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| **White Belt: Level 1 Guitar Lessons** | | |
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| |  | | --- | | The Essence and Importance of Flow | | Listening to music, we hardly notice how music flows from one measure or from one phrase or section to the next. But playing flowing music requires many months of study and training. Developing timing and flow cannot be rushed any more in music than in learning a new language. It takes time, effort, practice, trials, errors and reinforcement and celebration of successes. How Listening is Different than Playing A basic understanding of the mental and emotional processes involved in both listening and playing can help us better understand how they are different, and how we can take better control over these processes in developing our own skills of timing and flow.  Whether listening or playing, we will make an important assumption that the language being played is comprehended by both the listener and the performer. There is at least substantial commonality in the vocabulary and structure shared by each. Listening Flow When listening to music, the phrases played a few seconds before linger or "ring" in our short term memory, suspended there until we can complete the phrase, or thought. At that time a meaning is associated with the completed thought as we interpreted it and an emotion of some kind is evoked.  So in listening, the basic linear flow is:   1. Understand the context or topic of what is being played 2. Combine notes from the phrase as they happen until a phrase is signaled to have ended 3. Interpret the phrase to give it meaning within the context 4. Apply a meaning and emotional response to the interpreted phrase   Familiarity with a topic, song or style, or familiarity with the performer can allow us to anticipate accurately in many cases what might be played next. However, when listening to unfamiliar material or to a new performer, this is the basic process, and there is a small but notable time lag between each of these steps. Playing Flow Playing is much more difficult than listening, most obviously because there are more processes involved, and the process is circular, rather than linear. So, there is potentially more that can go wrong within the overall process, and more areas over which to gain control or mastery. Playing from Memory Playing a rehearsed song from memory where you've had a chance to work out the bugs is a matter of hearing the end of the song from the beginning, and within the song, hearing the next phrase while the current phrase is being expressed from your instrument. Mental focus should always be on the next measure or phrase, while the execution of the current measure or phrase is handled at an autonomous or physical level. Here is the process:   1. In a state of comfort and confidence, having rehearsed thoroughly you can hear the entire song in your head, and see and feel your hands playing all the notes even before you begin to play the first note 2. You buffer the first several measures or the first phrase in your mind, hearing it before you play it 3. While your hands are playing the notes in your mind's ear, your long-term memory is buffering the next phrase into your mind's ear, continually staying ahead of what is being played physically 4. Hear yourself playing, not with a mind to change what you play, but how it is being expressed (tempo, volume, tone, etc.) 5. Evaluate the audience's response, and make expressive adjustments accordingly 6. Return to the third step  Improvising Improvising is even more complex, but by controlling some of the macro variables, like playing within a familiar context will help the performer stay in control of the other more fluid variables. Here is the basic process:   1. In a state of comfort and confidence, having learned the boundaries of the context in which you will play, you come prepared with rough ideas of what will be spoken within that context, or how far outside of the context you will stray 2. Begin with an idea or an emotion, within the context or topic 3. Evaluate options for how to express that idea or emotion (prior experience helps shorten this phase) 4. Choose from among the options (usually leaning towards what has worked in the past) 5. Execute the chosen option on your instrument, using certain expressive options or punctuation available to you 6. Hear yourself speaking or playing your instrument 7. Evaluate yourself speaking or playing 8. Evaluate your audience's response 9. Return to the first step  Boiling It All Down So whenever you play, whether from memory or improvising, you only really have to be in control of three things:   * The current chord and its scale or mode (handled autonomously) * The next chord with its scale or mode (handled consciously by the mind's ear) * The transition between the current and the next chord with its scale or mode (handled autonomously)   We can further boil it down to the notion of "hearing ahead". Always keep your mind's ear primed with what is going to be played next. If while practicing you find yourself stopped because you don't know what's next, don't blame your hands. Start by fixing the process of flowing sound into your mind's ear.  If you're learning to read music, then you have to learn read ahead with your eyes a measure or two before the sound is expressed from your instrument. If your eyes stall on the current measure, your playing flow will be interrupted. Other Practical Examples In all martial arts styles, we study the flow and transfer of energy while both meditating and while performing forms and while sparring. The mind's eye in every case is seeing the next move, while contemplating how to transfer energy from one position to the next. If there is an interruption in the flow or a loss of balance or power, the striking hands or feet are usually not the root of the problem, it is an interruption in the flow of energy from the previous position or stance.  In juggling three balls, one becomes unaware of the individual balls, but gains a sense of the space occupied by the balls as a set, and the transfer of energy and between the balls in the set. For each ball, the throwing hand autonomously tosses the ball into the air in a trajectory learned through experience to come down near the other hand. The mental focus is always on the catching hand, and getting it into a position to catch the falling ball. Meanwhile, there is a rhythmic droning of 1 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 3... felt throughout the entire body.  Though these examples are not musical, they reinforce the concepts discussed here, and provide useful contrasts. How to Develop Flow in Playing Flow is developed through proper practice of the pieces you want to play. Start by framing the idea, and then adding detail later. Know the changing chord centers as they progress the song. Add detail as you go, such as melody and fingering. Practice sticky spots more than the smooth spots, then play the whole piece.  In spots where you cannot hear or picture what is coming next, rehearse this in your mind before your fingers hit the strings. Once you have mental and aural clarity, then address the strings with your fingers.  For long, difficult passages start with single measures, then build up to 2, then 4, then 8, then 16. I would also suggest learning these measures from the back of the piece to the front, as suggested by David Russell. This way your mind has exponential exposure to and clarity of later measures in the piece, which breeds comfort and confidence. | |
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| Your Attention Channels |
| This lesson gives some ideas that help to boost concentration. By gaining total control over our ability to concentrate, we open the physical, mental and physical channels that allow music to flow freely.  Playing an instrument is hard. Playing an instrument well is very hard, and requires a great investment. Why not invest some time in learning how to really concentrate, and open up the creative channels between your ear, your fingers and your heart? Otherwise, without the ability to concentrate and focus we are doomed to mediocrity at best, and constant disappointment at worst.  Rather than trying harder to concentrate, why not identify and remove distractions? Let's group these distractions into two broad categories: external and internal distractions. External Distractions External distractions are those distractions outside of us. The TV is an absolute killer of concentration... turn it off. You can't play while working your day job, changing a diaper or driving, so you have to make time in between these other necessary activities to play guitar with full attention. Make quality time early morning or at night when winding down to play. Internal Distractions Now that you have made quality time to practice and eliminated unnecessary external distractions, we turn our attention to eliminating internal distractions, or are those that go on in our minds and and steal creative energy away from your purest musical intent.  Before you can eliminate the excess noise in your head, you first have to identify and isolate each signal and assign each signal to its own channel, just like the channels on a multi-track mixer. In no particular order, here are 16 of some of the common signals I hear on my neural channels, which must be controlled:   * Track 1: What I was doing before I sat down to play * Track 2: What I need to do after I'm done playing * Track 3: What my left hand is doing right now * Track 4: What my left hand is going to do next * Track 5: What song to play next * Track 6: How well my right hand is keeping time * Track 7: That tone I'm trying to get * Track 8: Audience's interested in my playing * Track 9: What I want to say musically * Track 10: Attacking that troublesome stretchy chord without losing the beat * Track 11: My options for muting the strings and rebounding from mistakes * Track 12: What the rest of the band is doing in the moment * Track 13: The self applause for that really cool voicing I just love to play * Track 14: That fly in the room * Track 15: The self loathing for the mistake I just made * Track 16: I wish I could afford that new Taylor guitar   Now that I've identified each source of noise, I have full control over each channel discretely and separately. Those channels that are positive and reinforcing my musical intentions I can amplify separately and discretely, while those channels that are negative and distracting, I can switch off entirely.  If you think this visualization is a bit hokey, then at least give it a try before you dismiss it. You'll be amazed at what is really going on in your head when you truly listen to yourself think. By strongly visualizing your control over both distracting channels positive channels in this way, you gain remarkable control over your thoughts in any situation, you spend more time "in the zone" and years of mediocrity and frustration melt off your total experience. |

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| Rhythm Melody Harmony: The Basis of All Theory |
