

## Pianodao

The Way of Piano

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## It's Time To Stop Practising & Start...?

Guest post by Roberta Wolff

### **Alternatives to an outdated word**

#### **I propose a new word...**

The word '*practise*' is insufficient, it provides

- No insight into what the activity entails
- No guidelines on how to be successful at it
- Little in the way of mass appeal

As a teacher and writer, I am not in the habit of making up words. I find using words my students and readers already comprehend far more efficient. So, my research started with a thesaurus. Here is a summary of the synonyms listed for '*practise*':

- *Execute*
- *Knock off*
- *Persevere*
- *Take up*
- *Labour*, (eek!)

Obviously, they won't do. There were a few others though:

- *Pursue*
- *Develop*
- *Create*

Not bad, but still not the full picture. From this overview a realisation emerged. There isn't a word already in existence that can update and improve on the word '*practise*'.

*If I wanted a new word, I would have to make it myself.*

## **What the new word must do...**

I am setting the bar high here, I want my new word to:

- Not only be a label, but also a reminder of what to incorporate to make the activity successful. Something like an acronym would do the job well.
- Sound good, the acronym could be close to a word that has lots of positive and enjoyable connotations.
- Work for any age group and be '*good enough*' to catch on.

I will start by putting my suggestion forward now. However, I think in accomplishing this important task we should draw on the power of our combined creative brains. We need an insightful and inspiring word which describes what we all do most days and what our students do every day (we wish!).

## **The Full Picture**

How does one go about defining that time spent honing our pianistic skills? The amount written on the topic of piano practise shows just how multifaceted it is. However, to teach it successfully a core principle is important.

## Being At The Keyboard

When my students sit at the piano I don't want them to think '*work*', and I feel it is a half-truth to suggest that it is ***all**'play*'. I want them to think along these lines:

- Play
- Learn
- Experiment
- Apply
- Retain

### PLAY

More than anything students should be able to walk to their instrument, have a good play, and enjoy it. A good play provides enjoyment and satisfaction and will spark the inquisitive approach that is so crucial in learning. Many hours of enjoyment and many skills are developed through play. Playing is a vital 1/5 of a perfect practice session.

### LEARN

It is a simple fact that to improve you must keep learning. However, perpetual challenges and striving is not the full picture either when imagining a rewarding session at the piano. Learning is a vital 1/5 of a perfect practice session.

### EXPERIMENT

This word encompasses the autonomy all musicians could feel. It describes the curious nature learners of all ages and stages can apply, for example, when:

- approaching new repertoire
- discovering new learning techniques
- developing new skills
- investigating new styles
- absorbing new concepts
- trialling different interpretations
- advancing technique and touch

Experimenting is a vital 1/5 of a perfect practice session.

### APPLY

When applying skills, the student is basically teaching themselves, they are applying what is known to create new possibilities. As soon as lessons begin, the student can apply their

knowledge to fulfil their own personal ambitions and imagination. (My strongest students are those to whom this comes naturally). Applying can include:

- playing favourite tunes by ear
- teaching a friend
- accompanying family carols
- meeting with friends to play duets
- improvising
- composing
- creating
- arranging

Students who apply their skills to pursue their own unique musical interests keep music central and relevant to their everyday lives. It is hugely rewarding and empowering. Applying is a vital 1/5 of a perfect practice session.

## **RETAIN**

Retain or maintain is what we do to prevent yesterday's learning being lost. We all know these simple statements, it is important that our students do too:

**Practising every day = a possible maximum of 100% progress**

*Unfortunately,*

**Practising every 2<sup>nd</sup> day ≠ a possible maximum of 100% progress over 2 days...**

In reality, there is a fall off in learning when a day is missed.

To navigate this phenomenon the simplest solution is to include Retain daily. There are of course many deep practice techniques which go a long way toward long term learning and over time students will learn these. In the meantime, retaining the work will save time and frustration.

There are students who struggle to sit down for 30 minutes every day and because they can't do 30 minutes they do 0 minutes. This is a perfect instance for retain. Students could pick the 1 thing that they don't want to lose and play it slowly for a few minutes to retain it until they get around to a longer session at the piano.

All students and parents of students need to understand this from the beginning. Retain is a vital 1/5 of a perfect practice session and if time is short it is the fifth that needs to be done first.

## And now the word ...

### An acronym for Apply Experiment Learn Play Retain

My suggestion is **RePla** (pronounced *replay*).

I am tempted to add a Y at the end for 'YES!' to reflect the sense of achievement that a *re-playing session* would generate and to remind us all how a positive inner dialogue can improve learning.

"When you are *RePlaying*" sounds much more engaging than "when you are practising". If we also teach what RePlaying means, results will be better, and sessions will be more creative and interesting.

### Your suggestions

I can think of a potential criticism of this word and I am also interested to hear other suggestions. I invite you all to contribute to this new word.

*In the meantime...*

## Introducing The Concept of RePlaying

Introducing RePlaying could sound something like this...

"There is a new word, we have decided to do away with the word '*practise*'; it is not very helpful. The new word is RePlaying.

It reminds us of the 5 important activities that **all** learners use. I will tell you about them now and guess what? You get to choose what you do, when you do it and how you do it.

