

WHAT MAKES A GOOD REHEARSAL?

PREPARATION



Be punctual and ready to start on time

This is absolutely crucial for successful rehearsals. If one member of your group does not turn up on time, then the work cannot begin. Any professional musician will be able to tell you about the importance of punctuality for rehearsals. If you are a freelance musician and you are late for a rehearsal you will not get asked back, your reputation will not be good and your chances of future employment will be slim – it's that simple!



Know your parts

It is important to be clear on the difference between rehearsing and personal practice. Group rehearsal time is not when you start to learn the guitar line for your song – this should have already been done at home.



Be prepared

Have the right gear – ensure you are fully equipped every time you rehearse. Run through a written or mental check list before you leave for the rehearsal – forgetting even one lead or spare strings could bring many a rehearsal to a complete standstill. Remember you will need your instrument, leads, tuner, amp, sticks etc as appropriate.



Consider time to set up

If it takes half an hour to set up the drum kit, can the drummer get there half an hour earlier?



Know what the targets are for each session

It is very beneficial if all members of the group know what you are aiming for in each rehearsal session. Having clear targets and discussing and reviewing these is immensely beneficial. Time is the golden commodity in rehearsals and if you don't know what you are working towards, much time can often be wasted noodling about or working on the working stuff.



Use a rehearsal schedule

This might seem a little formal but scheduling rehearsals and what will be covered in each is invaluable. This does not have to be a detailed list like a tightly organised practise schedule but at least sketch out what tunes you wish to cover in each rehearsal and give yourself some type of time scale. This will allow each member of the group time to plan learning their parts properly outside of rehearsals and everyone will know what is expected for each session. You will see the results quickly and rehearsal management will be much easier.

A schedule need not be set in stone, but it will help to organise your thoughts!

EXAMPLE REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

Johnny’s ‘covers’ band has been booked to play a 40th birthday party covering a range of tunes from the 1960’s through to the ‘90’s. The set is to include 16 songs and they have 8 weeks to learn the songs and prepare these for performance. As each band member has other commitments, they can only rehearse twice a week so time is tight. The following is an example of how the schedule might look.



Always allow time to ‘recap’ what you have already learned, to keep it fresh.

"A song is usually rehearsed enough to gig when you are just starting to hate the sound of it, but it’s all worth it when you perform the song with total confidence at a live gig in front of an audience." Mark Singleton

WEEK 1	Session 1	Sex Pistols - God Save The Queen Rolling Stones - Satisfaction
	Session 2	Bob Marley - No Woman No Cry The Kinks - Waterloo Sunset
WEEK 2	Session 1	Run DMC / Aerosmith - Walk This Way David Bowie - Star Man
	Session 2	Review 4 tunes to date
WEEK 3	Session 1	The Beatles - Help Pink Floyd - The Wall
	Session 2	Jimi Hendrix - Purple Haze Queen - Bohemian Rhapsody
WEEK 4	Session 1	Queen - Bohemian Rhapsody
WEEK 5	Session 1	Review 8 tunes to date
	Session 2	Stevie Wonder - Superstition Led Zeppelin - Whole Lotta Love
WEEK 6	Session 1	Rage Against The Machine - Know Your Enemy The Who - My generation
	Session 2	Review 4 recent tunes
WEEK 7	Session 1	The Fugees - Ready or Not, Abba - Dancing Queen
	Session 2	Devise a set list – set run through
WEEK 8	Session 1	Run through set – tweak any weak areas – record set for objective listen before next session
	Session 2	Full set run through
WEEK 9	(2 days before gig)	Full set run through – with stage set up and lights