| At the heart of every lesson and every practice session there should be an   awareness of three vital and essential forces in all music. Learning how to manipulate these forces will give your music and performances tremendous depth, clarity and power.  **[Rhythm, Melody and Harmony](http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/Theory.php?subaction=showfull&id=1082586412&archive=&start_from=&ucat=3&)At the center of all music there are forces at work that we take for granted as listeners, but are critical to always remember as musicians: rhythm, melody and harmony**. Some musical styles emphasize one or two over the remaining forces, and there are sections in some piece where one or two of the elements are intentionally left out, but good music needs all three legs to run on.  As a reminder of the importance of all three forces, Black Belt Guitar Academy, uses this three-part symbol to remind us of the balance and interplay between rhythm, melody and harmony.  Black Belt Guitar Academy also stresses that every practice session should include elements of rhythm, melody and harmony. Let's take a closer look at each element, and then all of them together: Rhythm Rhythm is the first and most basic element of music, and is the greatest force for propelling music forward. Tempo is the speed at which music moves, and rhythm is how that tempo is subdivided. Tempo and rhythm also exist in all aspects of nature and life, which is why we all have a natural understanding of rhythm when we hear it, and why tempo and rhythm in music can directly affect our moods and vital signs.  In a band, guitar players are usually not responsible for setting the tempo or the beat of a song... that is the domain of the drum and base sections. However, guitar players like vocalists MUST observe and keep the time. It's always more forgivable to skip a note or even a measure or section of a song, than to play out of time with the rest of the band!  When playing solo, it is the job of the picking or strumming hand to set the tempo and the rhythm for the fretting hand and the vocals. A separate rhythm section is not required when playing a tune, because the tempo and rhythm can be implied in a melody, but however overt or subtle, tempo and rhythm are always there.  For these reasons, a metronome or drum machine is a crucial tool to develop and maintain good rhythm when practicing solo. When a ticker is not available, tapping your foot, counting out loud or bobbing your head is the next best thing. Melody Melody, or the tune, is the second most basic element in music, most approximating speech, it tells the story. Melody needs tempo and rhythm to help the story line move along, but the tempo and rhythm can be implied in the melody itself. Melody is the single most powerful element in music. Without a tune, music cannot exist.  Melody is a single line of musical thought comprised of *intervals* played sequentially. Notice we say intervals, not notes. Our mind senses the relative distances between the notes, even if we do not know exactly which notes is being played. If the notes are like letters of the alphabet, then intervals are like words, which form musical sentences called phrases, and larger musical paragraphs called sections.  Another sensibility we all have is whether the intervals "fit" within some kind of scale, relative to a tonal center. Our ability to remember prior notes (they ring in our ear), sense intervals between those notes and sense the scalar fit of notes around a tonal center gives us all another unique ability to "follow" a tune, and even anticipate where the tune is headed, based on where it has been.  Because of the importance of melody in music, we spend time in each lesson and during each practice session focusing on it. We always want to make a better musical statement, and we do so through melody. We also encourage musical students to always look for ways to say more with less. We do this through thoroughly understanding scales. Scales in all positions, keys, types and modes. Andres Segovia taught his students that study of scales solves more musical problems more quickly than any other aspect of musical study. Black Belt Guitar Academy believes in this philosophy wholeheartedly and encourages scale practice in every practice session. Harmony Harmony is the final element in music. When two or more notes are played simultaneously, we again have an interval or stacked intervals that take on a character beyond that of the notes alone. This is because the energy from the individual notes and their overtones either reinforces or interferes with the overtones of the other notes, giving the harmony a unique character beyond the notes themselves. This is a case where 1 + 1 > 2, and 1 + 1 + 1 > 3. We hear more than just the notes themselves. What we hear is often described as musical color, and the more notes we play, the more color there is. Too many notes gives us a "muddy" musical color.  Here again we learn the basics of harmony: intervals, and stacked intervals or chords. Understanding how intervals stack up to form chords gives our players a deep understanding of what is going on harmonically, and gives them a rich palette of harmonic colors to choose from in their own playing.  Harmony must be moving to be musical. Think of a blaring train or a car horn. Harmonic, yes. Musical no. For this reason, we emphasize chord changes or progressions as much single chords. We also study chords in the context of movement around a tonal center, using color and voicing for variety, but almost always support of the melody, and almost always in concert with the rhythm. Interaction of Rhythm, Melody and Harmony As said earlier, rhythm can be implied in the melody, and harmony. Chord changes have a sense of direction approximating a tune, and if one note in a chord seems dominant (usually the top note) while the others seem recessive, then then a melody can emerge out of harmony as chord progressions are played.  The interaction of all three elements and the endless possibilities makes music exciting to listen to, study and play and perform. The same songs can be played a million different ways by a million different musicians and still be recognizable. Without understanding all the theory behind the music, we just listen and connect with the soul of the artists. By just tweaking a tempo, substituting a rhythm, sharping or flatting a tone, or adding or subtracting a shade of color, the whole rendition is made one's own, and is a unique event in space and time where souls come together. The Guitar Can Do It All Like piano, guitar is one of the few instruments that allows such strong command of rhythm, melody and harmony at once. Unlike piano, you can carry a guitar with you wherever you go, and tune it any way that suits your need. Also, a guitar most closely approximates the vocal qualities of the human voice. Words like "weeping", "crying”, “screaming" are often used to characterize the expressive qualities of the guitar. I've even heard guitars sound like cattle, and elephant rumbles. You can buy wah-wah pedals, ya-ya pedals, and even talk-boxes for your guitar. All you knew when you picked up your guitar for the first time is that it somehow spoke to you, and you listened. Why We Study Music, Not Just Guitar The challenge of guitar is to take this wonderfully expressive instrument and use it to tell our own unique stories. We do this by manipulating rhythm, melody and harmony to suit our purposes. A study of music should center around the practical use of each these three forces separately, and how they work together. Theory is learned as much by listening to music the "works", as much as by hitting the books, but we need both. Armed with this knowledge, we understand musical messages with more clarity, and learn how to write and perform our own musical statements with greater impact.  Jazz great Dizzy Gillespie said he spent a lifetime learning what *not* to play. A study of music teaches us that when making a musical statement, less can be more. Too much of a good thing is just noise. Bruce Lee also taught in Jeet Kune Do, that we strive to continuously remove the non-essential from our movements. This is a good lesson in life and music as well.  Throughout your studies at Black Belt Guitar Academy, we hope you'll always take a fresh look at these wonderful musical elements each time you pick up your guitar, and ask how will I use them today? |
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| Want to Turbocharge your Guitar Learning Abilities? |
| Effective Learning habits and methods can teach you how to transform any idle time into quality practice time whether you have your guitar or not. This reference will teach you how to effectively learn to play your instrument... even when you don't have your instrument with you. You can potentially be learning to play guitar 24 hours a week, even if you only have a guitar in hand for 5 or 6 hours a week.  Black Belt Guitar Academy has believes strongly in improving guitar playing by improving the guitar player. This book amalgamates into a single volume all the best learning methods for life in general, and artfully tailors these methods to the guitarist serious about improvement.  This book is just as applicable to the beginner as to the seasoned pro, but we highly recommend it to beginning students so they can take advantage of all the advice early in their playing career. In this volume, you'll learn:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | * How to never get stuck on a learning plateau again, for months on end. The easy way to work out what you need to practice and for how long. * How to tune up your senses to make sight-reading, perfect pitch and transcribing easy. * How to control your body to release tension and make playing appear effortless - even at high speeds! * The simple way to change your thought processes as you play that will improve your playing instantly. * Never ever have stage fright again. | * The hand warm-up and stretching routine that can be done anywhere. * How to get an imaginary personal lesson from any of your guitar idols - anytime for free! * Banish bad playing habits. * Learn how to create over 24 hours a week of practice time, even if you only have time to physically practice 15 minutes a day. |  Also Included: Exclusive Mental Conditioning Techniques  |  |  | | --- | --- | | * Self Hypnosis * State control * DHE? Control panels * Time Distortion * A modified 'Fast Phobia Cure' * Image streaming * Belief swish | * Sensory Overlapping * Anchoring * 'Photo reading' music and guitar tablature * Accessing cues * Awareness shifts. * Propulsion systems * Deep Trance Identification |  |  | | --- | | [Click Here to Turbocharge your Musical Brain](http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/BeyondBedroomGuitar.html) | |
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| Perfect Intervals: Pillars of Western Music |
| Of all the intervals in our Western scale, the perfect intervals are the ones that act as the anchors for all the other intervals to swirl around in music. Learn to recognize them by ear, and you will have a solid foundation on which to build your later understanding of chords, scales and progressions.  As a white belt, you will master the perfect intervals first. This is for a few scientifically based reasons:   * They are the easiest to recognize by ear * They are the easiest to localize on the fret board * They exist in most chord, regardless of whether the chord is major or minor * They exist in most scales, regardless of whether the scale is major or minor * They form the basis for some of the most common chord progressions * They establish the outer boundaries and the half-way points of an octave, as perceived by our ear * Before studying the major and minor 3rds and 6ths, you should have firmly established the sound of perfect intervals in your ear   Don't be too anxious to learn all the other intervals at once. It's important to thoroughly master just the perfect intervals as a white belt so that your ear has a solid foundation on which to build later.  How did perfect intervals get their name? Well for starters, these intervals are perceived by our brains to be very consonant, stable, harmonious, predictable, and all other qualities you would have in a perfect Swiss watch. Note that these intervals are neither major nor minor, but they are present in every major or minor scales or chord you could ever play.  So what is the role of a "perfect" interval? Perfect intervals (not the notes themselves) form the skeleton of most widely recognized music, and it is against these perfect intervals that non-perfect intervals are compared. Think of people... there are stable people that are predictable and dependable and might be the perfect employee or neighbor... but that does not necessarily make those people interesting. On the other hand, when an eccentric or especially happy or moody person comes along, we take notice because compared to "perfect" people these non-so-perfect people grab and hold our attention. We need both kinds of people in our lives, and likewise we need both kinds of intervals.  Part of what gives these intervals their perceived stability is the simple frequency ratios, which is simply the rate at which the lower note vibrates divided by the rate at which the upper note vibrates. Luckily, you never have to think about this, but your brain is already wired to recognize a relationship between notes having these simple ratios.   