

My Dance Practice Process

As a follow-up on my previous post on [planning practice](#), here are some of my favorite tips on how to structure your actual practice sessions at home and/or in the studio, plus a few great articles I've found on dance practice, rehearsal and movement quality.

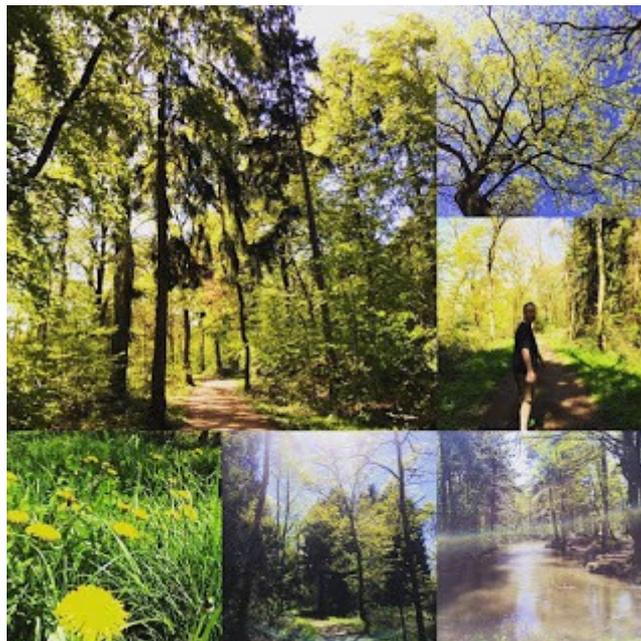
Enjoy and feel free to share!

How I structure my own dance practice sessions depends a bit on where I practise, and what I am currently working on.

No matter how much time I have though, I always take a few seconds (using very simple breath work) to center myself and focus before starting, and I take some time to warm up properly, making the practice itself much more productive - even if the session is short.

Same goes for cooling down. If I take one song to 'simmer down' I find that the work I have done sinks in more deeply, and if I stretch the muscles I have worked before moving on with my day - even for just a few minutes - I've noticed I have more energy and 'spunk' on the following day.

Also: I have found that whenever I get 'stuck', letting my dance rest a bit by moving it back to the pre-dance phase (see below), or working on a different piece, or just getting outside and breathing for a bit instead of stressing out about making progress always helps me get back on track easier on the next practice day. Sometimes inspiration takes time!



'outside' - the secret practice ingredient <3

So, in short (not) I usually structure my dance practice time like this:

Movement preparation

- take 3 breaths to center and focus - 30 seconds
- mini warmup: moving the joints through their respective ranges of motion to help up movement space (including 'cogs' from [Anatomy in Motion](#)) - 2-3 minutes

Dance-move preparation

- freestyle dance miniwarmup: dancing to one song in my itunes 'dance/listen' playlist that I am not

currently working on, focusing on how my body feels, not on what I do per sé - 3-4 minutes

Note: The breathing and 'cogging' movement preparation help me connect with my body (something I have been working on more consciously lately) before any practice session, and it really makes a difference, so I even incorporate it now in classes that I teach (and take).

I have also found that dancing freely to one song before practice helps me discover quickly which things to work on more during my technique sessions. I sometimes even find 'new' movement for my choreography work this way.

Actual dance practice session

- Technique

- I usually choose a specific movement to work on at different speeds, including in slow motion, first without music, then with music added
- Another option is to practice one or two techniques combined with music, then focusing on each movement separately without music (or with 'mind music' :) to refine and experiment a bit
- A technique DVD (or a mix of DVDs) focusing on a topic/two topics I am currently practising

Depending on how much time I have I sometimes do a mix of all 3 options, but if I am very short on time I will usually just do one movement focus, and/or 1-2 techniques with music, or a very short section of a DVD - All sandwiched between a short movement preparation, warmup and cooldown.

