

# DISCOVER THE SECRETS MOST GUITAR PLAYERS WILL NEVER KNOW ABOUT HOW TO PRACTICE GUITAR

**TOM HESS MUSIC CORPORATION  
PRESENTS:**

## **GUITAR PRACTICE STRATEGIES**

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## How To Play Guitar Without Making Mistakes

by Tom Hess

Every guitarist begins practicing something new on guitar with ONE goal in mind: 'To play it right'. If you are [practicing guitar correctly](#), the time will come when you are able to play whatever you were practicing 'exactly' as you want. When this occurs, you become excited, and that's great... well, kind of. As you advance and become a better musician, your feeling of 'excitement' often changes into fear - a really big fear. When you start wanting to play on a bigger level, such as performing for your friends or on a stage, you become afraid that you might make mistakes... embarrassing, reputation-damaging mistakes.

And THIS is when problems start...

It's a strange, but common thing that a guitar player who is better now than in the past is now 'fearful' of making mistakes instead of 'excited' about playing guitar better than before. These crippling [guitar playing fears](#) affect most guitarists as they discourage intermediate players from pushing themselves to become advanced. These same fears also sabotage potentially successful music careers of truly great guitarists.

As a real life illustration of this, I have a student I've been mentoring who recently had the opportunity to join a band and go on a really cool concert tour in Europe. Although he had been preparing all his life for this 'exact' moment, he nearly passed on it out of fear of not being 'good enough'. After confronting him about this, I helped him to understand exactly why he felt the fear that he did and trained him to practice guitar much more effectively than he was doing up until that point. I'm happy to say that this student conquered his fears and went on to audition for the band, get the gig, go on tour and have the time of his life becoming the 'rock star' he always wanted to be.

What was the secret to his success? More importantly, how can YOU avoid this fear from paralyzing your guitar playing as you become more advanced as a musician?

The reason why guitarists often feel 'more' insecure about their playing the better they become, is because they spend all their time practicing to 'play things right', vs. learning to 'never play them wrong'. Here is the difference between the two types of practicing and an explanation of how they affect your guitar playing:

**'Playing It Right'** - this is the first level of [practicing guitar](#) that everyone must go through when first learning to play something new. Your initial goal is to simply get the notes under your fingers, build confidence in your ability to play the music and 'nail' whatever you are trying to play. Most guitar players get 'stuck' at this level of practicing and assume that all their mistakes will eventually disappear on their own. This is FALSE! Mastery will not happen by itself, until and unless you go to the next (higher) level of practicing, which is:

**'Never Playing It Wrong'** - After you learn to play something in sterile isolation (such as in the sterile environment of your practice room), you must start practicing 'for the real world'. There are 3 'real world' contexts that you need to prepare for: performing on stage, recording yourself and integrating your musical skills together. Whenever you are done learning to 'play it right' with a practice item, you must ask yourself: "what is the ultimate goal/situation in which I will use this item in my guitar playing?" The answer will tell you exactly how you should practice that item next in order to fully master it and 'never play it wrong'.

Here are some examples of how to practice guitar in this way:

### **Practice Guitar For Live Performance:**

To practice guitar for live playing, you must anticipate what situations come up most often during your live performances and simulate those as much as possible during your practice sessions. Some of the most obvious things you need to prepare for include: playing while standing up, playing in the dark, playing with distractions, playing with other people watching you, playing guitar outside (to get used to playing in a variety of weather conditions) and playing on different guitars and amplifiers (if possible). Of course, the above list is NOT all-inclusive - use these ideas to make your own list of situations to simulate while practicing.

When you take any practice item that you've merely learned to 'play right' and put it under the stress of any of the situations above, it will often fall apart. It is GOOD to have this happen while practicing, because you now know exactly what needs to be improved in your playing to learn to 'never play this item wrong' in that situation.

Practice intentionally putting yourself into each of the contexts above and practice becoming confident at playing through them. The more you practice in this way, the better and more reliable your guitar playing will feel.

## **Practice Guitar For Recording In The Studio:**

The skill of 'recording' your guitar playing is something that virtually never gets practiced and this is why so many guitarists are scared to death of recording themselves. Just when you 'think' that you have learned to play something, as soon as you are put to the test of recording your playing (either on audio or video), you freeze up and start making mistakes that you typically do not make in your normal practicing. Sound familiar? Of course it does - we've all been there :)

To improve in this area, you must do 2 things. The first one is the most obvious and the simplest one: get into the habit of REGULARLY recording your guitar playing (on audio and video). Challenge yourself to play as perfectly as you can in as few takes as possible. This one point will go a long way towards helping you play confidently and accurately in the recording studio or similar situations.

Second, there are lots of very specific nuances of your guitar playing that you must practice and refine to have your recordings always sound good. I explain what many of them are in this free guide for [recording guitar in the studio](#). Make time for practicing them on a regular basis to improve your skills in this area.

## **Practice Integrating Your Musical Skills:**

Even if you don't intend to perform or record the music you are practicing, you still need to work on 'consistently' applying what you learn into songs and/or guitar solos. Doing this requires you to stop 'only' practicing licks and exercises in isolation, and learn to creatively combine them with other techniques. For example, after you learn a new arpeggio shape, you must practice creatively applying it with other techniques, using a variety of tempos and rhythms. You must also know the best musical contexts to use that arpeggio in while improvising. Watch this video about the [best way to practice guitar](#) to learn more about this kind of practicing and how to do it.

Depending on your goals with each item in your practice schedule, you may need to practice it in all 3 contexts above or just 1 or 2.

## **How To Put All Of This Together:**

Follow the steps below to apply these elements of effective guitar practicing into your playing:

Step 1: Become clear on what goals you want to achieve in your guitar playing in the medium to long term. This article about [setting musical goals](#) will help you do this.

Step 2: Become clear on how each item you are practicing is helping you move towards your goals in step 1. Read this article about finding the best [guitar exercises](#) to learn more about this. If you don't know what specifically you are trying to achieve by practicing a certain item, don't waste time practicing it!

Step 3: Follow a highly effective guitar practice schedule that will organize all of your practice items into a perfect blueprint that ties together your short/long term goals, skill level, practicing preferences and challenges. This [guitar practice schedule](#) generator will help you do this.

Step 4: Always ask yourself: "what is the ultimate goal/situation in which I will use this item or music in my guitar playing?" This will help to direct your practicing towards your goals and will help you to go from merely 'playing it right' to 'never playing it wrong'.

By applying the above steps into your guitar practicing on a regular basis, you will notice your fear of making mistakes disappear. The fear will be replaced by confidence, conviction and excitement as you make more and faster progress towards your goals.

To get lots of help with making your guitar practicing highly effective, check out the [guitar practice schedule](#) generator.



# 5 Things To Do When Practicing Guitar Again After A Long Break From Playing

by Tom Hess

Ever have periods of time when you don't practice guitar for a few days? How about a few weeks...or months (ugh)? If you have, then you know how frustrating it is to pick up your guitar and be shocked by how much your playing has gone backwards...

I can relate... after my 2012 world tour, I took a long break from seriously playing and practicing guitar. What started as a short planned break, turned into a longer one. 3 months later, it was time to begin recording another album. I picked up my guitar and... well, let's just say the sound that came out of my amplifier was nothing I wanted to hear.