DURING THE REHEARSAL



- Stay focused**
Don't mentally wander off, especially during the times in the rehearsal when your bit is not needed or the musicians are working on a specific part. Know when not to play. In a nutshell, DON'T NOODLE! There is nothing as unprofessional and generally irritating as a group member noodling on their instrument while you are working on a set part. Turn off your mobile phones!
- Use a structure chart, score or lead sheet**
When learning songs in the rehearsal room, original or a cover, you all need to be able to follow what is going on. If you're using music or written notes, use a music stand set at the right height to avoid tension and strains. If you are learning songs from a recording, have a copy of the CD and a CD player with you for reference. Look at the example structure chart on P34 - 35.
- Don't play too loudly**
Pardon?! Especially if you are rehearsing a lot, playing at excess volume can be an unnecessary health hazard. If you need to rehearse at a loud volume, use ear plugs.
- Ensure the group sound balance is right**
It is very important to be able to hear everyone in the rehearsal room. Make sure you are not playing louder than the quietest instrument. Rehearsals are very much about listening to the sound as a whole and where your instrument fits into it rather than listening to yourself exclusively.
- If there is a problem address it**
This may be a group member not playing their part correctly or the feel of a part is not up to scratch. Address the problem, don't ignore it. Admittedly this can be a challenging thing to do. Addressing difficulties without offending a sensitive musician comes with practice – diplomacy and tact are paramount!
- Work on tunes in small chunks**
Don't attempt to play the whole song all the way through with everybody playing all at once. There are no set rules here, some musicians like to start with the intro and build their way through the song, piece by piece. Wherever you start, work on small sections at a time with stripped down instruments, then add in the other parts one by one.
- Practice the hard bits in isolation**
The best approach is to loop these parts until they are right then stick them in the context of the whole song. When looping a part (playing it repeatedly – e.g. repeating an eight bar section over and over again) ensure that you do it "in time".
- Don't over rehearse**
You might think that this isn't possible but it is. If you spend 8 hours just running through the same set of songs you will definitely remove any magic or energy that may have been there in the first place and you'll be sick of the material.
- Leave the room tidy at the end of rehearsal**
Your mother would be proud! Keep the space clean and tidy. The smell of mouldy pies and cigarette butts is not attractive. Do make a conscious effort to keep the room well managed, organised, clean and tidy – this is much more conducive to a healthy and happy working environment.
- Last man out, turn out the light**
Ensure that all equipment is switched off and unplugged at the end of rehearsal. It will also help your equipment to last – leaving your PA turned on for 36 hours at a time will not be good for the circuitry.
- Enjoy it!!**
Rehearsing should be an enjoyable process. Making music is a great thing to be part of and don't lose sight of that!

EXAMPLE STRUCTURE CHART

1 WORK OUT THE DIFFERENT BITS

It is useful to first of all work out how many different bits there are in the song. This can be done by listening to the song and identifying the different parts that are in the tune e.g. Intro, verse, chorus, middle 8, guitar solo, bridge, interlude. What these parts are called is almost irrelevant, the important thing is to identify how many different bits there are and how many similar bits repeat. So for this example I have labelled the verse, chorus, middle 8 etc simply as A, B, C etc

Labelling these from left to right is an easy way of getting to grips with the overall structure.

Intro	A	B	A	B	C	D	A	B	A	B	C	D	E	F	C

The parts labelled are as follows **A**=keyboard riff bit, **B**= the verse, **C**= the stabs, **D**= the chorus, **E**= the guitar break (riff part – not the solo), **F**= the guitar solo

Once you know how many bits there are, what each bit consists of, you can then see more clearly how the song hangs together.

2 COUNT THE BARS

Having worked out the order of the bits, count how many bars each one lasts for.

Intro	A	B	A	B	C	D	A	B	A	B	C	D	E	F	C
8	8	8	4	8	4	8	10	8	4	8	4	16	16	16	8

3 COMPLETE THE DETAIL IN THE CHART

The final stage is to take the above structure and lay it out vertically, filling in what detail you feel is necessary to complete the structure. If you’re learning a ‘cover’ version, note the CD time as this will enable you to go straight to the relevant section in rehearsals.

Example structure chart Online Pharmacy – The Lovers

Intro	A	B	A	B	C	D	A	B	A	B	C	D	E	F	C
8	8	8	4	8	4	8	10	8	4	8	4	16	16	16	8

Intro:	8 Bars	Stabs (Bass, drums, keys)	0:00
Keys Riff:	8 Bars	Add Guitar, Main Riff on Keys	0:10
Verse 1:	8 Bars	Vocals Enter	0:19
Keys Riff:	4 Bars	No Vox	0:29
Verse 2:	8 Bars	Vocals Enter	0:35
Stabs:	4 Bars	No Vox (tight stabs – E - D)	0:44
Chorus 1:	8 Bars	All In (A - E - G - D)	0:48
Keys Riff:	2 Bars	Keys ONLY	0:58
	8 Bars	All In (No Vox)	1:01
Verse 3:	8 Bars	Vocals Enter	1:11
Keys Riff:	4 Bars		1:20
Verse 4:	8 Bars		1:25
Stabs:	4 Bars	No Vox (tight stabs – E - D)	1:35
Chorus 2:	16 Bars	Double Chorus	1:40
Guitar Riff:	4 Bars	Guitar ONLY	1:59
	4 Bars	Vox, Keys, Hi - Hats (Snare Roll On 4th Bar)	2:05
	8 Bars	Bass, Full Kit	2:10
Guitar Solo:	8 Bars	R’n’R Solo – keys counterpoint	2:19
	8 Bars	Vocals Enter	2:28
Outro:	8 Bars	Stabs (All stop dead on last beat)	2:38

