

## Finger Power!

The development of technical proficiency is one of the cornerstones of performing on any musical instrument. Technical proficiency is best nurtured through the establishment of a strong regimen of practicing scales, arpeggios, finger dexterity patterns, and etudes. A student can only achieve technical proficiency by committing to a routine of active and intelligent daily practice of such exercises. Technical prowess allows for true artistry to be expressed, and the alternative, a deficiency in this arena will create problems that are observed in many aspects of flute playing.

### *The Daily Grind*

The backbone of technical development on the flute has been established in books such as Taffanel and Gaubert's *17 Daily Mechanical Exercises*, Reichert's *Seven Daily Exercises*, Moyses's *Exercises Journaliers*, and Altes's *Celebre Methode Complete*. Michel Debost's Scale Game is an excellent tool for the development of facility throughout all key centers, dynamics, articulations, and styles. In practicing the scale game, one must always perform the scale with musical content. In other words, always *play with heart!* The game should be started on a different key each day and one should work through the entire sequence of rhythmic and articulation possibilities every three or four days. Debost's scale game is based on the fourth exercise from the Taffanel and Gaubert *17 Daily Mechanical Exercises*. Each modulatory section should be played slowly and with the most beautiful, legato sound possible. This exercise should be **committed to memory** – after all, it will be practiced every day! Other technical exercises should also be memorized as well. The act of memorizing simultaneously develops the ear and

frees up the student to carefully observe all aspects of playing by looking in the mirror and examine the mechanical elements of flute playing.

### *Conquering Your Fears*

There are several methods for working through technical difficulties that are encountered in etudes or music. The first one is to practice a passage in an alternate grouping of notes. For example: if the passage is in sixteenth notes, try to play it in triplets, quintuplets, sextuplets, or even septuplets.

The image displays five musical exercises on a single staff in 4/4 time, each marked with a circled number from 1 to 5. Exercise 1 consists of a triplet of eighth notes. Exercise 2 consists of a quintuplet of eighth notes. Exercise 3 consists of a quintuplet of eighth notes. Exercise 4 consists of a sextuplet of eighth notes. Exercise 5 consists of a septuplet of eighth notes. Each exercise is followed by a double bar line.

Another method is to place a fermata on the note before the difficult note, repeat several times, and then move the fermata to the next note, repeat, and the next note, repeating until at the end of the difficult passage.

The image displays five musical exercises on a single staff in 2/4 time, each marked with a circled number from 1 to 5. Each exercise shows a sequence of notes with a fermata placed over a specific note, illustrating the technique of repeating the passage with the fermata moving to subsequent notes. Each exercise is followed by a double bar line.

Once can always practice playing passages in different rhythms, such as a swing rhythm, reverse swing, dotted rhythms, or others. The flutist is only limited by his or her own imagination! The idea behind this is to make the task more complex than it is, that way when you return to the written music, the task is much easier. It also helps to smooth out unevenness in technique that naturally arises within certain fingering combinations such as an open tube to closed tube combination, a forked combination, or a left hand to right hand crossing combination.

There are four basic rhythms: short-long, long-short, long-short-short-short, and evenly, as illustrated above. Each "short" is represented by a one-count note and each "long" by a three-count note. Think of these as quarters and dotted-halves; or, if you prefer, sixteenths and dotted-eighths.



In addition, the passage can be practiced with a triplet subdivision: this is the swing rhythm. If a player has a problem section that is a long run of quick notes, one might wish to insert an intermediate step of one long and seven shorts so that a "rest and regroup" note occurs twice in a measure.

The last step is to play the notes evenly as they appear in the music. When the player begins to play it as written in the music, one should start at half tempo and repeat the section ten times. Once this has been achieved, one can begin to bump up the metronome over the course of several days or weeks. The rhythm exercises should be practiced every day on the difficult sections, every day starting at the beginning of the sequence until the music is technically flawless.

Another way to work through technical passages is through the alteration of the articulation patterns. For example, one can apply all of the articulations that appear in Michel Debost's scale game to a difficult passage. By varying the articulations, one will smooth out the rough spots in the same way that they are smoothed out with the rhythmic variations. This, in combination with the rhythmic variations, will give the passage extra security and ensure that the passage is technically stable.

### *Coda*

In order to move along the learning process in a timely, technique must be assessed and practiced on a daily basis. Without this kind of practice, one will always fall short of his or her potential as a flutist. A well-balanced practice module must be nurtured in order to develop into a well-rounded flutist. This is *only* possible with attentive work over a sustained time period.

### *For Further Reading:*

Clardy, Mary Karen. *Flute Fundamentals: The Building Blocks of Technique*. New York: European American Music Corporation, 1993.

Debost, Michel. *The Simple Flute: From A to Z*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Toff, Nancy. *The Flute Book: A Complete Guide for Students and Performers*. 2nd ed. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

### *About the Author*



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