



# The United States Army Band

## *Pershing's Own*

# Basic Training for the Oboe

---

*by Sergeant First Class Lorrie Berkshire Brown*

For many of us, knowing how well we would like to play is the easy part, getting there is the hard part. We have to become our own "personal trainer". Approaching practice as an athlete might approach a workout. As we all know, "getting in shape" is easier "said than done", and the best advice is to **organize any large task or goal into smaller, obtainable units**. As many a motivational speaker has shared, "If you leave a faucet dripping, it's amazing how fast the tub will overflow!"

One step at a time is the most efficient way to reach any destination, so here are some steps to "work, tone and strengthen", specific elements in our playing, contributing to the desired whole.

**Find a time each day that will be your practice time.** Treat it as an appointment with yourself, even if it is just 10 or 15 minutes! Include it with other activities you do everyday. Many people have luck with the same time, first thing in the morning or including a day off in their schedule. Sports Psychologists and counselors suggest that it takes 21 days for a behavior to become a habit that you will miss if you skip a day. Use this in your favor, and challenge yourself to make it at least a day, then -a week, then another, then another. If after 3 weeks you are not happy with the results of your new practice habit, you can return to your old approach before you tried the new one. Take a risk! Discipline is a skill you learn by doing.

**Divide practice into specific things to accomplish and allow a specific amount of time for each thing.** Break scales, exercises, etudes or music into basic elements such as time/rhythm, wind, pitch, intervals and finger challenges and allow an amount of time that day for each task. Stop when the time is up and move on. You can always come back and work more. Remember "ONE STEP AT A TIME" is more efficient, less stressful and more retainable. It also allows you to give it a rest and come back and refine your work.

**Approach your oboe workout slow and steady. Accurate repetitions are the key.**

Practice slow enough that you can think and concentrate on accuracy. That way you are always practicing to improve and **build confidence**. If each repetition is slow and CORRECT, then each time you REINFORCE that you CAN play it! Gradually increase tempos and challenges. This way all energy is productive, you are not just going through the motions, practicing inaccurate attempts or undermining your outcome with speed and franticness. Be tough about this!

**Create a schedule or notebook to follow.** Time organization helps us avoid procrastination and helps keep us focused. Included are a few schedules that allow for different time restraints and show obvious results. "So, get that oboe and give me 20!"





- B. **Scales.** After learning key signatures pick a "key of the day". Thinking clean, relaxed, curved fingers, and directional, continuous wind. Using a metronome and keeping track of tempos, play each scale so that you are "absolutely" accurate; slurred, then tongued, and in different patterns. Many books are available to help with this, but it is better to be creative and do this in your head. Eventually, cycle through all major, minor, modal, whole tone and pentatonic, diminished and chromatic scales. Again start so slow you cannot possibly make a mistake, use repetitions, keeping tally marks of "successful" times through. Gradually increase tempos and set challenges for yourself (Time trials). Put your tuner on the tonic of each scale and listen to intervals while you are developing this skill! Put the metronome on "off beats", 2 and 4 in addition to 1 and 3! This will force you to internalize time and sub-divisions!
- C. **Time and rhythm.** Isolate this and read different rhythmic things very slowly. Also, do this without your oboe! Just conduct and clap and subdivide. Start with very easy things to reinforce rhythmic confidence. There are books that focus on just this, or you can use any music you can find. This will greatly improve sight-reading ability.

### 3. **MUSIC, ETUDES, ENSEMBLE PARTS:**

- A. **Slow and accurate.** Approach technical passages as a game: always slow and accurate, gradually increasing your demands. You will accomplish more with this discipline. One would not run 26 miles as fast as they can on day one, training for a marathon. One must build strength, control and confidence! Use a metronome! The following approaches work well:
1. Isolate passages and use repetition! Starting slowly do it 10 or 20 times at that tempo, then again a bit faster. If it gets sloppy, go back. Only count accurate rep's After you have played it 20 or 100 times "right", 10-20 times at each tempo over the course of days or weeks, you will not be nervous about performing it!
  2. Start at the end and work backwards of a piece. Then as you go through it, it becomes more familiar.
  3. Use different patterns, and groupings that bring out the phrase and isolate problems.
  4. Sing the piece without your oboe so you know what it is you are trying

to play and communicate. If you can sing it, you most likely will be able to play it!

5. Use a tape recorder or disc recorder. Know what you are doing and what you want to do. Listen for pitch, time, rhythm, music and sound.
6. Reward yourself for your discipline!

O.K. OBOISTS .... LET'S GET OUT THERE AND DO IT!

## **SAMPLE PRACTICE SCHEDULES**

**70 minute oboe workout:** You can even set a timer and when the time is up, stop and move on!

35 minute warm-up and technique builder:

- 3+ minutes-wind/endurance
- 2+ minutes-long tones ppp-fff
- 5 minutes-control
- 5 minutes-tongue work-out
- 15 minutes-scales
- 5 minutes-time/rhythm (chop break-brain builder)

35 minute music drill

- 10 Etude/technical study
- 15 solo repertoire
- 10 orchestra/band music

The time spent on basics in the first section will reflect in improvement in the second section! Remember, the point is a "sustainable objective", a way to work-out consistently without procrastination! What seems like not enough time, will actually compound itself with daily attention, ultimately rendering a better overall result, than sporadic doses of longer time. Obviously, one needs to tailor this to their own needs. It often works well to add a second session for focus on music alone.

**30 minute oboe workout:** This is an effective initiation for younger students or amateurs.

- 2 minutes-wind/endurance
- 1 minute-long tones
- 2 minutes-tongue
- 5 minutes-scales
- 10 minutes-etude or technical study
- 5 minutes-solo repertoire
- 5 minutes-band music/orchestra music

These are just suggested examples. They are tried and true! Time and commitment are relative to how competitive and serious the player is trying to be. An obtainable, basic, solid structure will lend results. As the oboist reaps the benefit of each step by step increment, it will become easier and easier to maintain the habit of practicing. Opportunities that will follow an increase in skills only reinforce the positive long-term outcome of the short-term effort required to get in shape on the oboe.

## **LET'S GET TOUGH AND SHOW 'EM HOW IT'S DONE OBOISTS!**

---

*This article provided courtesy of [The United States Army Band](#), "Pershing's Own,"  
Washington, DC*