WHAT TO WORK ON?

There is more to it than the technical performance – less experienced musicians could be forgiven for believing that rehearsal is just about everybody getting the right notes in the right order at the right time together. Other areas for attention include:

THE FEEL

There are a range of components that affect the feel of a tune including whether you are playing in front of, on or behind the beat (it helps if you are all pulling in the same direction). This will come with practice but is worthy of much consideration – try to experiment with the “feel” of the performance – musicians rely heavily on what a performance feels like including simple things like the amount of energy that is put into a performance.

THE DYNAMICS

This affects the ‘louds’ and ‘softs’ in performance. You will need to spend some time working on the contrast between the loud bits and the quiet bits in your songs and the balance between the two.

CHANGEOVERS

If there are any changeovers involved in your set work on these as part of a final technical run through to ensure they are smooth and don’t affect the flow of the performance.

THE PERFORMANCE

Work on the actual “performance” – present the group as closely as you will do in the gig itself. Image the image you project to your audience. Use eye contact to communicate with other members of the group. Be aware of your body language (especially when you are not playing – don’t look bored!) Close to gig day, run it exactly as you expect the final performance to be – if you make a mistake, play on – don’t stop. If another member of the group makes a mistake, don’t look at them and draw attention to it – you may well get away with it – be professional.

SONIC CONSIDERATIONS

Spend time developing your actual sound that you produce and that the band produces. Playing around with the EQ on the bass amp can produce a whole range of different sounds – try top find the one that works best with the overall sound of the group or band that you are working with. Spend time experimenting with different tones to get the sound you want.

➤ WORKBOOK 5 – RECORDING AND PRODUCTION – CHAPTER 5

THE SET OR THE MATERIAL YOU WILL PERFORM

- Classical musicians talk in terms of “concerts” and “programmes” whereas a pop / rock / jazz musician will refer to the “gig” and the “set”.
- **Don’t just put your songs in a random order.**
The run of the set is an opportunity to manipulate the dynamic of the whole performance. There are many things to consider when devising including the dynamic of the set. For example, you could open with a gentle song and gradually build on this as the set progresses. A great example of a growing set dynamic is the “Stop Making Sense” video by Talking Heads where David Byrne starts the gig with a beat box and an acoustic guitar. As the songs unfold he is joined by more and more musicians until eventually the full band are in full swing. This results in a gradual dynamic incline as the early parts of the set develop which adds to the anticipation, energy and excitement of the performance. The other option is to start with a full band, all guns blazing approach to “kick in” right from the off – it’s up to you and it depends on what impact you want to have and what you are hoping to create with the music you are playing. It also depends on the venue and function you are playing.
- **Consider the start, middle and end of your set.**
Can you blend the end of one song into the start of another so they are seamless? Also consider the middle of the set where it may drop a little in preparation for the end where you may want to peak and go out with a bang (saving room for the encore of course...).
- **Think about the keys of the songs.**
Do you want two songs in the same key and with a similar feel next to each other, or do you break them up?
- **Does anyone need to swap instruments or re-tune between certain songs?**
- **Have a song or two prepared for an encore** if you are lucky enough to get one (i.e. one or two songs you can play after the main set has finished).
- 💬 "Some venues specialize in specific genres of music. The venue may have a limit to a percentage of original songs they would like you to do." Mark Singleton

