

## ***Etudes for Ease***

As musicians, we are familiar with etudes. We practice etudes for the purpose of studying and developing a particular skill or technique.

Here are two simple etudes for the practice of finding ease, poise, balance, relaxation. It is a way of pressing the “reset” button for your nervous system. These etudes are most effective if practiced several times a day. The effect of noticing ease is cumulative, just as tension is cumulative when we put our focus on it.

### **Etude #1: Constructive Thinking: Priming for Ease**

Think of a word, a phrase, an image, or an experience which gives you a sense of calm, happiness, fulfillment, ease, peace, joy, poise. Allow yourself to relax into the thought.

We will experiment with “constructive thinking” – in other words, using a thought which invokes relaxation and inner peace for you. It will become the primer for easy and poised movement, like the primer for a pump.

What comes to mind when you ask yourself the question: “where do I feel ease in my body?” or “where is an easy place?”

Explore the shift in your mental and physical energy with the following experiment:

Count from 1 to 4: on each count, ask yourself where you notice tension  
Count from 5 to 8: on each count, ask yourself where you notice ease  
Count from 9 to 12: on each count, ask yourself where you notice tension  
Count from 13 to 16: on each count, ask yourself where you notice ease

Did you notice a shift between the sets? What changed? Did you notice that when you pay attention to tension, the tension increases? The same is true when you pay attention to ease, however we are not well practiced in this. We are VERY GOOD at paying attention to tension.

Play around with this etude, keeping in mind that you can allow ease to be as available and accessible in your thoughts as is tension. After a bit of practice, you might be surprised at how often your constructive thinking – the priming of your ease – will enter your thoughts and activities throughout the day!

## Etude #2: The pause between stimulus and response

### 1. The Exploration

Choose a simple activity – one which you do many times each day. Avoid complicated activities that require a sophisticated skill set, to which you attach an important end-gain or outcome. For example, if you are a pianist, do not choose an activity associated with playing the piano. If you are a computer programmer, do not include the computer in this exploration.

Examples might be: reaching for something (a cup of coffee, your phone, a pen, your glasses, etc.), opening a window, brushing your hair, getting into or out of a chair, or simply raising an arm and lowering it.

### 2. The Pause

As you begin to move into your chosen activity. *Pause*. Here in the pause is the quiet resting place between a stimulus (your intention to do the activity) and your response (doing the activity).

In the pause, ask this question:  
*Where in my body do I notice tension?*

Continue into your activity and notice anything there is to notice about the movement. Did you notice effort? Did you feel tightening in your neck and shoulders? Any change in your breathing?

### 3. The Constructive Thinking

Again, begin to move into your activity. *Pause*.

In the pause, ask this question:  
*Where in my body do I notice ease?*

Continue into your activity and notice anything there is to notice about the movement. Was this different from the first time? Did you feel more centered, calm, lighter?

In the resting place between a stimulus and its response, there exists a moment of opportunity for constructive thinking. By simply asking the question: “where is there a little bit of ease?” we create a shift and the potential for easier movement in the response. Repeat the three steps above with a few different activities and enjoy the exploration.