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Interval Name | Number of Half Steps | Frequency Ratio | Consonant / Dissonant | Other Names, Symbols | Inverted Interval Name | Name of Interval in Second Octave | | ?Perfect Unison | ?0 | ?1 | ?Consonant | ?P1 | ?Perfect Unison | ?Perfect Octave | | ?Perfect 4th | ?5 | ?3:4 | ?Consonant | ?P4 | ?Perfect 5th | ?Perfect 11th | | ?Perfect 5th | ?7 | ?2:3 | ?Consonant | ?P5 | ?Perfect 4th | ?Perfect 12th | | ?Perfect Octave | ?12 | ?1:2 | ?Consonant | ?P8 | ?Perfect Octave | ?Perfect 15th |  Perfect Interval Spellings This chart shows the spelling of all intervals upward and downward from any starting point. This is important to know when composing music, because if you know the name of one note, then by hearing the interval, you will know the name of the next note you hear by ear.   |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | P1 | P4 | P5 | P8 | | ?Ab | ?Db | ?Eb | ?Ab | | ?A | ?D | ?E | ?A | | ?A# | ?D# | ?E# | ?A# | | ?Bb | ?Eb | ?F | ?Bb | | ?B | ?E | ?F# | ?B | | ?C | ?F | ?G | ?C | | ?C# | ?F# | ?G# | ?C# | | ?Db | ?Gb | ?Ab | ?Db | | ?D | ?G | ?A | ?D | | ?D# | ?G# | ?A# | ?D# | | ?Eb | ?Ab | ?Bb | ?Eb | | ?E | ?A | ?B | ?E | | ?F | ?Bb | ?C | ?F | | ?F# | ?B | ?C# | ?F# | | ?Gb | ?Cb | ?Db | ?Gb | | ?G | ?C | ?D | ?G | | ?G# | ?C# | ?D# | ?G# |  Perfect Unison The first interval we commit to ear and finger memory is the perfect unison. A perfect unison is the same note played twice. On a guitar a perfect unison can be played melodically (one note at a time) on the same string, or harmonically (two notes at the same time) on different strings.  Perfect unisons are used all the time when tuning your guitar across strings. They are also used in a lot of very cool finger-picking arpeggios, and hot country-style picking, letting open strings ring while playing the same note fretted on the next string.   |  | | --- | |  |   Pay attention to the slightly different sound of the same notes played on different strings. This subtle difference will be focused on at a later point when we discuss voicing. Perfect Octave The next interval we will commit to ear, mind and finger memory is the perfect octave. The perfect octave is 12 half steps apart on the chromatic scale and 8 notes apart on the major scale. The top note on a perfect octave vibrates exactly twice as fast as the bottom note.  ?   |  | | --- | |  |   A perfect octave is two notes twelve half-steps apart that have the same name. Every time you go up an octave, the strings vibrate twice as fast. Perfect 5ths The next interval we commit to ear and to finger memory is the Perfect 5th. This interval is present in almost every kind of scale. It is neither major nor minor. It adds stability and power to the chord. When playing two root notes and two fifth notes in two octaves, this chord is called stacked 5ths, and is one of the most powerful chords in rock music.  The ear when it hears a perfect fifth naturally gravitates to the root note, and the fifth adds strength, stability and power to that root.   |  | | --- | |  |   Church songs sung by medieval monks used perfect 5ths as harmony, because being "perfect" was what godly music was all about. Other kinds of harmony were forbidden in medieval church music because they were seen as pagan at the time. Perfect 4ths The next interval we commit to ear and finger memory is the Perfect 4th. This interval is the inversion of a perfect 5th, and like the perfect 5th, can add power and stability to chords.  It is easy to confuse a perfect 4th with a perfect 5th, because when the ear hears a perfect 4th, it tends to want to hear the top note as the root, then gravitate down a perfect 5th.   |  | | --- | |  |   Guitar strings are tuned in perfect 4ths from each other. E - A is a perfect 4th, A - D is a perfect 4th, D - G is a perfect 4th, G - B is a major 3rd. It is this tuning that we owe our ability to play so many chords within a 4 or 5-fret span. The EADGBE tuning places the majority of the good-sounding notes in close proximity to each other on different strings so that we can easily reach them with our fingers. Exercises: When training your ear, there is an important thing to keep in mind: You cannot force your ear to learn. It must happen easily and naturally, and through relaxed repetition over time, rather than cramming all at once. When we try to force the ear to learn, the ear rebels, and closes. Here are some tips to get your ear to open up.   * Practice the intervals no more than 10 minutes each day. * Practice intervals at the beginning of your practice session, when your ear is most open and relaxed. * Start out by learning the intervals on your instrument, not someone else’s. * Learn the intervals in the order presented in this lesson. * Play the intervals both on the same string and on different strings. Play them up and down the fret board, both in order and randomly. * Sing the note names of each interval as you play it. Sing and play each interval both up and down. * Play one note in the interval and sing the other. Do this up and down. * Play and sing each interval both melodically (one note at a time)and harmonically (two notes at a time). * If your ear gets tired, move onto other things and come back to it fresh tomorrow. |
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| **Open Dominant 7th Chords** |
| In this lesson you will add more open chords to your library. These chords are similar to those you have already learned, but the addition of the dominant 7th chord will add funk, and flair to your playing. At the end of this lesson, you'll have 21 of the most popular chords in music at your disposal!  The Dominant 7th chord takes its name from the minor 7th note in combination with the major 3rd note. This combination gives the chord a unique characteristic that tempers the major 3rd, allowing you to use it interchangeably with major chords if that is your desire. The minor 7th chord also has a sort of leading quality that song writers use to lead into a resolving chord.  Take just a minute to memorize this table:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | Attributes | Values | | ?Chord Formula | ?1-M3-5-m7 | | ?Major or Minor | ?Major | | ?Distinguishing Degree | ?M3, m7 |   Now take some time to learn each chord shape in this table. White notes are optional:   |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | C7 | A7 | G7 | E7 | D7 | | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-C-7-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-A-7-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-G-7-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-E-7-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-D-7-Open.gif | | F7 | B7 |  |  |  | | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-F-7-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-B-7-Open.gif |  |  |  |  Exercises: The exercises are basically the same as those you learned before. Remember to go slowly, deliberately and paying attention to the feel and sound.   * Play each chord until you can do so comfortably without dampening those strings that should be played, or playing strings that should not be played. Learn to pay close attention to clean playing from the start, and you'll sound much better much sooner. * Learn the fingering that works most comfortably and effectively for you. Try it different ways, and decide what works best for different situations. * Learn the correct finger pressure to apply to your strings for the best sound and most comfort. You should be pressing just hard enough to eliminate any string buzz, but not so hard that your hand gets fatigued or cramped. * Try strumming the chord with your right hand, and also playing one note at a time from bottom to top, and top to bottom. * As you play the notes one at a time, sing the note names aloud, playing and singing from bottom to top, and top to bottom. This will reinforce your learning of the note names on the fret board. * Try playing all the chords in complete darkness, using only your finger memory to locate and position your fingers without your eyes to guide them. As you play the chord, sing the name of the chord, and visualize the chord shape. * Learn to transition smoothly from one chord to another without noise. Practice changing from every chord in this set to every other chord in this set and back until you can do so comfortably. * In each chord, listen for and locate the minor 7th note which gives this chord it's dominant feeling.   Play the 7th chords alternating with the major chords to get the feel and sound.   * C - C7 - C - C7 - C * A - A7 - A - A7 - A * G - G7 - G - G7 - G * E - E7 - E - E7 - E * D - D7 - D - D7 - D * F - F7 - F - F7 - F * B - B7 - B - B7 - B   In the progressions below, pay attention to the strong leading sound of the dominant 7th chord before finally resolving on the last chord in the progression.   * Dm - G7 - C - Am - Dm - G7 - C * G - A7 - D * Bm - E7 - A * C - D7 - G * A - B7 - E * Gm - C7 - F   In the progressions below, the 7th chord softens each chord, and gives a bluesier or funkier feel.   * E7 - A7 - E7 - A * C7 - F7 - C7 - F * E7 - B7 - E7 - B7 - E * A7 - D7 - A7 - D7 * G7 - D7 - G7 - D   Now try to put the names of some songs you already know to these progressions. And as always, come up with a couple of your own! |
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| **Open Minor Chords** |
| In this lesson you will double the number of open chords you have already learned, by adding the natural complement to the major chord series. When you learn the major and minor chords together, you will be able to play the accompaniment to most popular songs ever written.  Minor chords take their name from the minor 3rd (m3) note. The minor 3rd imparts a more solemn or sad feeling to the chord, and indeed to the entire song, if the song is written in a minor key.  Take just a minute to memorize this table:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | Attributes | Values | | ?Chord Formula | ?1-m3-5 | | ?Major or Minor | ?Minor | | ?Distinguishing Degree | ?m3 |   Now take some time to learn each chord shape in this table. White notes are optional:   |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Cm | Am | Gm | Em | Dm | | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-C-Min-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-A-Min-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-G-Min-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-E-Min-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-D-Min-Open.gif | | Fm | Bm |  |  |  | | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-F-Min-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-B-Min-Open.gif |  |  |  |   If you feel that Cm, Gm and Bm open chords are a little tough to finger, you're right. Most guitar players avoid these fingerings in real life and choose to use barre chords, a chord type you'll learn in the yellow belt lessons. For now, suffer through these, because they will give your fingers a little stretch and help your fingers develop a little independence from the others. (Finger independence is a very desirable goal). Exercises: Remember to take each of these chords slowly, and deliberately. Fingers eyes and ears should work together to internalize these chords.   * Play each chord until you can do so comfortably without dampening those strings that should be played, or playing strings that should not be played. Pay close attention to clean playing from the start, and you'll sound much better much sooner. * Learn the fingering that works most comfortably and effectively for you. Try each chord different ways, and decide which fingering works best for different situations. * Learn the correct finger pressure to apply to your strings for the best sound and most. comfort. You should be pressing just hard enough to eliminate any string buzz, but not so hard that your hand gets fatigued or cramped. * Try strumming the chord with your right hand, and also playing one note at a time from bottom to top, and top to bottom. * As you play the notes one at a time, sing the note names aloud, playing and singing from bottom to top, and top to bottom. This will reinforce your learning of the note names on the fret board. * Try playing all the chords in complete darkness, using only your finger memory to locate and position your fingers without your eyes to guide them. As you play the chord, sing the name of the chord, and visualize the chord shape. * Learn to transition smoothly from one chord to another without noise. Practice changing from every chord in this set to every other chord in this set and back until you can do so comfortably. * In each chord, listen for and locate the minor 3rd note, which gives the entire chord it's minor feeling.   