TIPS DJ REHEARSAL AND PREPARING A SET

TIP

- **Ensure the rehearsal set up is comfortable one.**
Crouching over decks on the floor of a bedroom doesn't do anybody any good. Avoid running over the same set every time. Try different mixes / routines and different styles of mixing.
- Be critical! If you want to improve you have to identify your weaknesses. **Observe other DJs and analyse their technical skills** comparing them with your own – you should never stop learning. Record your sets, listen back and judge. Be as objective as possible or ask your mates' opinions.
- **Get to know your music inside out.**
Don't always mix the music – listening is very important! You need to understand how the track's dynamics work and how the production sounds across the whole track.
- **Strengthen your fingers** for scratching techniques like "crabbing", wherever and whenever you can. Try using a square lighter as a substitute cross - fade knob.
- A "set" set in stone may sink like one. **Be prepared to improvise** as the audience generally pick up on excitement and spontaneity and not on over rehearsed and "tired" performances. If you do have "set pieces", (tracks that go so well together it would be a shame to separate them), treat these as landmarks in your performance, or supports from which the spans of your musical bridge can hang!
- **Have a clear idea of what the promoter and the crowd** (as this may differ!) are expecting from you musically – it's always good to know these parameters, even if you intend to ignore them!
- Once you are at the club and can **observe the crowd, decide on some strategy** for starting your set – for example, use a "landmark" set piece allowing you to settle in, gain confidence and even "sound check", or you may realise it is a crowd that will appreciate more of a warm up.

EVALUATING YOUR REHEARSALS

RECORD YOUR REHEARSAL
There is nothing like objectivity. What we think something sounds like and what it really sounds like can often be two different things. It is a great idea to record your rehearsals at various stages. This can help you identify what the band's performance really sounds like. It is also very useful if you are writing music in a group context – record it and then you can be objective about your progress.

VIDEO YOUR REHEARSAL
This is a step further than simply recording your rehearsal. If you video your rehearsal you can get a good idea of what the group looks like and how you present yourselves. This can produce some very surprising results and is worth a go!

GET YOUR MATES ROUND
Having your rehearsal room invaded by a bunch of mates can seem a little intimidating but having a dummy run through the programme (or "set") in front of some friends can help to provide focus and get you used to performing in front of others. This applies equally to all performing musicians from the classical quartet to the rock band.



CASE STUDY
PAUL HANLEY – PROFESSIONAL DRUMMER



Paul has worked as a professional drummer with internationally acclaimed indie bands since the 1980’s and has toured America, Australia, Europe, the UK and Ireland. He also recorded several albums combined with the usual promotional round of press, radio, TV etc.

photograph supplied courtesy of Paul Hanley



Paul’s tips

1 Punctuality

Nothing is more soul destroying than sitting in a rehearsal room waiting for one member of the band. This is especially frustrating if you are practising for upcoming gigs rather than writing. If it’s always the same person who is late it should be justifiably used as defence in a murder trial...

2 Motivation

Everyone should be equally committed to rehearsing. If you have no input in the song writing or arranging for the band, then rehearsing can be a nightmare. (Ringo Starr learned how to play chess to get him through the early stages of Sgt. Pepper.) If we need to practice the set (or change it around) then no time is wasted noodling riffs or half ideas. Conversely, if we are writing new material, then we don’t bother playing stuff we already know. It’s better, I think, to keep these (very different) activities separate. Everyone does a bit of homework, so others aren’t forced to wait while we practice things we could have done on our own.

3 Environment

I used to rehearse in the worst room it has ever been my misfortune to enter. The fact that we were paying for the privilege of spending time in a near - derelict death trap didn’t help. The room was accessed by either a small winding staircase or a lift which should have been pronounced unsafe by someone with a death wish. The original owners had obviously taken the sweeping brush with them when they left, as the floors were home to at least seventy years of human detritus and filth. As you can imagine for such a building, which at any time could also boast up to 7 working drummers, it didn’t smell too pretty. Most importantly, we had no storage facilities either, which meant that a large portion of the rehearsal was spent loading in, setting up, breaking down and loading out gear. It always meant that transport had to be arranged, as none of us drove.

Nowadays, we enjoy a purpose built rehearsal space. It’s bright, clean and electrically sound. It boasts a fully set-up drum kit and PA, which means we can begin rehearsing within 5 minutes of arriving. You might not be able to get all of these things, but I’d venture it’s worth spending a little more on rehearsal facilities to secure as many as you can. The luxury of running water in the toilets works wonders.

4 Time

3 hours, I would venture, is long enough for a good rehearsal. You can have at least 3 full run - throughs with time spare to iron out tricky bits. If you’re writing and haven’t got anywhere after 3 hours then it’s time to go home, I’d suggest.