If you've ever taken a break from playing guitar (or haven't *seriously* practiced guitar in a long while), here are 5 things to do to get your guitar speed, technique and consistency back:

## 1. Practice With Your Brain First...Your Fingers Second

ZERO [mindless guitar practice](#) allowed! Not only is this required for normal guitar practice, but it's ESPECIALLY critical when practicing guitar after a break. After taking a long break from serious practicing, the chances of bad habits creeping back into your guitar playing are especially high. If you allow your mind to wander while practicing guitar, there is a very good chance you will develop bad habits (even if they were never there in your playing before)! Here are the best ways to prevent this by ensuring that you stay focused during your guitar practice:

- Follow a very effective [guitar practice routine](#) that's designed to get your guitar technique back in the fastest and most efficient way possible. Such a routine will FORCE you to focus and make mindless practicing virtually impossible.
- Apply the principle of focus rotation to make sure that your mind is always actively engaged in the process of practicing. I talk about this at length in this guide to [doubling your guitar speed](#).
- Choose guitar technique exercises that have the maximum amount of [guitar playing transferability](#). This will make it easier to avoid boredom (the primary cause of mindless practicing) and also will drastically reduce the time it takes to get back on track with your guitar playing after a break.

## 2. Avoid Overcompensation

Many guitar players overcompensate for their periods of no guitar practice by trying to play excessive hours when they start up again. This often leads to ineffective / unorganized practice, injury and massive frustration (similar to trying to play at your top speed immediately after a break from practicing). This overcompensation is based on the false belief that *more* guitar practice will make you a better player. Truth is, you can easily make A LOT of progress in less time by practicing in short, highly-focused intervals throughout the day. The reason why this works so well is because the short amount of practice time allows you to practice without losing concentration or focus. So, instead of working on your [sweep picking technique](#) (for example) for an hour straight, you divide your guitar practice time into four 15 minute sessions. In the end, it is much easier to practice for 15 minutes in a row than for an entire hour (where you would probably take several breaks and lose practice time anyway).

The [guitar practice routine](#) that I recommend to use for getting your guitar skills back after taking a break is based upon this principle.

## 3. Put First Things First

When you don't play guitar for awhile, your musical skills fade away at different rates. Your guitar technique is almost always the first to weaken (compared to other skills, such as music theory knowledge or ear training for example). Therefore, for the first 1-2 weeks of practicing guitar after a break, you MUST prioritize guitar technique in your practicing above everything else. Yes, you read correctly: you will get your musical skills back faster if, for the first 1-2 weeks of playing guitar after a break, you focus all (or at least most) of your guitar practice time on technique only.

Note: of course I'm NOT saying that you must "always" focus 100% on technique only when you practice guitar. I'm only saying that your first 1-2 weeks of practicing guitar "after a break" must be very technique-focused.

Incidentally, even when you aren't physically practicing guitar, you can and SHOULD be [practicing many things away from the guitar](#) to not let your other musical skills deteriorate in the first place. You can do this no matter how busy you are (since you can make time for practicing during your idle time in the day, such as when standing in line at the grocery store, driving to work / school, etc.).

#### **4. Learn To Crawl Before You Can Walk...All Over Again**

In the first week of getting back to practicing guitar after a break, you CANNOT start immediately playing the same licks, riffs or songs you've played before. The reason is because you do not have the same refined level of control you once had over fundamental hand and finger movements. If you immediately rush into playing fast or difficult things on guitar, you will play very sloppily and may even injure yourself due to the extra tension caused from inefficient movement. This is like trying to run a marathon after you haven't exercised in years... Everything that is needed to make your body complete the marathon (muscle strength, cardiovascular health, endurance, etc.) has gone unused for a long time, making it extremely underdeveloped for the work that needs to be done. If you try to run the race before preparing yourself adequately, you will fail to finish and risk injuring yourself in the process.

To ensure that you get your playing back to the level it was before (without injuring and needlessly frustrating yourself), focus primarily on perfecting the fundamentals of your technique for the entire first week of practice. As you do this, pay close attention to the extra tension you feel in your body and minimize it as much as possible. Do NOT give in to the temptation to play very fast or technical guitar licks. By working slowly to rebuild coordination between both hands, you create a solid foundation from which to play guitar faster, cleaner and more accurately.

Good news: it doesn't take nearly as long as you think to get your guitar technique back even after you haven't played guitar for months (follow this [guitar practice schedule](#) to get your technique back in 2 weeks flat).

#### **5. Gain Control Over Your Frustrations To *Take Advantage Of Mistakes***

It's easy to get frustrated when you know you used to play guitar much better than you are playing right now. However, do NOT let this frustration take control of your playing and kill your [motivation to practice guitar](#)! By allowing frustration, anger or disappointment to influence your guitar practice, it will become much harder to get your chops back to where they were.

Truth is, making mistakes is an inevitable part of the process of becoming a great guitar player. Much of your practice time will be spent in a never-ending process of analyzing, isolating and [fixing your guitar playing mistakes](#) to improve your skills to a higher level. If you really love playing guitar, it makes very little sense to become frustrated by this 100% necessary aspect of practicing. Instead, focus on using mistakes as helpful

tools for understanding what you are currently doing wrong, so you can refine your guitar practice approaches to get a better result. By removing the negative emotions that stand between your mistakes and your ability to fix them, you allow yourself to address issues in your guitar playing more directly – becoming a better player much faster.

Now that you know what to do to get your guitar skills back after not playing for awhile, implement the concepts described in this article and watch your guitar skills far surpass your previous best levels of playing.

After you get your guitar playing / technique back on track, make sure to STAY on track and make the fastest progress possible by using the best [guitar practice schedules](#) for your musical goals.

## How To Play Anything You Want On Guitar - 3 Steps For Practicing Guitar Effectively

by Tom Hess

See if this sounds familiar: you practice something for months (a song, a guitar solo, a lick or some guitar technique) and it doesn't seem to get any better. You try every guitar practice approach you can think of to improve, but nothing seems to work... leaving you frustrated, helpless and full of doubt about your potential to become an awesome guitarist.

Before I tell you how to solve this and learn to play guitar the way you want, you **MUST** realize and believe that you **DO** have infinite potential to reach your guitar playing goals, just like any of your favorite musicians. If you are still struggling with problems in your guitar playing, it does **NOT** mean that there is something wrong with you, or that you lack talent to play guitar well. It simply means one (or both) of these 2 things:

1. You never learned the correct steps to follow when practicing to play anything you want on guitar (I'll list these steps for you in a moment).
2. You were never *correctly* taught **HOW** to practice the steps mentioned above. This part is a lot trickier (and self-taught guitarists in particular struggle with this) because it requires a thorough understanding of [how to practice guitar](#) effectively. While the steps of *what* to do are easy to understand (they are rooted in common sense as you will soon see), executing them *correctly* is anything **BUT** simple.

The first thing you must do is visualize your guitar playing as a tug of war between all the practicing you are doing to make your playing feel easier, and the problems that riddle your guitar playing that make your guitar playing a lot harder than it should be. As each side tries to dominate the other, your goal is twofold:

- To continue making your practicing highly effective, so you can make more progress faster (I've discussed many ways of doing this in my past [guitar playing articles](#)).
- To overcome specific problems that prevent you from playing the things you want to play at the level you want (this is what I'll show you below).

To help you fully understand the practicing process described below, first watch this [guitar practice video](#) that illustrates how this approach makes your guitar playing better. Do this now before reading further.

