

How To Be A Great Piper On Autopilot

What if you could play your bagpipes without ever worrying about tuning or technique again? How much faster could you improve if you didn't have to think about every little step in your bagpipe practice? Couldn't you focus on being creative in your expression, rather than getting hung up on technicalities?

If world-champion masters had to think about the exact steps they needed to make to tune their drones properly each time they reached up to do it, what impact do you think that would have on their musical vision? What if they had to re-hemp their pipes each day? Or if they never dried their pipes after playing?

These are all examples of systems that these world-leading players have repeated so many times that they're now unconsciously competent – they don't even have to think about them, because they're so automatic and routine.

Systems automate fundamental skills, making them second nature. Just like driving, where pressing pedals and steering become automatic, bagpipe systems can free your brain to focus on musical nuances. That's because your brain is like a computer. By breaking complex tasks into smaller chunks and practicing them repeatedly, your brain automates them, freeing up mental space for creativity.

Improving a system also creates secondary benefits. For example, by focusing first on rhythm and then on melody notes, you gradually free up mental resources to decode written music faster. Constant exposure makes it second nature. Increasing your playing speed also takes time. Just as athletes follow a structured training program to improve performance, you need a methodical approach to build your tempo.

Believe you don't have a good ear for tuning? Think again. With enough practice and the right system, anyone can improve their tuning skills. It's about repetition and gradually honing your ability to detect and adjust.

And if you hit a plateau? Always go back to basics. Break down and rebuild your tunes, focusing on rhythm, melody, and posture. This method revitalizes your music, ensuring it's competition-ready.

By mastering systems, you're not just learning to play the bagpipes – you're setting yourself up for true self-expression and musical creativity.

Andrew Douglas

Co-founder

Dojo University