

Sonic Anchoring: A Practical Guide

Practicing Sonic Anchoring

Sonic Anchoring is a powerful technique for training your attention.

As with all the techniques in the program, the goal is to make this practice second nature, so that it becomes automatic.

Learning about Sonic Anchoring is not the same as being able to do it. You would never learn a D chord by reading about finger placement and then trying it for the first time at a jam session. You train your brain by practicing it hundreds of times until your fingers just go there. The chord has to become part of you before you can use it.

We can train our attention in the same way, so that we automatically focus on what helps us perform well. And Sonic Anchoring is how we do this for music.

The most common mistake people make with a technique like this is hearing about it and thinking, "Great, I will try that at my next performance." That's like waiting till your first performance to try a D chord.

So, for it to work, it needs to be a regular part of your practice sessions. Over days and weeks of consistent use, it stops being a technique you remember to do and starts being a habitual part of how you play.

What It Is

Sonic Anchoring is a way of directing your attention to a specific external target while you play. Instead of letting the Impostor fill your attention with thoughts about you ("How am I doing? Was that clean? Did they notice?"), you anchor it to something other than you.

This works because your attentional system can only focus on one thing at a time. You cannot simultaneously listen to the resonance of your instrument and micromanage your finger placement. The external target gives the Impostor a task so that the Genius can operate without interference.

The Four Anchor Points

You have four options, organized from closest to your body to furthest away.

ANCHOR #1: Instrument Feel

Focus on the tactile feedback from your instrument like the vibration of the body under the bridge, the resistance of the strings under your picks or fingers, the texture of the neck against your hand.

This can be good for technically demanding passages where you want to stay physically connected without thinking analytically. String players and banjo players often respond well to this anchor because there is so much tactile information available.

ANCHOR #2: Sound

Focus on the actual sound you are producing. The tone, overtones, sustain, resonance.

If you're playing in a group, this can be focusing on the collective sound.

This is the most universal anchor.

ANCHOR #3: Spatial Projection

Focus on where the sound is going. Direct your sound to a specific point in the room, just as you would try to direct your speaking voice to a particular person. It could be a particular part of the room or an actual person.

This anchor naturally pulls your attention outward and away from your body. Singers do this instinctively, and research shows that vocal quality improves the further the singer projects. The same principle applies to any instrument.

ANCHOR #4: Musical Intention

Music is about the transfer of emotion. Focus on what you want the listener to feel. Try to feel that emotion yourself as you play.

This is the furthest anchor from your body and the most powerful one. When you focus on giving something to the listener, self-consciousness tends to dissolve on

its own. Here, you are redirecting your attention to why you started making music to begin with.

How to Find Your Primary Anchor (plus notebook entries)

This week, start using Sonic Anchoring deliberately during your normal practice time. It's best to use on tunes and pieces you already know fairly well. These are the ones where the Genius should be running the show.

The goal this week is exploration. You are trying all four anchors to find which ones work best for you on your instrument, in your playing context, with your particular brain.

Here is how to approach it:

Pick one anchor per practice session. Before you start playing, set the anchor deliberately. Say your cue word (more on this below). Then play a tune you know well and notice what happens. When the Impostor pulls you off the anchor, notice that, redirect, and continue.

After each session, write down three things in your notebook:

1. **Which anchor did I use?**
2. **How absorbed did I feel? (1 to 10)** Absorption means you were in the music, not watching yourself play. A high number means time passed without you noticing. A low number means you were aware of yourself the whole time.
3. **What pulled me off?** What did the Impostor say or do? Was it evaluating a note? Worrying about an upcoming passage? Monitoring your hand position? This tells you what the Impostor's favorite move is with this anchor.

(By the end of the week, you will have tried each anchor at least once and you will have a clear picture of which one produced the highest absorption. That is your primary anchor. You may also notice that a different anchor worked well in a different context, like Instrument Feel during a fast passage and Sound during a slow one. That becomes your secondary.

The Redirect Pattern

Sonic Anchoring is not about eliminating the Impostor's voice. It is about noticing when it has pulled you off the anchor and returning.

The pattern is simple:

Set anchor → Play → Notice drift → Redirect → Continue

The redirect is the whole practice.

Every time you notice the Impostor has pulled your attention inward and you return to the anchor, you are strengthening the neural pathway that keeps the Genius in control.

So don't think of noticing and returning as a failure. It is a brain-changing rep.

Over time, with consistent practice, the anchor becomes your default mode. You will not have to think about anchoring because external focus will be where your attention naturally goes.

Your Anchor Cue

Choose a short word or phrase that immediately directs your attention to your primary anchor. You will use this cue before every performance from here forward, as the final step before you begin playing.

Examples:

- For Instrument Feel: "Feel the strings" "Feel the vibration."
- For Sound: "Listen." "Hear the tone."
- For Spatial Projection: "Fill the room." "Send it out." "Back wall."
- For Musical Intention: "Play the emotion" "Connect"

Common Questions

What if my mind keeps drifting back to self-monitoring?

That is normal, especially at first. The Impostor has had years of practice pulling your attention inward. You are building a new habit. Each redirect is progress. If you notice drift ten times in a three-minute piece and redirect each time, that was a great session. Ten reps.

Can I switch between anchors during a performance?

Yes. Different moments may call for different anchors. You might use Instrument Feel during a technically demanding passage, shift to Sound during a melodic section, and move to Spatial Projection when you want to connect with the room. The important thing is that your attention is always on an external target, not on self-monitoring.

What about when I am playing something I do not know very well?

Sonic Anchoring works best with well-learned material because the Genius needs to be capable of running the skill automatically. If you are still in the learning phase with a piece, some conscious attention to mechanics is appropriate. That is not the Impostor. That is deliberate practice. The Impostor shows up when you consciously monitor skills you have already automated.