Note: even though the video above is a demonstration of how to practice guitar correctly using only a single context (arpeggios), the *general process* for solving problems applies in the same way to EVERY technique and musical style (from shred guitar string skipping licks to [blues guitar double stops](#), to chord changes on acoustic guitar).

Here is how to apply the steps from the video you watched to learning to play anything you want on guitar:

### **Step 1: Think Like A Doctor When You Practice Guitar**

The cardinal mistake many guitarists make when practicing is trying to fix *symptoms* (perceived problems) in their playing, rather than focusing on *ROOT causes* (actual problems). This is especially common among self-taught guitar players, who were never taught how to correctly practice guitar. As you saw in the video above, it's very easy to misdiagnose a problem and to wrongly assume that you understand its cause, only to waste weeks or months practicing the wrong things - making little/no progress.

The best way to avoid wasting time on mere symptoms of problems and to really improve your guitar playing, is to get feedback from an [expert guitar teacher](#) who can analyze your technique and pinpoint the exact things that are holding you back. In addition to giving you the immediate fix to your [guitar playing challenges and frustrations](#), working with a proven teacher will help you to ultimately become *your own* guitar teacher and fix your guitar playing problems by yourself. This is by far the biggest benefit of guitar lessons, and is the reason why guitarists who study with a great teacher become better players much faster than those who are self-taught.

This is no different than going to a doctor with some symptoms of not feeling well or having specific aches and pains in your body. Instead of prescribing medicine for the most obvious surface-level symptom of a problem, a good doctor traces every symptom all the way to its root causes and treats them, making you feel fundamentally better (eliminating all the original symptoms at the same time). Note that a doctor wasn't born knowing how to correctly identify and fix health problems - these skills/knowledge are all acquired and learned. The same can be said about your guitar playing: even if you struggle with correctly identifying the causes of your [guitar playing problems](#) right now, you absolutely CAN learn to overcome them and (over time) become your own *guitar playing doctor*.

## **Step 2: Turn Any Problem Into A Self-Sufficient Guitar Playing Exercise**

After you identified the problem that is holding you back from playing what you want on guitar, the next step is to learn how to *correctly* isolate it, so it can be fixed. As you saw in the video above, identifying the specific problem (the hammer on and pull off in that specific example) was NOT enough by itself. The next step is to put the problem into enough of the original context to turn it into a *self-sufficient* exercise. "Self-sufficient" means that you do not need to look for any additional [guitar exercises](#) to overcome it - the problem BECOMES your exercise.

To learn more about how to correctly do this step of the process, read this article about [practicing guitar correctly](#).

## **Step 3: Keep Drilling...Until You Strike Gold**

After you identified the correct problem that must be overcome to improve your guitar playing and you correctly turned it into its own exercise (as described and shown in the video above), you now need to practice the problem until it's fixed.

The mistake that most guitarists make in this step of the process is not doing enough *quality* repetitions of the exercise to develop a new [guitar playing habit](#) to replace the old one. This mistake shows up in one of two versions:

**Version 1:** Some guitarists simply stop practicing the exercise too soon - they become bored, lose focus and quit after practicing for a few minutes...never to return to the exercise again. So they simply never do *enough* repetitions of the exercise to improve their guitar playing to begin with.

**Version 2:** Others will persevere through sheer discipline and force of will and end up practicing the exercise for hours on end. Although they do often perform a lot of repetitions of the exercise, the *quality* of each repetition begins to suffer as they go through the exercise over and over, allowing their mind to fatigue and lose focus. Read this article about [mindless guitar practicing](#) to learn more about this.

The correct way to replace any bad habit is by practicing guitar in bursts of concentrated effort of a few minutes at a time... CONSISTENTLY. Rather than practicing the same isolated exercise for hours nonstop, practice it for a few minutes at a time, many times throughout the day, accumulating lots of volume (repetitions) over the course of a week.

Version 1 of the mistake above is common to guitar players who practice at random (without ever using a practice schedule). Their practicing is completely disorganized and chaotic (and so is their guitar playing).

In contrast, version 2 of the mistake above is common to guitar players who don't understand the nuances of *effectively* training the body and the mind to play guitar. Instead, they attempt to build their practice schedules using a [linear guitar practice approach](#) with an Excel spreadsheet or a calculator (big mistake!).

To avoid both mistakes, you must realize that teaching a human being to play guitar is different from *programming a computer*. This is why you must use highly effective [guitar practice schedules](#) that are designed specifically for helping *guitar players* get great results from every moment of time spent practicing.

Now that you understand what it takes to play anything you want on guitar, start implementing the advice given in this article (and in the additional resources I provided throughout) to make your practicing more effective and your guitar playing much easier.

If you still struggle with getting the results you want from your practicing, you will reach your guitar playing goals much faster by studying directly with me. Read this page about [rock guitar online lessons](#) and tell me about your guitar playing challenges that you need help with.



# How To Practice Guitar Effectively With And Without A Metronome

by Tom Hess

Do you believe that [practicing guitar](#) with a metronome is important for your guitar playing?

When answering this question, guitar players tend to fall into 2 camps:

1. Some guitarists never (or rarely) practice guitar with a metronome.
2. Other musicians always (or almost always) practice with a metronome.

When asked about why they rarely use a metronome, guitarists in the first group often say that they prefer the freedom of not having to stick to a rigid tempo while playing in order to [become more musically creative](#). Others in this group just don't think much about the metronome.

The guitarists in the second group (those who use a metronome for almost everything) argue that playing guitar with a metronome consistently is key to developing [tight rhythm guitar playing](#), improving guitar speed and tracking musical progress. Therefore, the guitarists in this group believe it is essential to practice everything to a metronome in order to achieve the fastest results in their guitar playing.

## Which Group Are You In?

Fact is both of the above belief systems are incomplete and misleading. There is one main reason for this:

You need to alternate between both using and not using the metronome, but to be effective you need to do this in a strategic way, not a random one. You must have a diverse set of targeted guitar practice techniques (and know when and how to apply each one) to successfully overcome every guitar playing challenge you face. When it comes to practicing guitar with a metronome, there are times when using it is necessary and there are other times when the metronome will distract you from improving in the areas you need to master.

There are multiple ways of using a metronome in your guitar practicing. (Consciously choosing "not" to use a metronome "sometimes" is one type of such strategy.) It is NOT enough to simply decide to practice guitar with a metronome a certain % of the practice time (such as 50% on and 50% off). To get the most benefit from using a metronome, you need to

know when, how and why to use it (or not use it) depending on [the musical goals you are trying to achieve](#) in a given practice session.

Although the complete list of guitar practice strategies for using a metronome is beyond the scope of this article, I want to share with you several of the most important roles that the metronome should play in your guitar practicing (and also explain when/why to avoid using it). These ideas will help you to get much faster results in your guitar playing.

## **How To Use A Metronome To "Test" Your Guitar Playing**

Contrary to popular belief, practicing guitar with a metronome does NOT help you to "improve" your guitar technique or "increase" your guitar speed. As I discuss in this free mini course on [how to play guitar fast](#), there are specific elements that go into guitar speed that must be trained and refined, often at super slow speeds without the metronome. The metronome is then used mainly as a TEST to establish how well you have mastered these elements. The speed at which you can play will indicate whether or not you need to do additional practicing (without using the metronome) to overcome the technical flaws preventing you from playing guitar as fast as you want.

