



DOJO UNIVERSITY

Music, not just bagpipes.

Andrew Douglas, Co-founder of Dojo University, writes:

Last year, I had two hours of material to learn for the Inveraray and District Pipe Band concert. I didn't have much time to get it all locked away and memorized... so how did I do it?

The answer is as simple as it might seem infuriating – I just did it. I started playing through the tunes – sight-reading, playing along with recordings, adding recordings to my playlist so I'd absorb them through immersion... In essence – I ate the elephant. I made small, bite-sized actions, on a very regular basis, and within a very short amount of time, I'd started to learn the tunes without really noticing.

Now, you may think, "Oh, but you're a professional piper, of course it's easy for you." But I assure you, from seeing thousands of students at all levels successfully internalize this approach over decades of teaching, that the same process applies to every player, no matter their level or experience.

Students and teachers alike find memorization infuriating – but for two different reasons. For students, it's often a case of, "How can I memorize tunes faster?" For (good) teachers, it's basically the opposite: "Just trust the process and memorization will be a natural by-product."

Memorization of the tune shouldn't really be about just committing a tune to memory. It should be about actually, truly learning the material well. The tune itself should become automated and part of your unconsciously competent repertoire – so that you can play it near-perfectly even if you're nervous, distracted or exhausted.

Think about your national anthem – did you sit down to attempt to memorize it? I bet you didn't. I bet it just happened! Well, maybe you had to learn the words very early on at school, but I'll bet you'd mostly internalized them before then, or at the very least, you were familiar with the melody and most of the lyrics.

Immersion, exposure, constant exploration, and ongoing excitement about piping and piping tunes – that's the real way to memorize.

Enjoy the process! Integrate important tunes into your daily routine – play them on repeat on your playlist during work breaks, while you're doing the dishes, or when you're walking the dog – and you'll reap the rewards.