

The Counterpoint Club

A Chamber Music Podcast

Opus 4, Episode 1 : “The Counterpoint Coven”

Exploring Extended Techniques

What are extended techniques?

Extended technique is a broad term for creating sounds on your instrument other than the primary method that is usually used. Often these sounds are non-traditional and can be quite unexpected.

Each instrument (including voice!) has its own set of extended techniques. There are far too many for each individual instrument to list and describe here. This worksheet instead provides some tips on how to research extended techniques and find repertoire that uses them. Be warned, this can be quite the rabbit hole to fall into, there are so many fascinating sounds to discover and incredible examples of composers using them!

Tip No. 1 – Start searching.

Wikipedia and Google are your friends. [This Wikipedia article](#) is a great starting point in your research. There are some general explanations, definitions, and examples of composers who used extended techniques. You will also find a helpful (though certainly not all inclusive) list of extended techniques organized by instrument family, with links to more information to continue your research. After you find something that interests you, do a web search for that term and your instrument (i.e. “cello seagull harmonic effect”). This will lead you to...

Tip No. 2 – Listen.

At this point, your research should start to give you some specific composers and specific repertoire that use extended techniques. Look for recordings so you can hear what the effects sound like in the context of a piece. YouTube can be especially helpful here, as sometimes it's easiest to learn how to execute an extended technique by watching someone else do it.

Tip No. 3 – Find a score.

This can be tricky and potentially expensive. While the vast majority of repertoire that uses extended techniques is contemporary, there are some fantastic examples from every era. However, most of the repertoire you find will be written by composers who are living, so you'll need to purchase a score or perhaps find it in a local university's music library.

Tip No. 4 – Read the notes.

Not the literal notes, but the performance notes about the piece at the beginning. Many composers invent their own extended techniques and/or their own notation for the extended techniques. As these techniques are not always standardized, the notation for them isn't always standardized either. Most composers will give you some performance notes about what various symbols mean and how to interpret them. Be aware, some symbols used to notate extended techniques look as different as they sound.



Tip No. 5 – Ask.

Get help (as needed). Using the method here, do your best to figure out the extended technique as both described and notated by the composer. If something really isn't working for you, you can always reach out to musicians you saw in Tip No. 2 or even the composer themselves! Many musicians and composers are happy to give a little extra advice on how to better execute a particularly tricky extended technique.

Tip No. 6 – Perform.

Get out there and show off your new extended technique skills! Be ready to share with your friends and colleagues, especially those who you may inspire to start this journey into extended techniques for themselves. Audiences are often fascinated by these unexpected sounds. If you really commit to them and their music effect and intent, your audience will be entranced. After your performance, everyone will ask questions about that really awesome sound they had no idea your instrument could make!