So, before you start using a metronome to "measure your improvement" in speed, you need to spend a substantial amount of time refining the fundamental technical components that make guitar speed possible (without using the metronome). This goes totally against the conventional wisdom of practicing everything to a metronome in order to improve your guitar technique, but is a much more effective way of developing this skill (check out the free mini course above to fully understand why this is true and how you should practice to [build guitar speed](#)). In fact, it is this belief (that more work with the metronome is the key to overcoming one's guitar speed/technique plateau) that keeps many guitarists frustrated with their lack of guitar playing progress.

## **How To Use A Metronome To Improve Your Rhythm Guitar Playing**

The guitar players who never (or very rarely) practice guitar using a metronome say that they want to have the freedom of not having to stick to a rigid tempo in order to [be more musically expressive](#) with what they are playing. Although this style of guitar playing has its place in music (more on this below), most people who only practice guitar without the metronome typically struggle whenever they do have to play in strict time. It is important to be able to play by varying the tempo, dynamics and other musical elements for expressive reasons, but it is equally as

important to be able to lock perfectly in time with a particular tempo (for "different" expressive goals). If you have always stayed away from practicing playing guitar to a metronome for the reasons mentioned above, chances are that your timing needs improvement.

Unlike the concept of guitar speed, practicing guitar with a metronome is a very critical part of what actually "develops" your ability to play guitar tight (in time). As you play, you can tell easily if your guitar playing is in time if you can make the sound of the metronome click "disappear" on most (or all) of the strong beats of the music. If you are playing in perfect time, the notes you are playing will line up precisely on top of the metronome click, creating an illusion that the click has become silent (disappeared). If you can achieve this goal, you are making excellent progress.

### **How (And Why) To Practice Guitar Without A Metronome To Improve Your Guitar Phrasing**

One problem that guitarists who use a metronome often run into, is a tendency to come up with melodies and [lead guitar phrases](#) mostly in "straight" divisions of the beat (such as long streams of sixteenth notes, triplets and quarter notes). Even though the playing may sound good and be in time, the phrasing can begin to sound somewhat robotic and predictable (even if you use different scales). One solution to this problem is to practice a guitar phrasing technique known as "rubato". This soloing technique refers to intentionally playing lead guitar melodies without a clear rhythm by expanding and suddenly contracting the duration of pitches. Note: there is a BIG (and easily noticeable) difference between playing in the style of rubato and the playing "not being in time" (one is a cool guitar phrasing technique and the other is a result of poor rhythmic control). When you play using rubato, it is obvious that the notes of the phrase "intentionally" do not stick to any predetermined rhythm (and the phrasing sounds very cool and expressive as a result). In contrast, if you attempt to play notes that ARE (or should be) in a strict rhythmic pattern but are not able to play in time, the music then has no sense of rubato and simply sounds "out of time".

To learn more about rubato technique and hear exactly how you should practice it, watch this free [guitar phrasing lesson](#).

As you can see, always practicing 'with' a metronome or always practicing 'without' a metronome will limit your ability to reach your full potential as a guitar player. You now know that there are specific times when you should be using it and other specific times when you shouldn't.

Ultimately, the metronome is only one of many guitar practice tools that should be used "when necessary" to overcome specific guitar playing problems. The way each tool is to be used depends on the musical goals you are trying to reach and the specific problems you are trying to overcome. If you lack experience in knowing which guitar practice strategies and tools to use, [work with a proven guitar teacher](#) who can guide you towards making your guitar practicing more effective.

## 8 Steps To Develop A Highly Efficient Practice Schedule

By Tom Hess

If you are like most guitar players you sometimes feel [frustrated with your guitar playing](#). You know mastering guitar playing takes a LOT of time, energy and effort. It seems like a huge mountain to climb in order to reach the highly advanced levels of guitar playing. You know that few people who attempt to climb that mountain will actually achieve it... but if you are truly determined to reach these goals you certainly can!

Fact is, one of the biggest reasons why so few people become great guitarists is not because they lack talent, but rather due to not knowing all of the things they need to do or practice in order to reach their goal. People usually have more than enough things to practice (licks, techniques, exercises, scales etc.) but struggle most with creating an overall plan to get them the result they want.

Taking your guitar playing ability from wherever it is right now to exactly where you always dreamed it could be in the shortest amount of time can be done. Having a well-structured (yet flexible) guitar practice regimen is a key first step to do this.

I know... I know... You've heard this before, it seems 'obvious', so why talk about it again here? ...

... Well, unfortunately, many guitarists have misconceptions about having an efficient and effective practice schedule. Others have tried it for a while but either didn't stick with it, or had an ineffective practice plan to start with.

Have you ever believed any of the following [guitar practice myths](#)?

- Effective guitar practicing routines are boring, it takes all the fun out of playing guitar.
- I started putting myself on a practice schedule for guitar, but it was hard to stick to it.
- Practice schedules are too rigid and they restrict, or put limitations on my creativity.
- A guitar practice regimen is too structured for me, I want the freedom to allow myself to drift to random things when playing guitar.

- Practice routines for guitar just don't work. I can make more progress without one
- I can't stand to practice the same things in the same way each day.

Now think about this:

The truth is, 'bad' practice routines DO SUCK! However, efficient, effective and flexible ones have the power to totally transform your guitar playing, musicianship and your creativity in a shorter period of time. Imagine how much better your guitar playing life will be like after you fully reached all of [your musical goals](#)!

Good practice regimens won't hurt your creativity, the opposite is true because you are gaining the tools to [become more musically creative](#)... AND your schedule can include 'creative time' to work on writing new songs, improvising, etc. It's not boring to practice that which directly relates to the very things you want to achieve as a guitar player and musician. Yes practicing the same exercise for 30 minutes 'is' boring, which is why you shouldn't design a guitar practice schedule in such a way. We want to create a structure that works, not one that will drive you crazy. You do NOT need to spend all your [guitar practice time](#) with a fixed schedule. If you have 90 minutes to practice, invest 45-60 minutes working from your planned guitar practicing regimen. Use the rest of time to freely do whatever you feel like playing that day. The best routines are NOT the same each day. A good guitar practice workout schedule should be effective, efficient and flexible.

A practice schedule is a roadmap to freedom of being able to play whatever you want! But this doesn't mean that you don't have any room to have fun, be creative, and enjoy playing guitar in the process. The only difference is that now you will be enjoying the process more WHILE you get better, and avoid [mindlessly playing around on the guitar](#) with no direction or sense of purpose. As a result, it will take you much less time to become the exact kind of excellent guitar player you want to be.

The best way to think about an efficient practice schedule is with an analogy of a map. When you prepare to travel somewhere, you first analyze where you are (Point A), and then prepare the most direct and time efficient route of arriving to your destination (Point B).

## 8 Steps to Creating Your Own Guitar Practice Routine

**Step 1.** Get very clear on what your LONG TERM guitar playing / musical goals are. Beware of distractions... there is a big difference between 'short term goals' and 'distractions'. True short-term goals should be consistent with your long-term goals. If they aren't, then you might be simply distracting yourself from what you really want to achieve as a guitar player and musician. When creating your practice routine, focus mainly on long-term goals.

**Step 2.** Balance your existing strengths and RELEVANT weaknesses. Seek to turn your strengths into super strengths and 'only' work on weaknesses that are truly 'relevant' to your goals (see step 4 below).

