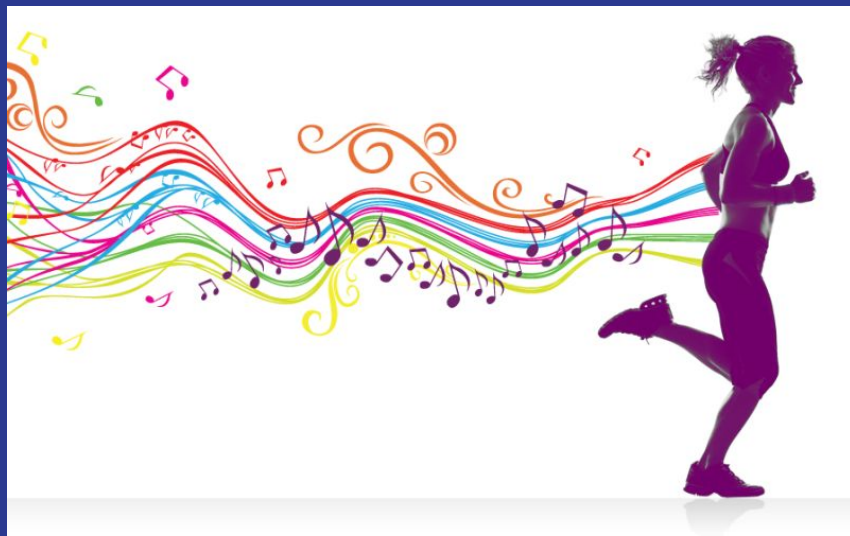




*Hangin' with the harp*

# The Art of the Finish

By Grace Browning



# “The Art of the Finish” – what does a “finished” piece look like?

## What it's **NOT**:

- Perfect
- The last time you'll ever play it
- Black & white expectations

## What it **IS**:

- Optimal
- The beginning of a long-term relationship
- Unique expectations for each individual



# 1. Determine Logistics

(Prep for Success!)



1. Determine “due date” (performance or recording, formal or informal, live or virtual)
  2. Determine timeline: weekly “mocks”, regular recordings, and REST DAYS
  3. Identify objectives and brainstorm a “reward” regardless of outcome
  4. Commit to shining your light!
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## 2. Take Inventory: record your first run-through!

- Why record yourself?
  - Introduce small amounts of pressure
  - Provide a literal sounding board for feedback
  - Helps build confidence over time
- How do you listen?
  - Take physical notes - pause when you need to.
  - Take note of the things you like and what you don't love
  - Observe what you hear \*without judgement\*
  - Determine next steps for practice (this becomes your to-do list)
- You are your own teacher (for 167 hours a week!)

*Note: you don't need fancy equipment – just your phone will do!*



# 3. Speed it up



1. Blocking (reverse hot potato)
2. Rhythm Drills (long-short, short-long)
3. Turbo Time (try TOO fast)
4. Metronome Fun
  - a. Up 3 down 2
  - b. Off beats
  - c. Every other beat

# 4. Memorize\*

\*optional, but helpful!

## Three Stages:

1. Encoding
2. Embedding
3. Retrieving

## Randomized Practice > Blocked Practice

10 5 min-sessions > 1 50-min session



Associate each section with an “anchor”

1. Structural or harmonic cues (A, B, C – recap, cadenza, coda)
2. Mood + character words (moody intro, arpeggio heaven, diva page)
3. Color, theme, narrative (“when the leaves fall” or “Mozart goes crazy”)

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# Building Layers of Memory with “Intelligences”

\*Inspired by  
Howard Gardner’s  
revolutionary book  
“Frames of Mind”

## Muscle (Kinesthetic)

### (Logical)

- Our default: not necessarily trustworthy
- Practicing run-throughs with varying levels of tension
- Rob Knopper (Audition Hacker) and his strategy R.O.A.M.

## Aural (Musical)

- Listening back to yourself + others
- Singing individual lines on “la”, solfege (do, re, mi), note names, or scale degrees
- GHOSTING - playing one hand pp and the other at normal volume
- Mentally rehearse your performance in your head and \*hearing the way you want to sound\*

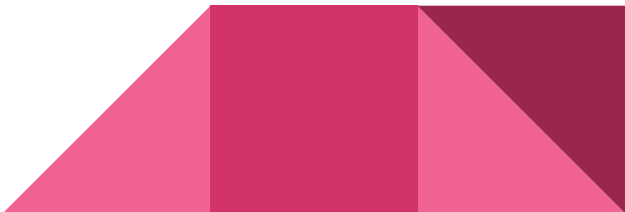
## Visual (Spatial)

- Marking the score in sections with colors, visual cues, and anchors
- Visualize the score in your head (great mental practice)
- Transcribe your piece for memory!

## Structural/Harmonic

- Analyze key areas, harmonic structures, transitions
- Understand the form and flow of the piece

**BONUS:** combine exercises for maximum brain effort: singing RH while playing LH, saying pedals out loud while blocking, visualize music while air-harping, etc...



# 5. Polish: “make it sparkly”

*Technique = clarity of expression*

## Listening back in layers:

- Dynamics/articulation/expression
- Tempo/pacing
- Buzzes, clarity, evenness
- Sound quality, phrasing, tone

## Make decisions:

(this does not make you a robot!)

- Confirm tempi + transitions
- Clarify voicing + direction of phrase
- Determine exact fingerings
- Leave nothing up to chance!



## HARP HACK:

*Having trouble hearing everything?  
Slow your recordings down to  
half-tempo with Audacity or Slow  
Downer app.*



# 6. Performance Practice

*Test the waters!*

**Adversity Training** = run-throughs that make you sweat!

- Add distractions (physical, aural, emotional)
- Simulate Flight or Fight response (get heart rate up, increase tension, shallow-breathe)
- Verbalize “nervous” self-talk, then center yourself.

**Visualization** = takes practice + energy but is SO worth it

- Third-person perspective
- First-person perspective
- Sheet-music perspective
- The more details, the better!



# Performance Practice continued:

“Learn to Surf” with a **mental script**

Ask yourself: what do you need to focus on at each moment to play your best?

- Singing Brain (imagine your audience can only hear what’s in your head)
- Subdividing Zen (staying present with each subdivision of every beat)
- Integrate process cues (“let it go”, “smooth fingers”, “focus on LH”)

Mind your **self-talk**

- Avoid “negatives”. “Don’t mess up” → “You got this”
  - Stay rooted in reality
  - Kindly dismiss inner critic with compassion and logic
- 

# 7. Reflect

The big day has come and gone. Congrats! How did you feel? What went well? What could go better next time?



“Don’t take anything personally. Always do your best.” – Don Miguel Ruiz (*The Four Agreements*)

- Listen back to your first recording – look how far you’ve come!
  - Filter feedback through your own lens – only YOU can define what your “finish” looks like.
  - Brainstorm new goals and objectives for your next project.
  - Celebrate your win!!!
-

# I want to hear from you!

What does your “finish” look like?

What are you struggling with?

What are you excited about?

What works for you?

Harpy practicing and keep in touch: [@thegracefulharpist](https://www.instagram.com/thegracefulharpist) // [gbrowning.harp@gmail.com](mailto:gbrowning.harp@gmail.com)

**THANK YOU Virginia Harp Center!**