

# Creative Practicing Techniques

Artistry requires both skill and sensitivity. While “repetition is the mother of skill,” mechanical repetition deadens sensitivity. Can we instead have *creative* repetition that cultivates sensitivity? Can we maintain a fresh relationship with a piece, a scale, or a chord as we learn it and play it over time?

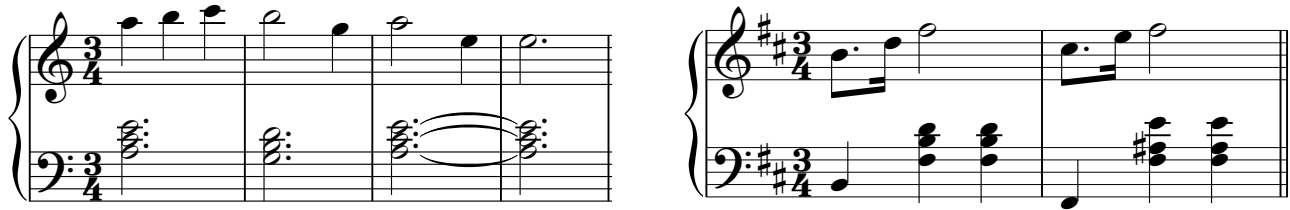
## The “Variety is the Spice of Life” Approach with Literature

Vary some aspect of the music on each repetition, especially tempo, articulation, or dynamics (TAD). In some cases, we can vary the rhythm (blocking the notes or playing them separately), the pedaling, the voicing/balance, or the range. This keeps the music fresh and develops a range of options that allows for creative, spontaneous interpretations. The example used is from one of Robert Vandall’s *Preludes*:



## The “Create First” Approach with Literature

In this approach, we first create our own music using some of the musical materials in a piece. For example, a student can improvise melodies in the key of A natural minor above the accompaniment to *Mist* by Clifford Poole. Or improvise melodies in B harmonic minor above the bass of the Schubert *Waltz*. The students gets a *musical feeling* for both the accompaniment and the melody. And this provides another foundation for composition.

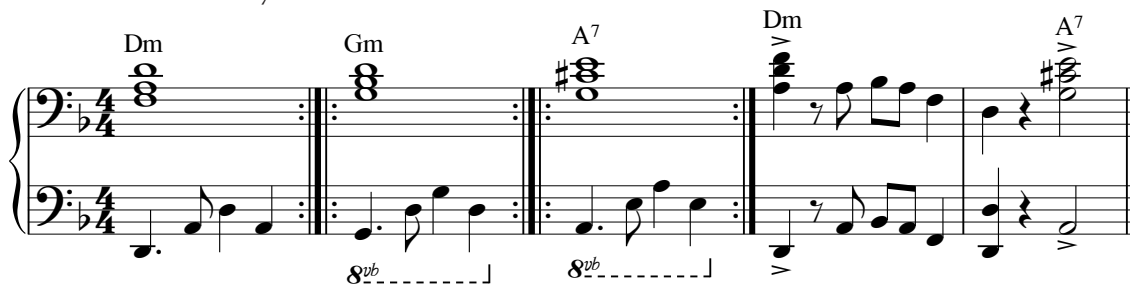


## “Create First” with Technique and Theory

Technical exercises and theory assignments can be taught by having the students create music with the materials first. This develops creativity, musicality, and sensitivity. Here examples using scales, intervals, and triads.

### Scales

- Introduce scales and keys through duet improvisations. The students first plays with a few notes (perhaps in a five-finger pattern), then adds more notes to complete the scale. Example: Introduce D harmonic minor with this *Tango* pattern from *Pattern Play 3*. What does it mean to “know” a scale?



From *Tango* in *Pattern Play 3* published by Frederick Harris Music. Used by permission.

- For solo playing, students can always improvise melodies above simple accompaniment patterns in the key. Fifths work nicely for both left and right-hand accompaniments.



Create melodies in D major.

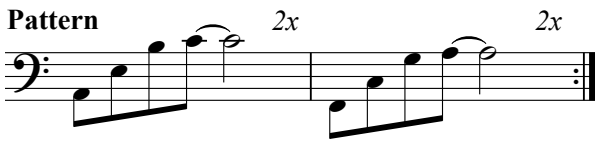


Create in G natural minor.

## Intervals and Finger Exercises

The original intention of practicing sixths and thirds was not exercise but to give performers material for personal creativity. The idea is to make *music* and, as a by-product, exercise the fingers.

### Pattern



### Vacation



Create melodies on white keys using 6ths, 3rds, or single keys. Transpose.

From *Reflecting in Pattern Play 1* published by Frederick Harris Music. Used by permission.

## Cadence Chords

- Break up “cadence chords” (I, IV, V7) and improvise above them in the key. Then transpose.



- Change the style of cadence chords such as playing them in “open voicing,” as shown here. Tango rhythm next?



- A musical and practical way to develop a personal and creative relationship with chords is to practice the art of arranging in addition to the art of improvisation. Make arrangements of tunes such as *Amazing Grace*.

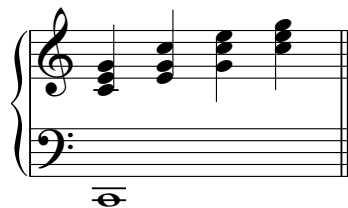
## Inversions

- Inversions can also be introduced in creative, musical ways. There is no need for unmusical and mechanical drill. For example, you could use *No Limits* from *Pattern Play* to teach triads and inversions.

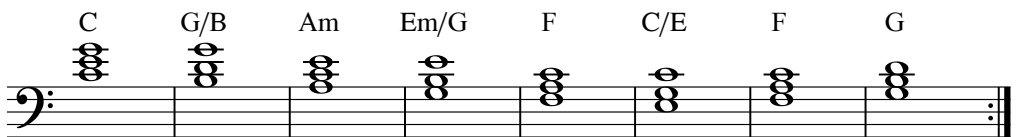
Create with inversions. Break up the chords. Change the top note to make melodies.

From *No Limits* in *Pattern Play 1* published by Frederick Harris Music.

- Introduce inversions using *Canon* progression.



- Improvise above this *Canon in D* progression in C major, then later transpose to the key of D. More experienced students can move the middle note of each chord up an octave to create an open voicing.



- “Fun run.” Convert a student’s desire to show off into the skillful playing of inversions!



This handout is to accompany a presentation given by Forrest Kinney, who strives to include some aspect of the Four Arts in each lesson. Forrest can be reached at [forrestkinney@yahoo.com](mailto:forrestkinney@yahoo.com). His website is [www.forrestkinney.com](http://www.forrestkinney.com).