/METERS [Page 33](#)



PROGRESS TRACKING

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

QUESTIONS TO BRING TO Q&A:

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A GUIDE TO OPENING MEASURES PRACTICE COMPANION

I'd like to take a moment to summarize the essence of "Opening Measures," what it offers, as well as a suggestion of a sample daily practice plan.

To start, this is YOUR guide and YOUR practice time, so please feel free to tweak my suggestions or even go in a different direction if that feels right to you.

I highly recommend regular note taking to help you organize your thoughts and practice experience. This will also give your own personalized source of reference material for the future.

Whatever path we each choose, it's important to keep our goals in mind, while staying open to ongoing slight course correction --just like Apollo 11 as it ventured towards the moon!

"Opening Measures" is designed to allow YOU to be at the steering wheel, with a helping hand in terms of...

- **mindset and body preparation** (opening reflection, tips for body awareness and tone connection)
- **practice content and structure** (two core methods to improve rhythm and pulse internalization with exercises and drills in progressive difficulty and optional tempo tracking)
- **mindfulness reminders** (a practice calendar, spaces for notes, observations, reflections, aha moments, and questions)
- **inspiration** (listening integration, quotes from famous cellists and musicians)
- **a companion cellist guide** --that's me! (lots of play along videos at different tempi --as well as "playing along" with the videos, these are also a great opportunity to observe other aspects of playing that can help, like set up, use of the bow and LH, and entire body, while playing...)



TIME SIGNATURES/METERS

In western music, pieces are typically written with a time signature, dividing the composition into a number of measures. There are two kinds of time signatures or “meters;” simple and compound meters.

Simple meters are those in which the main beat is divisible by 2. The most common examples are 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4. The bottom number represents the beat (a quarter note, which is divided by 2 to create two eighth notes). The top number represents the number of beats per measure. So there are 2 quarter note beats in 2/4, 3 quarter note beats in 3/4 and 4 quarter note beats in 4/4.

Compound meters are those in which the main beat is divisible by 3. The most common examples are 6/8, 9/8, and 12/8. For these examples, the beat is a dotted eighth note (which is divided by 3 to create three eighth notes). So there are 2 dotted quarter note beats in 6/8, 3 dotted quarter note beats in 9/8, and 4 dotted quarter note beats in 12/8.

Metrical hierarchy

Within each measure, there is a basic hierarchical importance or “stress” given to the placement of each beat, as below (relative hierarchical stress is represented through the number of lines under each beat number, more lines indicates a stronger beat with more emphasis):

SIMPLE METERS (one beat is a quarter note)



Beats listed in order of importance (stress)

1, 2



1, 2, 3



1, 3, 2, 4

COMPOUND METERS (one beat is a dotted quarter note)



1, 2



1, 2, 3



1, 3, 2, 4

