

Random vs Blocked Practice

By Juan Ramirez

What is **Blocked Practice**?

- “Blocked practice is when a learner performs a single skill over and over, with repetition being the key.” - Dr. Allison Belger (psychologywod.com)
- ex. 3 relatively short pieces of music to prepare for a lesson with 60 minutes to prepare. 20 minutes of practice on the first piece (A), then 20 on the second piece (B), 20 minutes on the third piece (C).

What is **Random Practice**?

- “By contrast, in random practice, motor learners work on a number of different skills in combination with each other,“ - Dr. Allison Belger (psychologywod.com)
- ex. Same 3 pieces of music to prepare for a lesson with 60 minutes to prepare. 3-5 minutes on the first piece (A), 3-5 minutes on the second piece (B), 3-5 minutes on the third piece (C), then repeat same process (A B C A B C A B C etc.) for the duration of the practice time.

Why Does **Random Practice Work**?

- Habituation is less likely to happen in random practice than blocked practice..
- “Habituation is a decrease in response to a stimulus after repeated presentations.”- Kendra Cherry (www.verywell.com)
- Random practice keeps the brain more focused and research has proven to be more efficient when it comes to retention.
- ex.1994 study by Hall, Dominguez, and Cavazos (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov):
- 30 elite baseball players were randomly split into 3 groups:
 1. Control Group, no extra practice
 2. Blocked Practice Group, 2 additional practice sessions a week for 6 weeks (12 sessions)
 3. Random Practice Group, 2 additional practice sessions a week for 6 weeks (12 sessions)
- Extra sessions consisted of 45 pitches: 15 fast-balls, 15 curve-balls, and 15 change-up pitches.

- Result:
- Players with the random practice schedule hit 56.7% more of the pitches than when they started.
- Players with the blocked practice schedule hit only 24.8% more of the pitches than when they started.
- Players in the control group showed only 6.2% improvement

How I Used it in a Teaching Medium

- Example 1: Private lesson the day before middle-school all-region auditions.
 - Private student had middle-school auditions the next day, they 3 short etudes.
 - They played through the first etude, and then received 1 critique
 - We did the same process with all 3 etudes for roughly 30-40 minutes.
 - Result: The student placed 2nd out of 76 students at the audition the next day.
- Example 2: Drumcorps Audition Camp, Front Ensemble Rehearsal
 - A particular student was struggling.
 - We took an exercise, split it into 4 sections (A B C D), and spent no more than 10 minutes at a time per section.
 - Result: As a section, the front ensemble was able to play through 3 different exercises by the end of the rehearsal.

Closing

- This is in no way the only way to practice or teach, it is simply one of many one can use.
- Not recommended for learning a whole piece.
- This is not a shortcut, there's no substitute for good, old-fashioned practice.
- Modifying and adding variations to this method for the appropriate situation is encouraged.