EIGHT GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICING THE IMPROVEMENT KATA

How well you master a skill like the Improvement Kata pattern depends more on how you practice than on merely repeating the routine a large number of times. Here are eight guidelines for your practicing:

1) Get an Overview of What You’re Trying to Learn
2) Find a Coach
3) Be Enthusiastic About Practicing
4) Break the Skill Pattern into Pieces, and Practice Only One or Two Pieces at a Time
5) Deliberately Follow the Prescribed Pattern Exactly at First
6) Practice a Little Every Day
7) Practice on Something Real
8) Practice at the Edge of Your Capability

These guidelines are based on several sources, including: The Talent Code by Daniel Coyle, Talent is Overrated by Geoff Colvin, Human Memory: Theory and Practice by Alan Baddeley, and the Bjork Learning and Forgetting Lab at UCLA.
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<th>Practice Guideline</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) Get an Overview of What You’re Trying to Learn</td>
<td>• Get a picture of the parts of the skill and how they come together as a whole for correct performance of the skill.</td>
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<td>• For example, study Part I of this Handbook</td>
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<td>2) Find a Coach</td>
<td>• You’ll need periodic input and guidance from someone who observes you, detects your errors and gives you advice on how to correct them.</td>
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<td>• An experienced Improvement Kata coach may or may not be available. If not, grab someone else who is practicing the Improvement Kata and coach one another.</td>
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<td>• Once you master the Improvement Kata you can coach others.</td>
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| 3) Be Enthusiastic About Practicing | • New neural pathways won’t form if you practice with a negative attitude. You gotta wanna.

• There will be plateaus when it seems like you aren’t making progress. Keep your chin up and keep practicing. Listen to your coach for advice. |
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| 4) Break the Skill Pattern into Pieces, and Practice Only One or Two Pieces at a Time | • Kata are usually practiced in pieces, until the whole sequence is learned. This is called chunking.

• Do not try to master too many chunks at once. The coach should determine what the learner is ready to practice next. |
5) **Deliberately Follow the Prescribed Pattern Exactly at First**

* Have beginners practice on processes that are easy to understand and where it is easy to see how to apply the Improvement Kata pattern.

This is like training in music and sports, where beginners don’t start on a difficult piece.

- The first stage of practicing is to try to copy the pattern exactly; to replicate the kata in a deliberately precise way. Think of it as **going slow to get fast**.

  Initial practicing is deliberate and uses your conscious mind, which is slow. Once the pattern enters your unconscious and becomes a normal, habitual way of working it gets faster, smoother, and easier. And then you can coach others.

- For beginners what is most important is practicing the desired pattern as closely as possible, not going fast or being efficient.* Speed follows.

  The slowness at beginner levels may lead people to think it’s not working. This is a mistake that can lock you into your current skillset.
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| **6) Practice a Little Every Day** | • Short daily practice is better than massed practice. This is called *spacing*.
• Your practicing only has to be a slice of the workday. You should have at least one Coaching Cycle every day. |
| **7) Practice on Something Real** | • What the learner is working on must be meaningful to the learner and the organization. The Improvement Kata pattern should be seen as a means to a desired objective. The learner must solve real problems on the way to a real target condition.
• Learners are doing two things simultaneously: Improving a process and learning the pattern of the Improvement Kata. |
8) **Practice at the Edge of Your Capability**

- Learning a skill requires making small errors and then working to correct those points.
- Target those aspects of the skill pattern that currently give you the most difficulty. Deliberate practice aimed at remedying weaknesses is a better predictor of expertise than raw number of hours.