**Step 3.** Be realistic about how much time you can practice each day. As mentioned above, you can and should allow 'free time' in your schedule to learn, practice, or do other things with your guitar outside of your written guitar practice regimen.

**Step 4.** You must be 100% sure you *really* know all the musical elements which are needed to reach your long term goals, AND you need to be clear about which of these elements are the 'primary' and 'secondary' priorities for you to focus on right now in order to reach your specific goals. To get help, I have created a totally free resource for you to use <http://tomhess.net/GoalsManifestation.aspx>

**Step 5.** Contrary to popular belief, creativity CAN be taught, learned and practiced. Always include creativity development into your practice schedule (or work on it at least in your free time).

**Step 6.** Application is key! Be sure to add time each day to work on applying your skills even if you have not mastered them yet! It's a big mistake to work only on mastering something before seeking to apply it.

**Step 7.** Don't create the same schedule for each day of the week, your schedule should be based on larger period of time (I use an 8-day practice and learning schedule for my students – works much better compared to a routine that repeats itself each day). Maybe 2, or 3 of the days are the same, but the other days are a little different (yet still based on the above steps mentioned).

**Step 8.** Create 3-5 different 8-day practice regimens. Use each one twice (16 days) before working with the next one. Be sure that when you create them that each are based on the first 7 steps above.

## **What's next?**

1. Get committed!

2. Stay committed! Follow through with your plan and watch your guitar playing get better and easier. If you find it hard to stay committed, focus on the 'reasons' behind the goals you have set for yourself, in other words, keep in mind "why" you want to reach those goals. How you will feel after you achieve them and are able to be/do/have what you want as a musician.



## Most Guitar Players Are Totally Out Of Balance

by Tom Hess

Most students of the guitar are totally out of balance with the skills they have. Those of you who have read my other articles know that I am not a believer in studying all music related things, nor am I a believer in studying a billion different [guitar playing styles](#) and techniques. As a musician and composer, I am committed to the process of mastering only the skills I need to reach my goals. As a guitar teacher, I am committed to helping my students master whatever things are needed to reach his/her goals. In almost every case, it is not important to learn everything about everything. It would be nice to do that, but there is simply not enough hours in the day (or years in a life) to master it all.

A significant percentage of my guitar students had already been playing/studying music for a while before studying with me, often having studied with more than one previous guitar teacher in the past. In almost every case these students possess some promising skills in a few areas and are severely lacking in other, very important, areas. The problem is not that they are lacking in this area or that one, but that they are lacking in some areas that are often critical (or at least important) in achieving their own [guitar playing goals](#). The worst part is they often don't realize how much they are lacking in these areas, nor do they fully understand just how important it is for them to be strong in these same areas. It is, in my opinion, every guitar teacher's responsibility to stress this issue to his/her students and to work with the student on a regular basis to bridge the gap and improve these weak spots.

For all you guitar players reading this, if you are already studying with a good guitar teacher, make sure he/she understands what your biggest musical goals are. If your guitar teacher is a good one, he/she should be working with you in your weak areas, and if your guitar teacher isn't, can't or won't, find another teacher. (Download the FREE guide about [How To Find And Choose A Guitar Teacher](#))

The one area that many students are usually strongest is actually technique and the weakest areas are usually aural skills, songwriting and improvisation. Songwriting may or may not be a part of your goals, but no matter what your goal is, improvisation is probably going to be an important tool that you will need for your goals and certainly [aural skills](#) will definitely be a critical part of virtually all goals.

Being out of balance musically can be a real problem for two main reasons:

1. Your weak areas will always hold you back because you won't be able to accomplish what you need to without being strong in all the areas required to [reach your musical goals](#).
2. Areas where one is strong in are not as useful without all the other skills needed to go along with it. This makes an area, which in general is pretty strong, now only mediocre because strong areas can't be fully applied.

Here is an example relating to the second point above: Let's assume someone's main goal is to write great songs with great [lead guitar](#) parts. Let's also assume the following:

**This Person's Strong Areas Are:    This Person's Weak Areas Are:**

Lead Guitar Technique  
Good Vocabulary of Chords  
Rhythm Guitar Playing  
Sense of Melody

Music Theory Knowledge  
Aural Skills (ear training)  
Improvising  
Form (song structure)

It is likely this guitar player will have no problem finding some nice sounding chords because he/she knows a good amount of chords, BUT because of his/her lack of understanding in how chords work together (music theory weakness), it will be hard to consistently find good chord progressions (combinations of chords). Plus, not understanding about theory will make it difficult to [write music](#) that is in key and that can change keys fluidly. This guitar player's aural skills are weak too so "hearing" chord progression in his/her head won't be easy either. So in the end, it won't matter much that this person knows a lot of chords because the weaknesses are severely restricting the ability to apply the chord knowledge.

Let's say this guitar player gets a song written and now it's time to record/play a guitar solo over the song. He/she has good lead guitar technique and a good sense of melody. That is a great start, but with weak improvising skills and a weak ear (aural skills), it will be very difficult to write something that actually sounds like it fits the song. With a better knowledge of music theory it is possible to at least partly bridge this gap. BUT in our example this person is weak in music theory. So here is another classic example of how one's strong areas are not really valuable since they can't really be applied. Sure this person could play some [really fast guitar](#) parts that has some melodic sense to it, but if it doesn't really fit the song, what good is it?

The examples I gave above are not exaggerations or extreme, they are just two, of many, very common situations that really hurt one's ability to reach goals and feel fulfilled from music. Most players are way out of balance and are being held back on a daily basis. Many people are seduced by their strengths and ignore their weaknesses, concentrating on making only the strong areas stronger. All that does is make one even more out of balance, [more musically frustrated](#) and further away from personal musical bliss.

## **What Conventional Guitar Practice Wisdom Never Tells You About Building Speed**

By Tom Hess

Most guitarists will never build real speed in their playing, because they make one of the following mistakes while trying to do so:

**Mistake 1:** When practicing for speed, many guitarists put all of their focus into practicing 'slowly' (as instructed by their guitar teacher or other resources they learn from). They are told that once they learn to play perfectly at slower speeds, their top speed will automatically increase as a result. Hmm, ever wonder why those same teachers who give this advice DON'T have a lot of [guitar students who can play fast?](#)

**Mistake 2:** Other guitarists don't have the patience to practice slowly and ONLY want to play fast, so they simply 'try to play faster' every day. They think that simply by trying to increase speed on a regular basis, they will eventually reach their goals.

In nearly all cases, both of the above approaches fail miserably to build serious speed. This happens because both practicing styles on their own have severe shortcomings that are never addressed (by most guitar teachers). In addition, practicing too much in either of the ways above creates severe problems in your technique (without you realizing it). To REALLY build speed on guitar, you must learn 'when' and 'how' to use BOTH practicing styles of slow and fast playing to counteract the weaknesses of the other.

Here is why always practicing exclusively 'fast' or 'slow' will prevent you from increasing your guitar playing speed and when/how you should use the opposite approach to build speed faster:

### **Why 'Always' Practicing Slowly Doesn't Help You Become A Faster Guitarist**

**Reason 1:** You Don't Identify What REALLY Prevents You From Increasing Your Guitar Speed

In order for your slow practice to be effective in helping you build speed, you need to first understand the technical obstacles/problems that make it impossible for you to play fast NOW. Until and unless you know 'specifically' what mistakes are getting in the way of you playing faster, the time spent practicing slowly will only be a waste. You'll merely be 'guessing' what to focus on (if you focus on anything at all) and hoping

that your guess turns out to be correct and improves your playing. To reach your guitar speed goals in the shortest time possible, you must 'know' (NOT guess) what specific obstacles stand in the way of your ability to play fast. To do this, you must first experience what it's like to play at faster speeds, and pay attention to what specific mistakes happen while playing at these speeds. You should only begin your slow practice AFTER doing the above analysis, NOT before!