Play the minor chords alternating with the major chords from the previous lesson to reinforce the major chord and to get the feel and the sound of the major to minor and minor to major chord changes into your mind and fingers.   * C - Cm - C - Cm - C * A - Am - A - Am - A * G - Gm - G - Gm - G * E - Em - E - Em - E * D - Dm - D - Dm - D * F - Fm - F - Fm - F * B - Bm - B - Bm - B   In the next set of progressions. notice that playing only minor chord progressions is kind of limited, and the over all sound is a little dark, compared to our major-only progressions.   * Em - Am - Em - Am * Gm - Em - Gm - Em * Cm - Am - Cm - Am * Dm - Am - Em - Am * Am - Dm - Am - Dm   Most music, whether classical, popular, country, rock uses a combination of major and minor chords to make them powerful, moving, and... well, popular! Here are some progressions from some widely known tunes to make the point.   * Am - C - Dm - F - Am - Am - E (House of the Rising Sun) * C - Am - G - F - C (Country Road) * C - G - Am - F - C - G - F - C (Country Road (Chorus)) * G - C - Am - G (Yellow Submarine) * Em - F - G - C * Em - A - Em - A - D - G - D * Em - C - G - Em - C - D * Am - F - E - Am - F - E * Dm - G - C - Am * Am - G - Am - Em - Am - G - Am - Em - Dm - C - G - Am (Love and Miracles out of Nowhere) * Bm - A - G - A - Bm - A - G - A   Now try to put the names of some songs you already know to these progressions. Come up with some of your own! |
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| **Open Major Chords** |
| These are the first 7 chords that every beginning guitar student should master. Play these chords comfortably, and you'll be able to play almost any beginning-level song.  The first chords every guitarist should learn are the open string chords for a couple of very good reasons:   * Major chords are the most popular and familiar of all chords. Learning major chords only will enable you to play a handsome collection of popular music in all genres. * Open chord shapes allow you to play the most notes with the fewest fingers in arguably the most comfortable position. Open chords use at least one open string, which frees up some of your fingers to either rest, or articulate some other notes while playing or transitioning between chords.   Many guitar players spend their entire career simply playing in open string chords, and a great deal of music is written for open chords to make it easier to play and learn. Open chords are especially versatile when transposing the key of a song by using a capo.  The open string chords are named after their root note, but by committing the shape or form of the chord to memory, the player can easily transpose songs up and down the neck of the guitar. The chord forms are also named after the shape of each of these chords.  Major chords take their name from the major third (M3) note present in every one of them. When played together with the root and the 5th, the M3 gives the entire chord the familiar, bright, happy quality we have all come to know through our childhood.  Take just a minute to memorize this table:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | Attributes | Values | | ?Chord Formula | ?1-M3-5 | | ?Major or Minor | ?Major | | ?Distinguishing Degree | ?M3 |   Now take some time to learn each chord shape in this table. White notes are optional:   |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | C | A | G | E | D | | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-C-Maj-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-A-Maj-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-G-Maj-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-E-Maj-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-D-Maj-Open.gif | | F | B |  |  |  | | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-F-Maj-Open.gif | http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/chords/Chord-B-Maj-Open.gif |  |  |  |  Exercises: These exercises go beyond just memorizing the chords, if you do each of these chords slowly, deliberately and paying attention to the proper physical and aural sensations, you will internalize and master these chords much faster than by memorizing alone. Your attention to the details early in your learning will pay big dividends later, since you will not have to unlearn any bad habits, and you can focus later on more advanced things.   * Play each chord until you can do so comfortably without dampening those strings that should be played, or playing strings that should not be played. Learn to pay close attention to clean playing from the start, and you'll sound much better much sooner. * Learn the fingering that works most comfortably and effectively for you. For example, when playing the A major chord, is it better for you to play all three notes on the second fret by laying your first finger across all three strings, or is it better foy you to play with the second, third and fourth fingers? Try it both ways, and decide what works best for different situations. * Learn the correct finger pressure to apply to your strings for the best sound and most comfort. You should be pressing just hard enough to eliminate any string buzz, but not so hard that your hand gets fatiqued or cramped. * Try strumming the chord with your right hand, and also playing one note at a time from bottom to top, and top to bottom. * As you play the notes one at a time, sing the note names aloud, playing and singing from bottom to top, and top to bottom. This will reinforce your learning of the note names on the fret board. * Try playing all the chords in complete darkness, using only your finger memory to locate and position your fingers without your eyes to guide them. As you play the chord, sing the name of the chord, and visualize the chord shape. * Learn to transition smoothly from one chord to another without noise. Practice changing from every chord in this set to every other chord in this set and back until you can do so comfortably. * In each chord, listen for and locate the major 3rd note, which gives the entire chord it's major feeling.   Now chords by themselves are not really musical, so let's combine two or more chords together in a a series of major chord progressions that sound good.   * C - F - G - C - F - G (La Bamba) * C - G - G - C - C - F - G - C (Happy Birthday) * A - E - E - A - A - D - E - A (Happy Birthday) * C - F - G - F * C - D - G - C - D - G (I just called to say I love you, (chorus)) * C - G - C - G * C - G - F - C * G - G - C - D - G (Man of Constant Sorrow) * G - F - G - F * C - F - C - G - C (On Top of Old Smoky) * C - F - C - G (The Lion Sleeps Tonight) * A - D - A - E (The Lion Sleeps Tonight) * D - G - D - G * D - G - C - D * B - A - B - A * E - F - E - F * B - C - B - C   Now try to put the names of some songs you already know to these progressions. Come up with some of your own! |
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| **Knowing your Guitar Neck like the Back of your Hand** |
| Want to learn a valuable skill that your friends probably won't? Commit now to learn something that most self-taught guitar players never learn. This skill will enable later learning of reading music by sight.  Do you know where to find a B on your guitar? How about an F#? It's no fun when playing with your friends and someone says play an A, and you need to watch their fingers for a clue, or listen to an A on the piano while you fumble around and play a few notes until you find it. Not knowing where the notes on your fret board are has "amateur" written all over it, so in this lesson, we'll give you some ideas to learn where the notes are on your fret board until know you know it like the back of your hand. Notes of the Chromatic Scale It required generations of musicians, scientists and inventors to arrive at a 12-note scale we have today after centuries of the study of music, combined with generous helpings of trial and error, political and theological strife and compromise. The result was an agreed upon pool of notes from which all scales, chords are constructed. Most of the details had been worked out by the time orchestral music was born; otherwise it would have been impossible for different instruments to play together harmoniously. We call this repeating 12-note scale the chromatic scale, which denotes color.  In the following busy little picture, each colored dot illustrates the location of a particular note of the chromatic scale on the guitar fret board. Anywhere you start, the colors slightly shift with every half-step (1 fret) up or down the neck, and repeat with each octave (13 half-steps or frets apart from the starting note).  http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/scales/Scale-Chromatic.gif Notes of the Different Octaves The six-string guitar has notes that span about 4 octaves. In classical music, each octave has a number so that any instrument can find the same pitch, even though they are all tuned quite differently. In classical music, each octave is renumbered starting with the C note.  Here we have pictures of the notes in each octave from Octave 2 to Octave 4. The notes may be referred to as G4 (G in the fourth octave) or C3 (C in the third octave), for example. Notes of the 2nd Octave Beginning with C2 and ending with B2...  http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/scales/Scale-Chromatic-2.gif Notes of the 3rd Octave Beginning with C3 and ending with B3...  http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/scales/Scale-Chromatic-3.gif Notes of the 4th Octave Beginning with C4 and ending with B4...  http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/scales/Scale-Chromatic-4.gif Notes of the 5th Octave Beginning with C5 and ending with B5...  http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/scales/Scale-Chromatic-5.gif Exercises Don't try to absorb this picture all at once. Break it down into small digestible pieces, such as:   * Pick a string and learn the note names up and down all frets, one string at a time. * Pick a fret and learn the note names across all strings one fret at a time. * Pick a note and learn the position of that note everywhere on the fret board.   The notes on the fret board are learned by repetition. Here are a few useful ideas:   * When you do have your guitar with you (and nobody is around to make fun of you) sing the names of the notes as you play them. This makes the learning "sticky", and you will internalize it much more quickly than by playing alone. * Look for and visualize patterns, and play those patterns as you discover them. For example, know where a C is relative to a G, or an F relative to a D. * Learn the note locations relative to the inlays (dots) of the guitar neck. * When you can't have your guitar with you, quiz yourself by drawing the fret board on a piece of paper, or try out some nifty software like **[CDB Fret board Trainer](http://chorddb.hypermart.net/chorddb.htm" \l "cdbfv15" \o "CDB Fretboard Trainer" \t "_blank)** on your Palm Pilot. * As you learn chords and scales, take a little extra time to sing the notes of those chords and scales as you are first learning them. This is a two-way reinforcement activity that helps cement both the notes and the scale and chord construction in your mind. * A little bit every day is better than a lot at once. Don't try to cram for your test. Just make a point of knowing your stuff, and when you realize that you might have some fuzzy areas that need sharpening, just revisit them and you'll see that a little attention to these areas will quickly fix them. |
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| **Tuning Your Guitar** |
