

INDEPENDENT LEARNING

The pomodoro technique involves the following stages:

- **Identify a pomodoro:** identify a specific task to be completed e.g. practising a skill. Example: 'proof-read the article I need to submit on Monday', or 'practise the top line melody to "On Green Dolphin Street" to a metronome, starting at 50% of the tempo I need to perform it live'.
- **Complete the pomodoro:** set a timer for 25 minutes, and engage in the task or practise the skill for that period, without distractions.
- **Record your progress:** after 25 minutes, stop working. Record your progress. Note areas in need of improvement.
- **Take a break:** take a 5-minute break, where you take your mind off your work (grab a coffee, have a bite to eat, stretch, go for a walk, or just relax).
- **Repeat steps 2-4 twice, followed by steps 2-3 once:** the technique involves four blocks of 25-minute pomodoros followed by 5-minute breaks, and on the fourth time through, taking a longer break; so:
- **Take a longer break:** after the fourth pomodoro, take a longer break, of 15-30 minutes. As with the shorter breaks, use this time to take your mind off your work.

The above process can be repeated for further rounds.

The pomodoro technique can be undertaken without any teaching or assistance from others. This is important for reaching expertise as a result of deliberate practice. Expertise as a result of deliberate practice requires 'a well-informed teacher to guide you through deliberate practice and help you learn how to teach yourself. You learn how to teach yourself so you can learn and improve *independently*, which has the benefit that you can continue to make progress in the absence of your teacher. Students need, extensive, successful, independent practice in order for skills and knowledge to become automatic. When you reach this stage, a learner no longer requires guidance, instruction or assistance to complete the tasks or to practise the skill in question, or to recall prior learning in that area.



SAINT NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL

Pomodoro **Don't Just Learn, Overlearn** **Independent Learning**

As teachers our aim is to help students reach the stage where they have gained mastery over particular tasks and skills, engage in them independently, and understand what they need to do to reach expertise.

If it takes thousands of hours to reach expertise over a task or skill, teachers should not be expected to get their students to achieve expertise. The aim should be to help students along the path towards it. One of a teacher's roles is to help students reach the stage where they can learn and practise independently. This is part of the learning process towards expertise.

O Jesus through the most pure heart of Mary, I offer thee all my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of Thy divine heart and particularly for the intentions of Our Holy Father, the Pope.

DELIBERATE PRACTICE

Learning to the point where a skill becomes automatic enables a learner to recall information from long-term memory effortlessly, without using much working memory. Our working memory is small. By using less of it to recall prior learning, we are in a better position to learn new things and engage in problem-solving in the area where we have made recalling knowledge automatic and our skills fluent.

Hours of practice

The best way to become an expert is through practice – hours of practice. The more the practice, the better the performance. A specific amount is given by Malcolm Gladwell: his ‘10,000-hour rule’ holds that 10,000 hours of deliberate practice are required to reach top-level performance ability. Whatever the amount, the consensus is that to master a skill, extensive practice is required, and ‘the best way’, is through deliberate practice; systematic, effortful, highly focused, intentional engagement, goal-oriented, aiming at improving performance.

Deliberate practice involves:

- **Purpose:** aim to improve your performance beyond its current level.
- **Specificity:** break down the task to be achieved or the skill to be gained into smaller tasks or practices, each of which constitutes a step along the path towards expertise.
- **Identification:** identify areas where specific improvements and practice are needed.
- **Focus:** concentrate and avoid distractions; become fully absorbed in the task or skill you are aiming to master.
- **Systematization:** focus on the areas where improvement is needed as part of a procedure towards expertise.
- **Goals:** make your practice goal-oriented, focusing on achieving incremental goals situated just outside your comfort zone, ultimately aimed at improving performance.
- **Repetition:** regularly rehearse areas in need of improvement until mastery and a specific goal is achieved, before moving to the next goal.
- **Resilience:** as a consequence of trying to do things you cannot yet do, deliberate practice will involve regular failure and so will require bouncing back to persevere towards expertise.

POMODORO

- **Feedback:** you need regular feedback, ideally from an expert, on where improvement is needed and how improvement should be made.
- **Self-reflection:** you should be regularly self-assessing your own performance and reflecting on areas where improvement is needed.
- **Effort:** deliberate practice involves sustained effort, because you are outside your comfort zone; if it feels easy, little effort is required.
- **Time:** expertise requires thousands of hours of deliberate practice.
- **Coaching:** by an excellent teacher

To contrast deliberate with non-deliberate practice, the latter might involve:

1. mindlessly repeating tasks (rather than involving focused attention);
2. a feeling of ease, due to lack of effort (which could imply that automaticity has already been attained);
3. staying within your comfort zone (rather than stretching yourself);
4. a lack of specific goals or purposes;
5. practising what is already known or understood well, rather than areas in need of improvement

The ‘**pomodoro technique**’ is one method that can be used effectively for ‘deliberate practising’ some tasks and skills. This is a time management technique where a task is broken down into shorter tasks spaced over timed intervals, undertaken for specific blocks of time with short breaks in-between. Each block is called a ‘pomodoro’, the Italian word for ‘tomato’, after the tomato-shaped kitchen timer, because such a timer was said to have been used by the creator of the technique in its development – entrepreneur, developer and author [Francesco Cirillo](#). He developed the technique while he was a university student looking for ways to work more productively. The technique is analogous to approaching a task via short sprints with breaks, rather than a long-distance run.