

# Away from the Piano: Literature Review of the Role of Mental Practice

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## Abstract

Music performance in general, and piano playing in particular, require an extended period of technical and artistic skill development. Both cognitive and motoric demands are involved in music performance and the use of mental practice can be an important tool in acquiring music performance skills. Mental practice is a form of practice that involves the use of mental imagery skills as opposed to the physical or motor skills used in physical practice. One of the most important mental imagery skills in music performance is auditory imagery. Auditory modeling can be used to help form auditory images. In reviewing the current scientific literature, the relevance of mental practice in music teaching and learning became evident: mental practice is a valuable strategy in music practice and performance preparation. Although additional research is needed, especially in relation to novices learning to play the piano, the authors conclude that the current literature supports the use of mental practice as a beneficial practice strategy in playing piano.

Mental practice, especially the use of auditory models, can be helpful for increasing familiarity with the music to be learned. The recent evolution of digital audio technology has made the use of auditory models more accessible to teachers and students with options such as YouTube and music streaming services like Spotify adding to more traditional digital formats such as CDs and MP3s. Using devices like smartphones, both teachers and students can also

create auditory models by playing and recording the music themselves. Mental practice can be introduced early in music training using strategies such as observational and dyad practice. The use of mental practice in addition to physical practice can also help to avoid playing related injuries. Music teachers play an important part in the successful adoption of mental practice providing guidance to their students in its use from the beginning stages of listening to music rhythms to advanced interpretive aspects of score reading.

*Keywords:* mental practice, mental imagery, aural modeling, auditory imagery, music performance