| The purpose of this lesson is to help you keep your guitar in tune so that it sounds optimal for the kind of playing you do. Unless you know how to tune across all strings, and along the whole neck of the guitar, you may find that your guitar sounds good when playing an open C chord, but when playing the same C chord as a bar chord on the 8th fret, it sounds out of tune.  You are expected to learn tuning early, since you'll use this the rest of your guitar-playing life.  There are many different possible tunings your instrument, but throughout our lessons, we will be using the standard tuning of E-A-D-G-B-E unless otherwise specified.  For an excellent Windows-based chord and scale generator program at a very modest price, we highly recommend [Virtual Fret board](http://www.rock-software.com/VirtualFretboard/affiliatelink.html?afid=81). Among its many features is the ability to generate chords and scales in any key, and with any of 13 alternate tunings. Tips before you start  * Buy a sturdy case for your guitar to protect it from the inevitable bumps, scrapes and dings that can affect tuning. * Keep your guitar humidified by keeping a moist sponge in an open plastic bag within your case. This will save your guitar from humidity changes that can effect the shape and sound of your instrument. * Never leave your guitar out of its case for extended lengths of time when you are not playing. Kids, pets or humidity changes or plain old gravity can ruin your instrument. * After you know what strings feel and sound best for you, stick with the same weight all the time, so your guitar will not have to be readjusted when new strings are put on. * Change your strings often if you are serious about sounding good. Old strings tend to sound dull. Coated strings last longer than non-coated.  Five Point Tune Up Our 5-point tune up method will allow you to sound most in tune for the kind of songs you will be playing. As versatile as our Western 12-note scale is, it is not exactly precise, which means that there are a few compromises along the way to make it sound good to us overall. That said, we need to know how to make our guitars get in tune, stay in tune, and to minimize any perceivable inconsistencies in the scale that we get with all fretted instruments to some small degree. Point 1: Start with a Tuner There are two general categories of tuners: active and passive, and you need to know how to use both.  Active tuners are those that produce a tone, and you are expected to tune your guitar to match this tone. This can be a piano, or your guitar teacher's guitar (especially when your teacher is playing on a DVD), or it can be a tone played from your computer or anything else. Sometimes you have no choice except to tune with the other instrument or device simply because they cannot.  Passive tuners are those that hear the tone you are playing and tell you what note it is. These tuners should be part of every guitar player's toolkit to keep them (and their band mates) all sounding good.  Now that your open strings are in tune with your tuner and bandmates, here are some other tuning tricks to make sure your instrument sounds good with itself: Point 2: Tune Perfect Unisons on Adjacent Strings http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/scales/Tuning-Point1.gif  Pluck the strings of the corresponding color one at a time, and repeatedly. When nudge one of the strings if you have to to come into tune with the other. Repeat this for each pair of strings. Point 3: Tune Octaves Two Strings Apart http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/scales/Tuning-Point2.gif  This technique will make sure that strings two-apart will sound in tune with each other. This will usually fix problems you hear while playing open E, A, or D chords. The notes to compare are color coded. Point 4: Tune Octaves Three Strings Apart http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/scales/Tuning-Point3.gif  This technique will help you fix problems you hear when playing your open C and G chords. The notes to compare are color coded. Point 5: Tune Octaves on Adjacent Strings http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/scales/Tuning-Point4.gif  This technique will help you fix problems you hear when transposing chords to another voicing higher up on the fretboard. The notes to compare are color coded as usual. Other Hints  * Generally, tune up, and not down. That is start below your target pitch, and tighten your string until you arrive at the desired pitch. * Perfection is not attainable, but you can optimize the tuning for your circumstances. * If you have a floating bridge, you may need to repeat the process a few times.  Potentially Necessary Guitar Adjustments  * Fresh strings of the recommended weight are usually the best adjustment you can make if you are having trouble tuning across using the 5-point method. * The screws (or fine tuners) on your may need to be adjusted to lenghten or shorten your strings * Tighten the springs on your floating bridge |
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| **Guitarist and Guitar Anatomy 101** |
| Parts are parts... or are they? In this short but important lesson, we just want to take a little time to pay attention to some details too often overlooked in keeping the guitarist and their guitars healthy. We want both you and your guitars to be around for a very long time.  We will focus here on some areas that all guitarists should understand, and know how to take care of. The Ear Never forget that music is an affair with the ear. Whenever you get mired down in theory, exercises, drills problems with equipment, or even frustrations with fickle band members or even the nastier aspects of the music business, remember that music is affair of the ear.  There are three parts to the ear to get to know:   * The outer ear, or the part of the ear we see. * The inner ear, which are the delicate working parts of the ear, consisting of the auditory canal, the ear drum, the hammer, anvil and stirrup, the cochlea, the auditory nerve, etc. * The musical ear, which is our mental ability to fully understand the music we hear.   http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/misc/Ear.gif The Inner Ear The inner ear is built to respond to vibrations in the atmosphere around us. Vibrations cause the ear drum to vibrate in resonance with the vibrations in the air. These vibrations are caused by vocal chords, guitar strings or other forces causing the air to compress and expand outward from the vibrating source. This pressure disturbance consists of compressions and rarefractions of the molecules in the air.  A healthy ear responds to vibration rates ranging from about 20 per second to about 20,000 per second, or 20Hz to 20KHz. The rate of vibrations is called frequencies.  A healthy ear also responds to extremely faint vibrations in the air, the faintest of which is known as the Threshold of Hearing (TOH). The lowest intensity pressure wave a healthy ear can detect is one whose compression of atmospheric particles increases the air pressure by just 0.3 billionths of an atmosphere!  The decibel scale measures how much sound energy is being emitted from a source. For every 10 decibels that you add to the scale, the amount of energy in the air is increased 10 times. Have a look at the following table:   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | Source | Decibel Level | x Greater Than TOH | | Threshold of Hearing (TOH) | 0 dB | 100 | | Rustling Leaves | 10 dB | 101 | | Whisper | 20 dB | 102 | | Normal Conversation | 60 dB | 106 | | Busy Street Traffic | 70 dB | 107 | | Vacuum Cleaner | 80 dB | 108 | | Large Orchestra | 97 dB | 109.7 | | Max Volume on MP3 Player | 100 dB | 1010 | | Angry Mom, yelling to "turn it down!" | 105 dB | 1010.5 | | Front Row Seats at Rock Concert | 110 dB | 1011 | | Pain Threshold | 130 dB | 1013 | | Jet Takeoff | 140 dB | 1014 | | Eardrum Explodes | 160 dB | 1016 |   From all of this, we hope you take away one important item. Take care of your ears! Very loud sounds above 130 dB can cause permanent diminished hearing, as can prolonged exposure to sounds above 80 dB. Most often this hearing loss is not total, but prolonged exposure to loud music does lead to diminished hearing at the high end of our hearing range first, so music and voices begin to sound a little muffled at first, then it can render us deaf to subtle overtones in both music and speech that give music and speech their rich qualities.  Wearing hearing protection in noisy work environments, in airplanes, and especially at rock concerts makes you makes you a smart person, not a baby. If you think your friends will laugh at you for wearing foam ear plugs, its because they were too stupid to think of it themselves, so buy enough for everyone, and you'll all have more fun. Nobody will miss the ringing in the ears for a day or two after the concert. Foam ear plugs diminish the sound intensity by 20 - 30 dB, which is just enough in most cases to prevent pain and damage, while still enjoying the full range of frequencies.  Remember Pete Townsend? Guitarist of the once loudest band ever... The Who? See that hearing aid in his ear? Wonder how it got there? You get the point. The Musical Ear In future lessons, when we refer to "the ear", we will be talking about the musical ear. The musical ear is defined as our musical understanding of what our physical ear hears. The musical ear is developed and cultured through small daily doses of ear training exercises, which consist of interval, chord and scale recognition and recall, as well chord progression recognition and recall.  Another aspect of ear training is very special skill called perfect pitch, which is the ability to name any note you hear, as well as recall up the right note from memory with no other external reference. The Fingers The fingers are the part of you that tickle the guitar, and make it sing. Your fingers take instructions from your mind at first as you are learning to translate chord and scale charts, or tablature into intelligible music.  But with experience the mental instructions to your fingers give way to the emotions of the heart. You no longer have to rely on cognitive processing to play what moves your audience. Instead, of using your hands to push music from the guitar out to your audience, your hands are used to shape and mold the songs as they flow out of their own volition. In the case of amplified music, your hands actually are used to restrain and steer the power of your guitar, the way a jockey steers a thoroughbred in full stride, or the way an expert swordsman controls the strokes of his sword to change direction without losing momentum.  Your fingers are all numbered as per the picture below. This is to help you in some chord charts and tablature to use the fingering that the author wants you to use. On your fretting hand, the fingers are numbered as 1, 2, 3, 4, beginning with the fretting index finger, and ending with the fretting pinky finger. The thumb is sometimes notated as T (Thumb). The picking hand uses letters to indicate the finger used to pick each note in an arpeggio. This notation is usually found in sheet music of classical music, where fingers instead of picks are used. The letters are initial letters of latin words: p (pulgar or thumb), i (indice or index), m (medular or middle), a (anular or ring finger), d (dimuto or little finger).  http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/misc/Hands.gif Good Posture For your fingers to do their best magic, your whole body should be comfortable. There is a high correlation between slouching guitar players and back and neck problems. When sitting, choose a chair that allows you to straighten your spine, allowing your arms to hang comfortably down to their playing position. Good Diet and Exercise Hey, wait a minute! This is a guitar lesson, right? This is a Black Belt Guitar lesson. We care about you, and we are quick to point out that great musicianship and vices do not necessarily go together. Take a lesson from two of today's hottest guitar gods: Steve Morse, and Steve Vai. Both are Steve’s, and both are vegetarians. They believe (as do we) that good health is key to excellence in any pursuit, even the music business. They know that diet affects the body, mind and spirit in ways that either support or hinder the learning, creative and performing processes. Their intense ability to focus, write, create, jam, tour, demo, endorse, carry on a family life, etc. etc. is supported by the energy they get from good food. With a little planning, anyone can make good choices about food.  