- Choreo work

- I start by reviewing a video of a previous choreo practice session and/or workshops I have taken/taught for inspiration
- Then I either dance the full choreo (while recording) OR I focus on a specific part I am working on (while recording the version I want to check 'in action')
- Then I check the recording of the full choreo (or of the specific part I am working on) using my dance journal as a guide to reflect (see below)
- After that I usually try out a few things to refine without music, making notes of the things I want to KEEP
- Then I dance again (while recording) etc..

Note: My dance practice sessions can be technique, or choreo, or both. If I have plenty of time then I will do technique first, then choreo work, as working on technique always inspires me. Sometimes I am working with a DVD and suddenly inspiration strikes, so I have to stop it and then test out my new choreo ideas right away.

If I have the studio for practice I try to work on my technique at home beforehand (or on an earlier day), so I have maximum studio time for the choreography itself. I still do the breathing, and movement preparation + mini freestyle session at the studio though!

So for me choreography is mostly an iterative process: I dance - record - reflect - refine - redance - record - etc.. Even if I am planning to improvise (or partially improvise) to a song, having this immediate feedback loop helps me to use the practice time I have to the max.



my dance - record - reflect - repeat setup at the studio :)

Using a dance journal

I always bring a notebook (I have a separate one for practice sessions) where I note the date, time, where I practise, what I work on, and what I did that day (dancing with or without music, with or without costume, with or without mirror) for each practice session.

For each 'dance loop' within the practice session I note the things I see that I like, the things that I didn't like (and ideas on how to change them if I know), the parts where I want to try out different options, and the parts that are still missing somehow.



The Little Book of Dance

Bonus dance challenges and self-coaching

If a dance is more or less 'set', or if the improvisation sessions start to feel more fluid, I challenge myself by adding more performance-like circumstances (dancing with the costume, dancing without

mirror in different directions, imagining my audience and/or performance environment) and focusing more and more on how the dance 'feels' when it goes well.

So in a way I am coaching myself, much like I would coach a student who is working on her choreography or musical interpretation. It is certainly less comfortable than 'just' dancing the choreo many times, but it does make the practice time much more effective.



My 'Coachee', with #dancerfeet :)

Cooling down

I move more slowly for at least one (calming) song after a vigorous practice session, and no matter what I have worked on I try to take my time to stretch out the muscles that have been working hard, as well as reflect a bit on how I feel about the practice session and the things I have learned in the process.

Doing this gives my practice sessions a feeling of 'completion', helps restore my mental and physical energy a bit, and it makes it easier to 'stay in my body' during the rest of the day.

Sometimes I will use [my foam roller routine](#) for some extra deep upper body relaxation work

Dance prep work

BEFORE I start to choreograph (or prepare to improvise) to a song I tend to go through a preparation process for a few weeks or months, by listening to different versions of the music, watching videos of different interpretations, gathering information about the song itself, studying the lyrics, visualising dance movements that I would like to 'see' (this usually works best when I am doing something else, like work around the house, showering, walking, or driving), imagining how I would make use of a (sometimes still imaginary) costume etc..

This process can happen months (or even years!) before I start on the actual choreographing/improvisation preparation of a song, and I find it to be one of the most crucial steps in unlocking my creativity, even though it is mostly 'passive work'. It also allows me to work on

several pieces at once, so they can germinate and mix in the back of my mind, intermingling with my daily dance (and life) experiences.



Sometimes inspiration hides up here!

Focusing on other non-dance activities (like [TKD](#)), or taking classes in other dance forms (like [ballet](#), modern) while having a dance project broiling in the back ground also help to boost choreographic/improvisational creativity.

For improvisation performances this background preparation process still happens, albeit a bit more subconsciously.

Soo, that's it, my dance practice process in a (big-ish) nut shell :)

Please let me know if you have any questions/remarks, and if you are a dancer: I'm curious to learn about your practice process too!

xxx Khalida
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