Starting to practice slowly before going through the process above is similar to walking on a balance beam blindfolded and with your hands tied behind your back, hoping that you don't lose your balance. To take off the blindfold from your eyes and untie your hands, you must identify what things prevent you from playing guitar faster BEFORE doing your slow practice.

### **Reason 2:** You Develop Bad Habits That Make Faster Guitar Playing Impossible

When you exclusively practice guitar at 'slow' speeds, you form the bad habit of using big, sloppy motions that are completely different from the motions you would use while playing fast. By having more time between notes, you don't see the consequences of using wasted motions in your picking and fretting hands (since you can get away with it and still play the notes slowly). When you do get around to playing faster, you try to apply the same sloppy motions and see your playing fall apart and your hands get out of sync.

Here are two frequent examples of this that I see all the time in the guitar playing of my newer students:

- They try to play sweep picking arpeggios by picking each 'individual' string of the arpeggio rather than using a single sweeping motion to move across all of the strings at once.
- They play three note per string scales using strict alternate picking. This creates tons of unnecessary picking hand motion in the process, causing MASSIVE slowdown and mistakes. Watch this video about [playing guitar fast](#) to see a demonstration of this problem (and its solution)

### **Reason 3:** Practicing Slow All The Time Does Not Prepare Your Mind To Hear Music At Faster Speeds

To play at virtuoso level speeds on guitar, your mind needs to learn how to think/hear notes at the same tempo (or even faster) than the speed you are playing at. If all you do is practice slow 'all the time', you never

develop your mind's ability to think as fast as your hands can play. This leads to your playing sounding sloppy at faster speeds and your ears/mind not being able to follow the music at those tempos.

To avoid this problem, you need to spend some time training your mind (as well as your hands/fingers) to get used to the demands of faster playing. To see a lot more examples of how to practice in this way, take this free [guitar speed mini course](#).

### **Why 'Always' Playing At Your Max Speed (When You Can't Do So Cleanly) Will Hurt Your Ability To Play Fast**

You now know why it's ineffective to spend all of your time practicing guitar slowly. However, it's equally dangerous (and ineffective) to 'only' play at fast speeds with music you haven't yet mastered. Here are the reasons why:

#### **Reason 1: Your Guitar Playing Becomes Sloppy**

Playing fast 'all the time' will prevent you from learning to mentally process notes in the same way as playing slow all the time will not allow you to push your mental capacity to think at faster speeds. This approach is especially dangerous when you play at fast speeds for too long while making a lot of mistakes. By doing this, you become immune to the sound of your own mistakes and start perceiving them as 'normal'. In other words, you get 'better' at playing WITH mistakes! I see these problems often with new students who come to me for help with increasing their guitar speed. To help them play faster, I first point out the mistakes they are making at faster speeds (that they aren't aware of yet) and then train them 'how to detect' these same mistakes in their playing on their own. This is one of the reasons why my [guitar students](#) make amazing progress in their progress very quickly.

To avoid this problem, your practicing needs to balance working on 'perfection' and accuracy during slow playing together with training the skills that only faster practicing can develop.

#### **Reason 2: You Increase The Likelihood Of Injury**

Playing faster with sloppy technique very often leads to injuries that can potentially cripple your ability to play guitar permanently. This comes from not mastering the correct movements at slower speeds so that they become effortless at faster tempos. This is not a joke: I've seen many guitar players injure themselves from prolonged playing at faster speeds

who had to stop playing guitar for weeks (or months) in order to fully heal.

To prevent this from happening to you, pay close attention to 'where' and 'how much' tension exists in your body as you increase speeds (this is something you can only observe during faster playing/practicing). Once you have identified any excessive amounts of tension in your playing, begin playing again at a slower speed using only as much tension as needed. Then increase speed once you can play the notes correctly with optimal tension.

**Note of caution:** NEVER play guitar in pain! If you ever notice pain in your arms while you are playing, stop playing immediately until it goes away.

Now that you understand the problems that exist with conventional approaches to building speed on guitar, watch the video below to see how to practice applying these concepts to improve your speed (with sweep picking):



# Why You Lack Motivation To Practice Guitar And Struggle To Make Progress

by Tom Hess

Are you feeling less motivation to practice guitar lately? Most likely if you have come to this page, you have felt frustrated more than once with slow progress during your guitar practice sessions. Fortunately, you are not the only guitarist who goes through this. Every guitar player (regardless of skill level or experience) struggles at one time or another when learning [how to practice guitar effectively](#).

After teaching over 1,000 guitar students, I have found that there are many reasons why guitarists may lack motivation to practice. To help you overcome this problem and learn to practice guitar more effectively, I have put together 5 of the most common reasons why guitar players struggle with their practicing.

**Reason #1:** Not knowing [what to practice on guitar](#).

Most guitar players are unsure about 'what' to practice and make the mistake of working on way too many things at once (most of which are totally unnecessary). This is usually done with good intentions out of high enthusiasm for playing guitar, however this approach leads to overwhelm from having too much material to cover in your guitar practice sessions. If you don't know exactly what you should practice on guitar, it's hard to find the motivation needed to practice guitar effectively. To understand more about what you need to practice on guitar for yourself check out this page about musical goals.

**Reason #2:** Not having an [effective guitar practice schedule](#).

Most guitar players don't know how to create an effective practice schedule. Many 'think' that they know, but the reality is completely different. One of the most common mistakes guitarists make when creating a practice schedule is attempting to "equally" divide their total available practice time among the items they plan to practice. This is similar to trying to cook a meal by using every ingredient in exactly the same quantities, without considering how each ingredient affects the taste of the food. Guitar players who practice guitar in this way end up "over" practicing some items and "under" practicing others.

Another typical problem that guitar players run into when practicing (without realizing it) is gravitating naturally towards working on the skills that they "want" to practice while mostly (or completely) ignoring the



things they “need” to practice to reach their specific goals. The result of this is something I see very often when I begin to work with a new student: their [musical skills are often severely out of balance](#) and their weak areas hold back their ability to apply the skills that are already well developed.

I could go on and on writing about the various mistakes that guitarists make when creating their practice schedules, but it would be better for you to evaluate your own ability to do this for yourself. Take this test about creating guitar practice schedules and I will give you (for free) specific feedback on the areas where you need work with making your practicing more effective.

**Reason #3:** Not enjoying the process of practicing guitar.

Contrary to popular belief, practicing guitar is NOT boring ‘busy work’. If you think about your guitar practice sessions with this negative mindset, then you have a fundamental misunderstanding of what practicing guitar is all about. You will be able to maintain high levels of motivation to play and practice your instrument when you learn to achieve consistent results from your guitar practice efforts. To do this, you need to not only design your practice schedules to be highly effective but you also must know how to have fun in the process of reaching your musical goals. When you have the tools to design such an effective and inspiring environment for yourself, it will become easy to find motivation to practice guitar and you will not be distracted by short term frustrations of not being able to play something as well as you want. Over time, you will start to see your guitar playing challenges as ‘opportunities’ for you to enjoy the process of learning how to get better at guitar.