Don't smoke. Don't take alcohol. Don't do drugs. You don't need these things, ever. We all love Jimi Hendrix, and Kurt Cobain, but we all prefer they were still with us. Eddie Van Halen would have preferred not to have mouth cancer. You got the point.  Take good care of yourself. Get your rest. Stretch. Exercise. Breath. Your playing and your life demand your best health. Take time out for this, and you may be playing into your 90's! The Guitar The guitar is not really part of our body, but with the exception of our own voice, the guitar is the instrument with the truest extension of our body. With enough experience, it is possible to become one with the guitar.  Here we will take a little time to become acquainted with the major components of the guitar. You will eventually have to know these parts well enough to keep your guitar in good repair, whether you do it yourself, or lean on your friendly luthier to do it for you.  Take a little time to memorize the names of the things on your guitar(s).  http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/misc/Gibson.gif  Take good care of guitars. You can't help wearing out your frets eventually, but you should protect your guitar from too much abuse from pets, kids, baggage handlers, sun, drying out, but most of all protect your guitar from loneliness! If nothing else, your resale value will be higher if you take care of them. Change your strings as often as needed to keep your sound good. Keep your acoustic guitars moisturized by keeping a damp sponge in the case. Find a good luthier if your guitar gets sick or needs surgery. Books our Users Recommend:  |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | [**You Are Your Instrument**](http://www.sheetmusicplus.com/a/item.html?id=74160&item=2966154) By Julie Lyonn Lieberman. Fretted. Size 8.5x11 inches. 152 pages. Published by Huiksi Music Company. (695233) | |
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| **Effective Practice** |
| This lesson will reveal some of the secrets that separate great players from the rest. The secret is in knowing how to practice, then doing it... consistently. What to practice varies with each player. We will focus here on the how to make the most of your practice time. Begin with Written Goals Set long-range (year), medium range (week to month), and short-range (today) goals before you start sit down with your guitar. Write those goals down. Most players fail to do this, and end up at the same place... frustration. Written goals have real power. Every tangible thing begins with a thought. If that thought is not expressed in written or spoken words, the thought never becomes more than a thought. When the thought becomes written word, it drives us on to action, and those thoughts are transformed into physical reality.  http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/misc/NotePad.gif  Always have pencil and paper with you. This is to catch all the inspiration that you have, which is usually a fleeting thought or impression. Even if you can't fully develop it at the time, you should jot it down. Otherwise, it quickly fades away, and you may never have that impression again, until you hear that someone else has used it. Do the Time How much is enough? We believe that less than 30 minutes daily will produce anemic results. It usually takes 5 - 10 minutes to warm up the fingers and the ear before the good practice really begins, and the musical juices begin to flow. On the other hand, world-class musicians typically practice no more than two-hours per day to keep their skills honed (this does not include time performing or recording).  So the sweet spot for most guitarists is somewhere between 30-minutes and 2 hours each day. If you find that you can't find two hours back-to-back, it's OK to break your practice sessions into a morning session and a separate afternoon or evening session.  How much is too much? If you are practicing properly, you should not have a problem with frequent burn-out. Most problems from practice arise not from practicing too much, but practicing the wrong way, so you get bored, then you want to throw your guitar through the wall, then you find yourself on TV for all the wrong reasons!  Having said that, we recommend taking a planned day off or planned day of very light practice every week. Sunday works well for many students, and is our choice. This planned day off gives us several advantages, including:   * Greater intensity and focus during our 6 on-days. * Greater creativity comes from this planned time off. * It allows us to remember that we are all human beings with lives beyond music. * It allows us to renew our relationships with those we love and with God. * When we strengthen our relationships with those we love and with God, we feel their support more in our playing.   We want you to excel at music, but we never want music to become an addiction. Practice Critical Hearing The hardest part of any practice routine is hearing how you really sound, so you can find the problems and fix them. Whenever possible record your practice sessions, even if you only have a cheap tape recorder. The cheaper the better, at first. Tape recorders do not lie, and they will tell you how you really sound without the sugar coating, or overly harsh criticism.  http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/misc/Recorder.gif  The most important benefit from this exercise is that you will learn to really hear yourself as you are, then magically, you know what you need to work on. Overcompensate for Weak Areas Good right-handed basketball players spend twice as much time dribbling with their left hand in practice, in order to switch unconsciously between hands in the game. In practicing guitar, you should spend 80% of your time on the weakest 20% of your playing, until it is no longer a problem. The idea is that you don't need to practice what is already easy for you.  A good example is with strumming or picking. For most players, the down stroke is the strongest and most comfortable, and if you practice for 5 minutes using only upstrokes, you'll see how awkward the upstroke really feels. An average player would sense this awkwardness and train himself to avoid it. But an excellent player would see this as an opportunity for improvement, and practice it twice as much as the down stroke, making both equally strong. Practice to Perform This advice applies to practicing your repertoire (songs), and will increase your confidence many fold. The idea is that if you practice one way, then perform something different, both the practice and the performance can be sources of embarrassment and frustration. Imagine, if you can, an audience while you practice, and practice playing to them. A friend, band mates, or even playing for your dog can make the practice more real. If you can't find a live audience, remember you can always play for your tape recorder.  As much as possible, try to play, breath, sing, etc. with the same intensity, emotion and projection as when you perform. If you have stage gear, try to mark your settings so that once you achieve a great sound in the studio, you don't have to fumble around to find the settings that sounded good the night before during practice.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | *Category: White Belt  Subcategory:  Published on: 09 Oct 2003* |  | |  Set Management Akin to practicing like you play is practicing what you will play. Before you go on stage (or before friends) to play, you should know something about how long you will be allowed to play, then fill that time with the songs that have the most impact, or are most entertaining. A 1-song set is planned for and executed differently than a 3-song set, or a 10-song set, etc.  Manage your set in writing. This is so that you and your band mates will avoid confusion when playing.  This approach will save hours, days, weeks or years of frustration and anxiety in your playing. On-Line vs. Off-Line Practice Not all aspects of guitar are learned with guitar in hand (on-line). Some of the theoretical aspects can be effectively learned without your guitar (off-line). Knowing this will allow you to take advantage of those times when you can't have your guitar with you (driving, during a break at work, etc.) to keep learning the theory, and saving the prime time when you can have your guitar with you to work on your technique, repertoire, speed, etc.  Even some of the creative aspects of music can be organized into on-line vs. off-line times. For example, while practicing scales (on-line), you accidentally hear yourself playing a very catchy melody. Stop and jot it down. Or, while you are driving to work (off-line), you hear something on the radio that you want to add to your repertoire, but you think you can improve on it. Pull over and jot this down as well. Or, while waiting to pick your sister up at the airport (off-line), you can pull out your tabs on that lead you want to master, and work out some of the fingering that seems comfortable to you, while also using your aural recall to hear the tones of the lead in your head. On-Line Practice Structure On-line practice should be structured with your specific goals for the day in mind, but some examples of effective practice might look like this:   * Warm-Up, Tune-Up (5 Minutes) * Scale Practice (5 Minutes) * Chord Changes (5 Minutes) * Review, Refine, Existing Repertoire (30 - 45 Minutes) * Learn New Repertoire (30 - 45 Minutes)  And Now for the Challenge... These practice ideas are pretty simple, and you probable already new them, but if a year from now you find yourself utterly frustrated, visit this lesson again and evaluate your own practice habits to see if there is something you are overlooking.  Have Fun! |
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| **Set Management: A Must-Have in Performing** |
| Even when you have learned 1000 songs, and have achieved superstar status... the most you'll ever be able to play for an audience in one concert is about 20. Most gigs we play while coming up through the ranks are much shorter, so what you don't play is as important as what you do play. This lesson will help you polish your performances to knock the socks off your audience. Set Management All good albums and concerts are organized to give the audience the best experience possible in the time allowed, so that you'll be invited back. This planning is an important part of performing that we'll call set management.  When given an audience, you are judged by how you play in the time you have. *You are not judged for what you don't play*. So you want to leave your mark during your time. This could be playing for a friend, performing at school, auditioning for a band. In that time, what will you play to engage your audience and convey who you are musically.  Given sets of different durations, do spend some quality time refining the sets as a matter of habit through your entire career. Constantly replace old, stale material with new fresh material, but stick to the allotted time. 1 Minute Set Pick the song that you think will make the most impact for the occasion. This should be your most polished and comfortable song, and one that is a crowd pleaser.  Don't make the mistake of picking a song you are working on, or one you can't play completely, or one that you can't remember the words to if you are a singer. 5 Minute Set This set should contain your best two or three songs, sequenced to start and end with a bang. The bigger bang at the end, if possible. Leave them wanting more. Familiar tunes work good here, so your audience spends more time getting a feel for your talent, than wondering who wrote this thing.  Keep your selection tight. This means play songs that are related in style, tempo or theme. This gives your audience a clearer picture of what kind of musician you are. Save your eclectic tendencies for longer sets.  Don't exceed your set time unless asked. It's better to be invited back, than risk the losing the interest of your audience. 15 Minute Set This set should contain your best five or six songs, sequenced to start and end with a bang. As usual, the bigger bang should be at the end, if possible. Leave them wanting more.  With a set this length, you can begin to introduce some more variety in terms of fast/slow, or even mix a little acoustic work with your electric songs.  Don't range too far. Keep about 80% of your songs within the genre or style that defines you, and use the other 20% of the material as relief. 30 Minute Set Arrange your songs to give good variety, and undulate your audience through a wider range of emotions. Alternate fast and slow songs, major and minor keys, popular and obscure, in order to keep the audience interested. Again, start and end with a bang, and leave them wanting more.  A good formula might like something like this:   * Song 1: Flagship Song * Song 2: Fast Familiar Material * Song 3: Fast New Material * Song 4: Slow Flagship Song * Song 5: Fast Familiar Song * Song 6: Fast New Material * Song 7: Slow New Material * Song 8: High Energy Song to Bid for an Encore  Encore No matter how long your set lasts, what would you play if asked to play some more? This is your reward for a set well managed and executed. If you think you might get to play more than one, give them a slow song to calm them down, so your final song can send them back over the top.  These are just a few rules to help you with being ready for your performances, but remember, once you know the rules, you can break them with authority! |