Let me tell you about them...

- **Retain** – hold onto the work you did yesterday. (Do this by playing it carefully again today.)
- **Experiment** – try out something new. (Dynamics, technique, new learning skills, memorising).
- **Play** – disappear into the music and enjoy yourself.
- **Learn** – dive into the deep end and actively learning something new and challenging.
- **Apply** – use your skills in a new way to achieve something that interests you. (Play by ear, improvise, teach yourself a scale, rearrange your music, transpose, discover your interest)

Am I missing something? How many letters are there? How many have I said? Oh yes, the “Y”. What could that stand for?

It means ‘YES!!’

*Thanks to your RePlaying session you are now on a path toward achieving your full potential.”*

## How Teachers Win With RePlaying

RePlaying brings with it 3 huge advantages:

- RePlaying is not only a model for a super session at home it is also a great model for a lesson.
- RePlaying provides a sleek way of informing parents. There has never been an option to learn piano without the need to spend some regular time at the instrument. However, parents hope to create this option by asking to ‘learn for fun’. Well, the concept of Re-Playing applies to every type of learning, to every type of student, and to every reason for learning. It is no longer a choice between ‘serious lessons, practice and exams’ or ‘fun lessons where students hope to dictate the curriculum and achieve for free’. RePlay covers it all!
- Every age student can learn to RePlay because the concept behind RePlaying supports the student as they engage with the music at *their level*.

## Modelling RePlaying

The best way to teach RePlaying is during lesson time. Sometimes the simplest things are the most powerful. This is evident with RePlaying which also makes a super outline to follow when planning lessons. For example:

- Start a lesson by playing a duet or improvising, or any other activity or game that is enjoyable and fully absorbing – **Playing**
- Teach a new concept – **Learning**
- Link the new concept to those already known – **Retaining**
- Ask in what way the knowledge/skill can be applied to open new opportunities. Let the student lead and let them be creative – **Apply**
- Take your ‘RETAIN’ from last week and develop it. What is your student interested in experimenting on? – **Experimenting**

## Your Students RePlay Sheet

Learning aids are a powerful tool, with this one the student tells you what they RePlayed. Students may work through the 5 actions in any order and jot down what they choose to do for each action. It may be that certain skills will need to be repeated for several days before being replaced or upgraded. Your RePlay sheet can be downloaded [here](#).

## A Theory About Quitting Piano Lessons

Around grade 3/4 a number of students give up. I think a contributing factor to stopping at this level is practise habits which are not easily adaptable to more involved, longer pieces. It could be that teaching the RePlay approach from a young age goes some way toward building dependable, long term learning techniques and enjoyment in the process.

## Autonomy

*"Control leads to compliance; autonomy leads to engagement."*

Daniel Pink

RePlay will provide students with autonomy. They get to choose what they do, when they do it and how they do it. They also learn how to control their rate of learning. This autonomy of learning results in increased motivation as the student evolves their piano time into something relevant, rewarding and engaging to themselves.

It is a 5-step approach that encourages autonomy, ambition, engagement, experimentation, inquisitiveness, manageable perseverance, metacognition, and an open mind, all the attributes of an intrinsically motivated learner. And it sounds way more fun than 'go do your practising...'

*I would love to know your thoughts and suggestions. Who will be RePlaying this week?*

## Roberta Wolff

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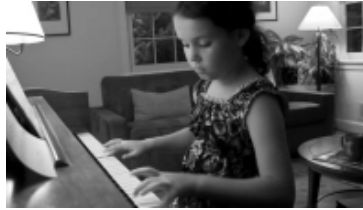
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Andrew Eales is a pianist, writer and teacher based in Milton Keynes UK, where he runs Keyquest Music - his successful independent music education business, private teaching practice and creative outlet. [View all posts by Andrew Eales →](#)

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## 4 thoughts on “It’s Time To Stop Practising & Start...?”



### Kati

April 22, 2018 at 1:24 pm

This makes me incredibly pleased!!! I abhor the word practice especially since most students associate it with something negative. I am going to be introducing this to my students IMMEDIATELY following our recital in 2 weeks. For years, I've been trying to avoid the word practice and a focus on “how long should my child practice?” I've always focused on being goal-oriented but have not been able to change the student and parent mindsets. Hopefully this will be helpful! Thank you!

★ Liked by you



### musicatmonkton

April 22, 2018 at 2:30 pm

GREAT article, very thought provoking. Here's my reponse 😊

<https://musicatmonkton.com/2018/04/22/play-with/>

★ Liked by [1 person](#)

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**Lynda Fish**

August 12, 2018 at 4:35 pm

This is fantastic. I find many students want to “pass” one piece, and move on to the next. I have always been plagued with the “I don’t have anything ready” mindset myself, even though I may be working on some fantastic pieces at the time. I believe this concept is long overdue, and I am going to begin implementing this concept right away. Thank you for a very thought provoking article.

★ Like

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**Daniel Banche**

December 29, 2018 at 10:26 am

I like the tip on Retain to overcome those days where a full 30 mins isn't feasible.

How about considering that PLAY is already 4/6 of the word RePlay, which helps justify the final Y?

★ Liked by you

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