To help you learn more about this topic I have written another article that talks more specifically about the [best guitar practice methods](#). Read it to learn more about how to solve this problem in your guitar practicing.

**Reason #4:** Not seeing the big picture.

Fact is, it takes a long time to get really good at guitar. If you want to become a great guitar player, you will first need to understand your own musical goals. After you are clear on what you want to achieve on guitar, you will need to design your guitar practice sessions as stepping stones to reaching the goals that you have set. Imagine each guitar practice session as a piece of the puzzle that ultimately makes up the big picture of your musical dreams. The more you understand what the big picture of your guitar playing goals looks like, the easier it will be to design the practice

schedules that will help you make that vision into reality and the easier it will be to find the motivation needed to practice guitar effectively.

**Reason #5:** Not having [perseverance in your guitar playing](#) due to expectation of instant results.

Even if you know how to practice guitar effectively, big results will not happen overnight. Unfortunately for most guitarists, if they don't see instant (or at least very fast) results, then they will quickly abandon one guitar practice method in search of something else. As a result they never have a chance to experience the benefits of "consistent" practicing. Jumping from one guitar practice approach to the next is similar to starting to watch 10 different movies and stopping a few minutes into each one before you can understand what the movie is about. When you practice guitar, you must give time for any method to start working for you before you can intelligently evaluate its effectiveness.

### **What should you do now?**

By now, you should have a clearer idea about why you struggle to consistently find motivation to practice guitar. Analyze your guitar practicing efforts to determine if any of the problems listed above apply to you and begin to implement the suggested solutions in your future guitar practice sessions. Although the list above is not an exhaustive collection of all the problems you may run into in the process of developing your musical skills, if you apply the suggestions given in this article you will start to experience faster results from your guitar practicing and you will begin to enjoy the process much more along the way.

To get a better idea of what you need to practice on guitar, check out this page about reaching [musical goals](#). In addition, if you haven't taken the free test about creating [guitar practice schedules](#), I highly suggest you do so now.

# How To Get Better At Guitar Much Faster

by Tom Hess

Until you know exactly what keeps you from quickly getting better on guitar, your [musical goals](#) will always seem *out of reach*... leaving you frustrated every time you pick up your instrument. This is like to trying to drive a race car, but not realizing you have a brick under the gas pedal that is keeping you from fully accelerating towards your goals. To get better fast, you must become aware of the biggest problems that are slowing you down and take action to eliminate them.

Here are 5 obstacles that get in the way of you progressing as fast as you'd like (and the actions you must take to turbocharge your guitar progress:

## 1. You Practice Guitar For The Sake Of Practicing

You've likely heard statements such as: "practice makes perfect" or "*perfect* practice makes perfect". Truth is, neither statement tells the whole story about what it means to get better on guitar. Fast guitar progress is all about practicing not just *perfectly*, but also STRATEGICALLY.

Here is the difference between practicing guitar *for the sake of practicing* and practicing guitar *strategically*:

When you practice for the sake of practicing, you compile tons of tablature or exercises or random guitar lessons you find online and try to practice them as best as you can, simply trying to *get better*. This leads to the following:

1. You become overwhelmed and frustrated as you quickly accumulate more practice items than you know what to do with. This is because random videos, tablature or exercises are not centered around a *strategy* for reaching your musical goals as quickly as possible.
2. You have no way to measure your progress, since you haven't established a long term overarching goal for your practicing (hint: a vague desire to "get better at guitar" is NOT a specific goal!) So you end up going through the motions of practicing guitar month after month, year after year, having no idea if your practicing is really getting you anywhere.

3. Your guitar playing skills get way out of balance, without you realizing it (more on this below).

Note: even if your practicing habits are highly effective, your lack of overall strategy makes it impossible to improve your guitar playing fast. Practicing the wrong items correctly is just as bad as practicing the right items incorrectly.

In contrast, strategic practicing starts by focusing on the specific musical goals you want to reach. You must then find out [what to practice on guitar](#) to reach those goals, and not let yourself become distracted by practicing random items that do not relate to your goals. Thus, your guitar playing goals act like a filter that only allows relevant items to pass into your practicing - ignoring all the rest.

## **2. You Don't Know HOW To Become A Better Guitar Player Every Time You Practice**

Knowing what to practice is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to making progress on guitar. To make fast progress, you must know both *what* to practice and *how* to practice it. Even if you have the right strategy and a full list of correct items to practice, they will be of limited use to you if you:

1. [Practice guitar mindlessly](#).
2. Don't know [how to solve your guitar playing problems](#) easily and with minimum frustration whenever they come up (and they WILL!)
3. Don't have a highly effective [guitar practice schedule](#) to follow with the practice items you have.

The easiest way to learn how to practice guitar is to work with a guitar teacher who A.) has already accomplished the same musical goals you desire B.) understands exactly how to get you from where you are now to your guitar playing goals fast and C.) has a proven track record of helping countless other players become [awesome guitarists](#).

## **3. You're A Self-Taught Guitarist**

Many guitarists decide to learn guitar on their own, because they think they can make progress just as fast teaching themselves as under the guidance of a great teacher. This belief could not be any further from the truth! Here are just a couple of reasons why this thinking is dead wrong:

1. Random videos, tablature or disorganized/amateur lessons you find online can NOT correct you when you practice ineffectively, build [bad guitar playing habits](#) or waste countless hours working on things that take you in the WRONG direction from your musical goals. They also cannot answer your questions, give you feedback on your guitar playing and cannot tailor themselves to your skill level and your musical interests. So you are left on your own to figure everything out and *reinvent the wheel* of guitar playing, using yourself as your own guinea pig.

On the other hand, an expert guitar teacher will design a highly effective learning strategy *specifically* for you, will hold your hand every step towards your guitar playing goals, and give you tons of support along the way. This saves you years of wasted time and unnecessary frustration - allowing you to not only make faster progress on guitar, but also enjoy every step of the process of reaching your goals. This leads me to my next point:

2. Guitar players who try to learn on their own, often make slow progress after they lose motivation to practice (because they aren't seeing big results). Working with an expert guitar teacher solves this problem. Not only will your teacher help you understand exactly *what* and *how* to practice, but he will hold you accountable for the progress you make and will continually push you to make the fastest progress possible. Without someone to hold you accountable in this manner, you create a MASSIVE slowdown in your progress.

To illustrate this point, compare the process of getting better on guitar to going to a gym to lose weight. Learning guitar on your own is equivalent to following some general exercise program you found online and becoming unmotivated after 4 weeks, when you notice that you lost a tiny amount of weight...or even GAINED weight! This can be disheartening and cause many people to stop coming to the gym.

Now imagine working with a personal trainer who will

- Hold you accountable for coming to the gym every single week.
- Explain that your initial small weight loss is normal, as your body is adjusting to the training regimen and that the weight you initially *gained* after working out is actually lean muscle (a good thing!) In fact, something very similar occurs in guitar playing, as your skills temporarily seem to go backwards, when you begin the process of reversing [bad guitar playing habits](#).

- Design a highly effective program, personalized to you, that is easy to follow and takes into account your physical fitness levels, your goals and motivation.