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| **Ongoing Growth: Horizontally and Vertically** |
| A black belt guitar player should be both wide and deep, as explained in the sections below. Also the black belt guitar player should be continually expanding both horizontally and vertically. This lesson has a few ideas to keep you growing and make you a wider and deeper player.  Assuming that you have firmly committed to become a great player (of course you are), and you are making time to practice and perform (check!)... here are some more ideas to help you chart your course to being a well-rounded, and seasoned player, and a player who always keeps things fresh and interesting.  Growing Horizontally and Vertically as a Guitarist Horizontal Growth Growing Horizontally as a Guitarist  Growing horizontally means adding to the list of songs that you are able to play, even though you may play all the songs in basically the same way. Think Broader and Wider. You want to acquire or write more songs all the time, and learning or writing new songs should be a regular part of every practice session. Genre Cross-Over Another way that artists try to expand is to learn songs from different genres. This makes you an eclectic player, who might be able to mix some blues, with rock, or jazz with classical, for example. This is also a great excuse for owning several guitars, each of which might be particularly well suited to one genre or another. Vertical Growth Growing Vertically as a Guitarist  So let's say you can play a thousand songs, but you play them all the same way... Here are some ideas to help you keep your repertoire fresh and original sounding. Think Higher and Deeper.  Vertical growth is the deepening or heightening of old, familiar songs or techniques. Rough edges are polished off, holes and gaps are filled, voicings and melodies are altered for effect, and a creative spirit identifies itself. Genre Substitution One well-known example of genre substitution is neo-classical. Think of Bach played through a tall stack of amps with full volume and distortion, and in double-time. This is a way to make very complex, technical music more accessible and popular with an untrained audience. Variations on a Theme Try playing a well-known standard tune like Jingle Bells, Happy Birthday or the theme to Gilligan's Island in the style of metal, grunge, country, bluegrass, jazz, or classical. This way you can have a lot of fun practicing, and fitting an old familiar tune to any occasion. Melodic Variations Try changing major melodies to minor and other scalar modes. Also, experiment with substituting direct, overt melody with indirect, implied melody played through licks. Harmonic Variations While comping, and trying to find the best sounding voicing, try playing the melody on top and bottom of harmonic intervals or triads. Play the theme using open chords, straight bar chords, or substitute Jazz chords. Tempo Variations Practice to a drum machine as much as you can when alone, but try switching between different drum patterns or tempos. It's amazing to hear the difference a shuffle, a bossanova or reggae rhythm can do to pull you out of a 4/4 rut. Technical Variations The same old tired song can be spiced up by decisions on how to execute particular sections of a song... whether to strum or finger pick, use chords or arpeggios, employ bends or slides, hammer-on or pick, or mute or let ring, etc. Build a Medley Are there certain songs that sound great bolted together? Any two songs written with similar chord progressions and rhythm patterns make great candidates, and they are typically great crowd-pleasers. Tonal Variations Another excuse to spend money on guitar equipment is this one. Try playing your favorite tunes through different settings on your amp and effects chain. For example: fuzz vs. clean, acoustic vs. electric, with and without reverb and chorus, etc. Take a heavy metal song, and go unplugged with it.  Experiment with all your equipment settings, but boil them down so that you audience hears only what you think will really do the job, then mark the settings on your equipment. These settings are now yours. |
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| **Always Begin Here!** |
| What would you do if you knew in advance you could not fail? What is that secret element that separates good players from bad players, and great ones from good ones? You may be surprised by the answer. Set Your Goals before Starting Without goals, there is no movement. Wherever we are now is both the origin and destination. Compared to water, lack of goals is like the Dead Sea. Already at the lowest possible elevation, it can flow nowhere, can exert no kinetic or potential energy upon other objects nor sustain complex life.  For our goals to be effective, they must be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Action-Oriented, Relevant and Time-Framed), or they will eventually give way to pressures or frustrations. Let's examine each one at a time:  **Specific Goals** limit the variables we have to deal with at once, and allow us to focus on those areas that need work. Areas that do not need work should not be practiced at the expense of those areas that do. Specific goals should be written down to keep you on task until mastery is gained, and you check yourself off.  **Measurable Goals** allow us to quantify or substantiate progress from one day or one week to the next. How do you really know if your playing of diminished arpeggios is getting faster and cleaner if not confirmed by a metronome? How do you really know that you are making fewer mistakes unless you can compare two recordings of yourself? Always measure, always record, always listen critically.  **Attainable, Action-Oriented Goals** ensure that regardless of our current abilities, the next step is always possible, but requires effort. Trying to tackle extended chords before you are proficient with triads, for example, can be frustrating. Channel your energy into mastering your current level and then move on to the next. Our belt level system is geared to help sequence these musical concepts into a logical order for you.  **Relevant Goals** serve the purpose of helping us study the right material in the right context, and weeding out activities that distract from the specific goals set earlier. For example, if you are preparing a Bach piece for a classical master class with David Russell in two weeks, why would you spend your training time jamming to BB King? Save BB King for later, and work on your posture, breathing, memorization, articulation and phrasing on your classical guitar. Be comfortable in the knowledge that you cannot excel at all styles at once.  **Time-Framed Goals** always have a deadline attached, but just as importantly there is a beginning time where you block out other activities to focus on the task. This window must be commensurate with the work to be done during that timeframe. You might not make every deadline, but unless you put dates on your goals, they have a way of dragging themselves out much longer than necessary. This is one habit that will separate you from your friends by a long shot. Let's Get Started Before beginning any lessons, take some quality time to dream about what you want to become, and how guitar will enhance your life and the life of others. The pursuit of guitar can consume hours each week, and even years of your life, so take some time to dream and plan for you dream to realize itself. Let the clarity of your vision and the thrill of creating that future take control for a little while.  What will make you want to keep going when your fingers hurt, when people tell you that your playing stinks, or have no future in guitar, or most common of all when the novelty wears off, and things become boring?  Go to a quite place, put away your guitar and pull out a piece of paper and a pencil. Review the following steps and spend some quality time with your future self.  http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/images/misc/Goals.gif Jot Down your Inspiration Take some time to list your [inspirations](http://www.blackbeltguitar.com/Inspiration.php" \o "Inspiration). Who are those who move you with their music? Whose songwriting causes you to marvel? Whose technique causes your jaw to drop? These players might be famous, but they do not have to be. They can be your friend, a local band member, a teacher.  As you list the players who inspire you, think about them and let the emotions flow through you. List the things they do in their playing, songwriting, or in their personal character that makes you want to be better at this guitar thing. Pay attention to your motivation meter and note whether they really move you or not. If you think you are writing down characteristics that inspire someone else, don't list them. Write down what you want to become. Write down what you want to be using specific declarative language as if you already are what you want to become. Examples would be:   * "I am a well-rounded competent player that plays blues and jazz for live audiences and in the studio", or... * "I am a teacher who motivates my students through my recorded music and my interaction with them", or... * "I am a world-class professional player that inspires other guitar players around the globe through my performances and recorded music", or... * "I am a business man who likes to play guitar to relax in the evenings".  Write down major milestones. Major milestones are important achievements combined with dates. These must be written to be effective. Without milestones real progress cannot be made or measured.  Examples of major milestones might be:   * Save enough money to buy a new Martin guitar by my next birthday, or... * Start teaching students in my basement by next spring, or... * Start a band by next month, or... * Get admitted to music school by next semester, or * Build a studio in my basement by next year, etc.  Write down the steps to make your milestones it happen. Write down the practical things you can do each day to make your milestones a reality. Write them down. Examples might be:   * Practice daily * Read publications * Look for bands auditioning for players * Do marketing for new students * Save 10% from each paycheck for new guitar  Write down your daily time commitment to make it all happen. How much time can you give each day to make your goal happen? Write down your ideal daily commitment, and your minimum daily commitment, in case your ideal commitment can't be reached for some reason.  During this time each day, make sure to remove distractions, such as TV, phone, kids, visitors, etc. It should be just you, your instrument, and your practice routine. Write down all the songs you would like to play. Take some time to write down in one place all the songs you can think of that you would like to play. At first, don't worry about the order, just list every cool song that you would like to add to your repertoire either now or down the road a ways. Return to your list often, to pull songs off of it into your short-term practice routines. |
