

## How to Become a Rotten Piper



I'm sure there's lots of books, tutorials and web pages out there on how to become a good bagpiper. So I'm going to offer some advice on how to become a rotten piper.

**Go it alone.** They say it takes "seven years and seven generations" to become a true piper. Well, the heck with that. An instructor will correct all your mistakes that you aren't aware of. We don't want that. And bad habits will sneak in over time so if you're forced into getting a teacher, at least only go for a short time . . . definitely no more than is required to learn all the basic embellishments.

**Grip the practice chanter tightly.** You don't want to be able to lift your fingers quickly, so hold your fingers down as hard as you can. Walk around with your PC, don't cheat and support it on something so you can have a very light grip. If you are lucky you can get carpal tunnel syndrome and be really messed up.

**Play embellishments really quickly and move your fingers as little as possible.** Play as fast as you can, we're not looking for perfection here. Overlap those notes and if you barely lift your fingers, the note may become entirely inaudible later on. That'd be wonderful!

**Practice once a week or even better once a month.** The last thing you want to do is train your fingers. Spend all your time on the computer reading piping stuff instead! And if you're stuck having a teacher, he'll understand if you don't practice, just tell him you had more important things to do. Teachers *like* to review things over and over and over. Heck, they wouldn't be teaching if they didn't like to feel superior . . . you wouldn't want to hurt his feelings, right?

**Practice as short as possible.** Bah, stamina is for good pipers! Heck, why tire yourself out? No more than a few minutes, tops. If you *have* to practice for a long time, make sure to practice beyond the point where you can play well, then you can really train those neurons with bad form!

**Skip those boring exercises.** If you were dumb enough to get an instructor, he'd tell you to practice doubling scales, grip scales, taorluath scales, scales, scales, scales! Boring! You took up pipes to look cool, not play boring scales. Might as well sniff rotten fish.

**Going to lessons? Drink up!** Everyone knows that you play better when you can relax, right? What's more relaxing than a few beers or some shots? Maybe something mind-altering you bought on the corner from that dude out on parole! If you are relaxed enough, everything they teach you will go in one ear and out the other—perfect! But I told you not to get an instructor anyway, remember?

**Forget the practice chanter, jump right on the big pipes!** The PC is for wimps that can't hack it on the real pipes. World level pipers keep that PC in their pipe cases just for show.

**Get a "gut buster" reed.** One great way to lose concentration is to play a super hard chanter reed. You'll be turning purple, huffing and puffing, and as an extra bonus you'll probably tighten up your whole body—including your fingers! And definitely don't cork up any of your drones to make playing a new reed easier. That's for sissies.

**Curl those fingers!** Bah, instructors talk about keeping your fingers pretty straight, like levers. Is that natural? Do you type with your knuckles? No! Play with your fingertips.

**Don't focus when you practice.** There's a saying "practice doesn't make perfect, it makes permanent!" Well, if you are going to risk wrecking your naturally bad form by practicing, at least don't listen to what your gracenotes and embellishments sound like. That way, if you are lucky, you can ingrain some rotten technique during all those practice hours.

**Don't use a metronome.** All human beings are born with a absolutely perfect internal clock that doesn't speed up or slow down, what do you need one of those tick-tock things for? Save your money. And heck, if you're off the beat, who's going to notice?

**Don't play in front of a mirror or videotape yourself.** Just play naturally. If you look in front of a mirror you may see that your "E" finger is raising too high when you lift it and may want to correct it. Fight the urge.

**Never perform for an audience.** The more freaked out you get when you finally play in front of a group, the better! If you have to play in front of a group, do it early on for the general public—definitely not your family and don't wait until some instructor messes up your natural form. It's not how you sound anyway, it's how you look. Just buy one of those tall fuzzy hats, they'll think you're cool.

**Don't record yourself.** Like an instructor, you hear lots of things to correct when you listen objectively. Forget that!

**Get your pipes on eBay for cheap!** What a rip off! Why pay \$1,000 for a set of pipes, when you can buy a set of "genuine great highland bagpipes" for \$100 on eBay? By now, those Pakistani pipemakers know their stuff! So what if it's made from mystery wood, African Blackwood is overrated! Wood all sounds the same the way you are playing it anyway!

**Don't tune your drones.** We're not shooting for that crystal pool of beautifully tuned sound. If you're lucky you can turn off a bunch of listeners. Maybe they'll hate the bagpipes forever! Now we're talkin'!

**Start with really hard tunes.** There's nothing like starting at the top! Only school children play easy tunes. Pick tunes with crunluath a machs and superluaths back-to-back. Man, that'll sound like trash.

Of course, this is all tongue-in-cheek. Think "Oscar the Grouch." No one *wants* to be a bad piper—it just happens sometimes. If you do the *opposite* of the above advice, you'll be on the road to becoming a *good* piper.