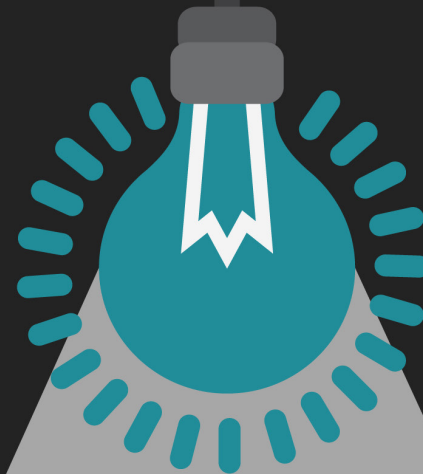




Constraint Exercises Workbook

by Michael Lake

In order to master any skill including improvisation, you must identify the fundamental or core skill required. Otherwise, you risk wasting time and effort on activities that don't advance proficiency in the skill. The tool for drilling down to that core skill is what we are calling Constraint Exercises.



Constraint Exercises strip away activities mask the core skill and prevent work to be done directly on that core skill.

One example provided in the video lesson regarded playing your instrument with steady solid time. Players tend to turn on the metronome and play over the clicks. To do so exclusively, however, risks two things: 1. that the irregular playing may be due to instrumental mechanics and not the player's sense of time, and 2. that simply by playing with the metronome on regularly spaced clicks (4 quarter notes, 8 eighth notes, etc.) the player's own internal "clock" may not be tested or strengthened since the metronome is providing the basic time.

By tapping or clapping to the beat, the instrument is constrained from the time-keeping, thus providing a more direct reflection of the player's sense of time. After all, poor time while playing the instrument with the metronome may be due to poor technique such as articulation and not a poor sense of time from the player.

Also, by playing exclusively with a steady click, the player's sense of time is not truly tested. By constraining clicks with a tool like the Maniacal Metronome or the Missing Bar exercises, the player is challenged to make their own steady time which strengthens their core skill of good time.

How to use this workbook

The point of this workbook is to develop within you the skill to strip away aspects of playing in order to find and work on the core skill. If you are struggling with improvising over a jazz tune, you must develop the ability to find the chords, bars, or section over which you struggle. Then build the means to practice just that chord, bar, or section, just as we did with the four bars of All The Things You Are in the video lesson.

This workbook contains three sections for you to identify a challenge. Within each section or challenge, write down steps you could take beginning from the simplest, in order to practice the fundamental skill you've identified that needs improvement.

As you think about the steps, always ask yourself, can I break this down further? Remember what Michael said in the lesson about singing being a constraint in itself. Singing is the ultimate constraint since you're constraining the instrument along with all the physical challenges that come with playing it.

The worksheet on page three is a completed example for you.

Name of challenge I wish to work on: Playing better over C blues changes

Describe in detail the challenge: Even though I can play blues pretty well in the keys of F and Bb, I struggle with C. I have to play C jam blues in an upcoming concert.

What is the core skill required for mastery of this challenge? More easily playing over the C7 chord

What constraint exercise can you do first to strengthen the core skill? Arpeggiate up and down over the C13 chord

What constraint exercise can you do next to strengthen the core skill? Play the basic C blues progression on piano

What constraint exercise can you do next to strengthen the core skill? Practice over a recorded loop of a C7 chord

What will confirm that you've improved on the challenge? Play over C jam blues and hear if I still sound weak on the C7 chord.

Name of #1 challenge I wish to work on: _____

Describe in detail the challenge: _____

What is the core skill required
for mastery of this challenge? _____

What constraint exercise can you
do first to strengthen the core skill? _____

What constraint exercise can you
do next to strengthen the core skill? _____

What constraint exercise can you
do next to strengthen the core skill? _____

What will confirm that you've
improved on the challenge? _____

Name of #2 challenge I wish to work on: _____

Describe in detail the challenge: _____

What is the core skill required
for mastery of this challenge? _____

What constraint exercise can you
do first to strengthen the core skill? _____

What constraint exercise can you
do next to strengthen the core skill? _____

What constraint exercise can you
do next to strengthen the core skill? _____

What will confirm that you've
improved on the challenge? _____

Name of #3 challenge I wish to work on: _____

Describe in detail the challenge: _____

What is the core skill required
for mastery of this challenge? _____

What constraint exercise can you
do first to strengthen the core skill? _____

What constraint exercise can you
do next to strengthen the core skill? _____

What constraint exercise can you
do next to strengthen the core skill? _____

What will confirm that you've
improved on the challenge? _____