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| **Musical Vitamins for Guitar Players** |
| To always be ready for peak performance, we need to be sharp and at our best physically, mentally and spiritually. This lesson will give us a complete list of musical Vitamins, that when taken in recommended doses will help us to enable us to absorb the music we ingest, process it, and derive energy from it. Musical vitamins also help us grow, stave off disease that can afflict musicians and heal ourselves musically.  In learning to play guitar, there are musical vitamins that can help supplement our usual diet of learning to play new songs, and rehearsing the songs we already know. These musical vitamins are the drills and theory that supplement your song playing, and help you to remain musically healthy. The benefits are that you can absorb more music, faster, process the music and understand it, and detect and fight off bugs in our playing. A healthy balanced practice routine might look something like this:  Guitar Practice Mix  Here is a list of musical vitamins with the Black Belt Guitar Recommended Daily Allowances (BBGA RDA), needed to keep you musically healthy and strong. Check your practice routine, and see if any of these vitamins could help you out.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Guitarist Vitamin** | **Vitamin Description** | **BBGA RDA** | | **Vitamin A** | **Arpeggios:** Arpeggios are the bridge between chords and scales, and they should be part of every practice routine. Playing arpeggios from bottom to top and from top. | 5 Minutes Daily | | **Vitamin B** | **Borrowing:** As you listen to music from different artist, styles, genres or even other instruments, open your ears for ideas that you want to amalgamate into your own playing. This kind of openness will add depth to your playing, and help you avoid periods of creative drought in your playing. | Daily, as Exposed to Music | | **Vitamin C** | **Chords:** It goes without saying that chords are the workhorse of guitar music. [Learn open chords, bar-chords, inverted chords, extended chords, sustained chords, augmented chords, diminished chords.](http://service.bfast.com/bfast/click?bfmid=5607334&siteid=40240565&bfpid=902872&bfmtype=gear) To be like guitar George, who knows all his chords, you need to practice a lot of chords every day, and stuff a lot of them into your memory banks. | 10 Minutes Daily | | **Vitamin D** | **Darkness:** That's right... total darkness. Take the time to play with all the lights out. This reinforces the direct link between your hands and your ear. Instead of seeing what your hands are doing, learn to feel what they are doing in relation to what you hear them doing. This is a super-potent exercise for refining your tactal and aural abilities. | 10 Minutes 3x Weekly | | **Vitamin E** | **Exercise:** Not guitar exercise... Physical exercise. Get out and get your heart pumping. Stretch and do some pushups and pull-ups. Practicing guitar is no excuse for letting your body go to the dogs. While you are exercising, use this time to listen to your favorite guitar influences. [An](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00009J5VZ/blackbeltguit-20" \o "iPod" \t "_blank) **[iPod](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00009J5VZ/blackbeltguit-20" \o "iPod" \t "_blank)** [can be one of your best investments.](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00009J5VZ/blackbeltguit-20" \o "iPod" \t "_blank) | 30 Minutes 3x Weekly | | **Vitamin F** | **Finger picking:** Put your pick away for a while, and get in *touch* with your guitar. Also try combination of picking with your flat pick and fingers for a little different articulation than with a pick alone. | Mixed with Picking | | **Vitamin G** | **Gambling:** There is no substitute for thorough preparation in playing, but taking an occasional gamble can sometimes pay off. Try going for broke on some of your toughest leads in front of some of the friends you want to impress the most. If you win, you win big. If you lose, all you have lost is a moment in time, but you have learned a lot from the experience. Learn to play the tough hands with a straight face, cool, calm and relaxed. Don't dwell on the weak cards in the hand you are playing, just ante up and play. Enjoy the game. | As Opportunities Arise | | **Vitamin H** | **Harmonics:** Learn to play false harmonics on the 12th fret above the fretted notes of your left hand. Also, learn all the names of the natural harmonics over the 12th, 5th, 4th and 9th frets. Try substituting these harmonics over fretted notes. | 15 Minutes Weekly | | **Vitamin I** | **Interval Training:** Notes don't make music, intervals do. Our mind hangs on to the last note played in a melody, and anticipates the next, which creates our perception of motion in music. The distance between notes played melodically or harmonically should be understood by the mind and the fingers. Know all your intervals up and down. On the same strings and across strings. This will help you nail new melodies you hear the first time, without having to fumble around the fretboard to find the right notes. | 5 Minutes Daily | | **Vitamin J** | **Jamming:** Now this is what it is all about. Actively pursue being able to play with other musicians. Learn from those better than you, and be patient with those that are a little behind. They are learning too! Learn to organize your jam sessions around common knowledge, such as common tunes, or common chord progressions that you all know. Careful not to let egos interfere with the music. | Every chance you get | | **Vitamin K** | **Kinetic Energy Focus:** In guitar, we use kinetic energy of our fingers and picks to make music. The more efficient our movements, the less wasted motion, and the more kinetic energy is converted to speed. Minimize the wasted motion in your right hand by picking with precision. Minimize the wasted motion in your left hand by using proper positioning of the fingers just above the frets, the proper voicings in the chords and scales to minimize left-hand travel, and using the best available fingerings to allow playing passing notes even when the left hand is changing position. | Every Time You Play | | **Vitamin L** | **Left-Hand Only:** These include hammer-ons, pull-offs and bends and slides. Left hand only exercises will help improve your leads and licks overall. You can do this at the same time you practice scales, or other leads. | 3 Minutes Daily. | | **Vitamin M** | **Muting:** Take some time to focus on deadening the strings that are not being played. If you are not paying attention to this, chances are you are making unwanted noise on your extra strings. Consciously determine whether left-hand or right-hand music works best for what is being played. | Every Time You Play | | **Vitamin N** | **Nashville Numbering System:** [This system is the best way to get the sound of the harmonic scale into your ears and hands. Using numbers for chords in the harmonic scale, all musicians in the band are instantly able to relate the chords to each other without the need to read music.](http://service.bfast.com/bfast/click?bfmid=5607334&siteid=40240565&bfpid=707360&bfmtype=gear) | 5 Minutes Daily | | **Vitamin O** | **Open Strings:** Experiment with the songs you already know to see if ringing open strings can add a new dimension to the chords you are already playing. Guitar is very well suited to this kind of effect, and most bar-chord-locked players don't ever think to try it. It can set you apart from the crowd. | As Opportunity Affords | | **Vitamin P** | **Punching Through:** This vitamin pertains to adjusting your tone and choice of melodies and chord voicings to punch through the bed of sound created by your other band members, without having to increase your volume. It means to play notes that are not already being played or sung by someone else in the band. Two-note harmonies work excellently in this application, and punch through more effectively than bar chords to be sure. | As Opportunity Affords | | **Vitamin Q** | **Quiet:** Guitars in the wrong hands can be an endless source of noise. Introducing timely pauses in the middle of a piece can create tension, and anticipation, and has the effect of winning back a lost audience. Try it in some of your music to see if you can add some life to your songs. Also, quite refers to keeping volume below the pain threshold when practicing, and saving your ears, your dog's ears, and your audience's ears. | As Opportunity Affords | | **Vitamin R** | **Reading Music:** Small doses of reading music in both standard notation and tablature everyday is more effective than avoiding it until you have to, then beating your head against the wall when you need it. Take some sheet music with you in your backpack or on a plane, and read a few bars while waiting for your ride. | 10 Minutes Daily | | **Vitamin S** | **Scales:** Another staple of any serious practice routine. [Learn scales backwards and forwards, vertically and horizontally, major, minor, pentatonic, blues, modes, exotic, etc. Learn to fit scales over chord progressions. Learn to play in time... quarter, eighth and sixteenth notes. Duplets and triplets.](http://service.bfast.com/bfast/click?bfmid=5607334&siteid=40240565&bfpid=902870&bfmtype=gear) Get the scales into your ears and fingers, and everything else is just gravy. | 10 Minutes Daily | | **Vitamin T** | **Timing:** Use a drum machine or metronome. Get your tempo going, then try to work those quarter notes up to eighth notes, and then graduate to sixteenth notes. Try to increase your sense of syncopation, going with and against the rhythm in interesting ways. | During Practice Drills | | **Vitamin U** | **Upstroke:** When flat-picking, almost everyone has a stronger down stroke, but the upstroke can be problematic. By practicing your upstroke twice as much as your down stroke, you can equalize the imbalance in strength. | During Practice Drills | | **Vitamin V** | **Verbalize:** When learning note names, intervals, scales, chords, chord changes, etc., it really helps your memory if you say or sing what you are playing. This will cut down on the time it takes to master these basic elements. | During Practice Drills | | **Vitamin W** | **Writing:** Take a music pad with your wherever you go. This is to jot down ideas that are keepers. If you don't write it down... too often it's gone forever. That is until you hear someone else playing it on the radio. You get the idea. | Every Opportunity | | **Vitamin X** | [**X-treme playing techniques:**](http://hop.clickbank.net/?cpinegar/screaming) Dive Bombing, Legato Phrasing, Middle-Eastern Effects, String Skipping, String Scraping, Whammy Melodies, The Difference Tone, The Gargle, EVH Elephant, Satch String Pull, are all great techniques to learn, but they can't substitute for being solid musically. Practice these special effects to add spice to your playing, but don't make them the main course. | As Needed for Boredom | | **Vitamin Y** | **You-niqueness:** In all the playing you do, remember, remember that it's more fun and profitable to play things your own way, than to learn to mimic other successful players exactly. Let other players inspire you and let them teach you things you would not have learned on your own, but always try to put your own signature on what you play. | Every Opportunity | | **Vitamin Z** | **ZZZZZ...:** Get plenty of sleep! Recent studies prove that sleep deprivation significantly increases health risks, and reduces cognitive functions, creating symptoms similar to attention deficit disorder. In guitar, you simply can't learn as much as fast if your faculties are impaired by lack of sleep. Trade in those after-gig party hours for some z's, and you'll be amazed at the difference in your playing. | 8 Hours Nightly | |
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