In the first scenario, you hold yourself back from ever reaching your goal of losing weight. In the second scenario (working with a trainer), you have the highest chance of not only reaching your goals, but doing so in an enjoyable way with minimum risk of injury.

#### **4. Your Guitar Playing Is Out Of Balance**

Another way you will drastically slow down your guitar playing progress is by spending too much time practicing areas you are already strong in, while ignoring (or being unaware of) your weaknesses. This causes your playing to become unbalanced, as you become strong(er) in some areas and remain very weak in others. The worst part of this, is that your ability to apply your musical strengths is going to be severely limited by your musical weaknesses.

For example, I get e-mails all the time from guitarists who are frustrated because they can't play great lead guitar solos (despite spending a lot of time practicing technique). I have to explain to them that technique is only *one* aspect of playing guitar solos. In order to get better, they need to develop their [guitar phrasing](#), knowledge of music theory, fretboard visualization, ear training and many other skills. Even if you aren't interested in playing guitar solos, it's likely that your guitar playing is unbalanced in various ways due to years of learning on your own (and picking up bad habits along the way).

Learn more about how your guitar playing can become out of balance by reading this article about [what to practice on guitar](#).

#### **5. You Aren't Aware Of (And Don't Know How To Fix) Your Bad Guitar Playing Habits**

Even if you know what to practice and how to practice it, bad guitar playing habits can slow down your progress to a crawl, until you learn how to diagnose and fix them. Read the seven points in this article about solving [guitar playing problems](#) to learn how to quickly correct your poor playing habits.

## Stop Believing These Myths About Slow Guitar Playing Progress:

In addition to knowing the 5 things that make it very hard to get better on guitar, here are 3 things that most people blame for their lack of progress that have NOTHING to do with this problem:

1. **Lack Of Talent:** Many guitarists believe they can't improve at a faster rate because they lack natural talent. Truth is, every great guitarist sucked at one time or another, and it was NOT natural talent that helped them become great. They became awesome players because they worked hard at it every single day (and did not make any of the mistakes described in this article). If you do the same - you will get the same results.
2. **Being Too Old:** Your age has nothing to do with your ability to make fast progress on guitar. Learn more about why this fear is nothing but a myth in this article about [becoming a better guitarist](#).
3. **Having Limited Practice Time:** No matter how much time you have to practice guitar, you CAN make tons of progress, as long as you aren't making any of the mistakes described above. To learn more about this topic, read this article on how to [practice guitar effectively with limited time](#).

Now that you understand why so many guitarists struggle to improve their playing, read this page about [online guitar lessons](#) to learn how to massively speed up your guitar playing progress.

## How To Find The Best Guitar Exercises

by Tom Hess

Do you become overwhelmed with searching for what to practice on guitar as you try to filter through countless guitar exercises? Are you feeling frustrated with thousands of [guitar playing resources](#), books, videos and lessons that all attempt to guide you down different paths of learning guitar? Would your guitar playing become a lot easier if you knew exactly what to practice on guitar as well as when and how to do it so that you could make the most musical progress possible?

From teaching well over a thousand guitar students over the last 25 years, I have found that most guitarists do not struggle with finding lots of guitar practice materials. Instead, one of the most common problems I hear about is a general feeling of helplessness from not being able to make sense out of the millions of [guitar practice](#) exercises and resources found on the internet or elsewhere.

If you can see yourself in what I wrote above and you feel overwhelmed by not knowing how to decide which guitar exercises you should focus your practice time on, then I want to show you why so many guitar players share this problem and (most importantly) how you can make more progress in your guitar practicing and identify exactly what you should practice on guitar to become the musician you want to be.

One of the [biggest mistakes that guitar players make](#) regarding guitar exercises is having "too many" of them. As a result, they spend a lot more time and energy jumping around from one exercise to another than they do focusing on "how to get the most results" out of whatever guitar exercise they are practicing. Fact is that you can often make a lot more progress by focusing "intelligently" on a smaller number of highly targeted guitar practice exercises than you can from a long list of random guitar licks (more on this below).

Another mistake guitar players make is looking for "what to practice on guitar" before defining specifically what their goals are AND what specific steps they need to take to achieve those goals. Remember that guitar exercises "in and of themselves" have no meaning. Going through monotonous repetitions of random guitar practice materials will have very little effect on your guitar playing until and unless your mind focuses on two things:

1. The "specific" guitar playing problems you are trying to solve by using a particular guitar exercise.



2. How the guitar practice exercise fits into the big picture of the general guitar playing skills you are trying to develop.

It is important to understand (and always remember) that guitar exercises are merely tools that are used to overcome "specific" problems in your guitar playing. The key word in the last sentence is "specific". For example, instead of saying: "I want to [make my guitar playing cleaner](#)", you need to identify an exact problem such as: "I need to work on cleaning up the noise from the lower strings that occurs every time I bend a string". The more specific you can become about what you are trying to achieve, the easier it will be to determine the most effective guitar exercises for reaching that goal.

If you struggle to get results out of the exercises that you practice or if you are feeling overwhelmed from not knowing which guitar exercises to include into your guitar practice routine, ask yourself: "what specific guitar playing problem is this exercise helping me solve and how does this particular guitar practice exercise fit into the big picture of my [long term goals as a musician](#)?" If you cannot answer this question (don't worry – most guitar players cannot), then here are the steps you need to take to understand what to practice on guitar:

1. Become clear on what goals you want to achieve for guitar.
2. Break up your long term guitar playing goals into a list of skills that you must develop to reach those goals. If you are unsure of what steps you must go through to become the guitar player you want to be, check out this free resource about reaching [musical goals](#).
3. Narrow down your guitar practice exercises to a list that is very specific to your guitar playing problems. After doing Step 2 above, select the guitar exercises that will help you develop the skills you identified as important to your guitar playing goals.
4. Learn how to organize your guitar practice time in the most effective ways among the exercises that you have identified in Step 3. This will help you to avoid wasting valuable practice time and will enable you to make faster progress. If you have trouble with doing this on your own, read this [guitar practicing](#) page to get help.
5. Realize that the biggest responsibility for your guitar playing progress falls on YOU. The most important factor that determines how much progress you will get out of a specific guitar exercise is what your mind focuses on as you practice. Even if you have correctly identified (narrowed down) the list of guitar practice

exercises to focus on, your mind must be totally focused on overcoming the specific problem that the exercise is designed to fix. You must never let your fingers go on autopilot while practicing. As you get better at doing this, you will likely realize that you don't need to practice as many guitar exercises as you imagined before. In fact, many guitar exercises can often be used to develop multiple skills simultaneously (watch this [guitar practice](#) video to learn how to do this).

Approaching the process of practicing guitar with the mindset outlined in this article will make your journey towards becoming a better musician a lot easier and more enjoyable.

If you [study guitar with an experienced guitar teacher](#) (someone who has already taught many people to play guitar well), he/she should already be aware of the ideas described above and should be helping you to practice guitar in this way. However, if you have been struggling with knowing what and how to practice on guitar, implement the ideas that you have just learned into your guitar playing and watch your rate of progress take off like never before!

## Why So Many Guitar Solos Sound The Same And How To Avoid That

by Tom Hess

Have you ever tried to [write a guitar solo](#) and think, "my solo is ok, but it sounds like so many other guitar solos I've heard before"? Why does this happen? Is it because you intentionally copied the same licks and phrases from your favorite guitar players? ... Maybe, but probably not. Or is it because you are so influenced by other guitarists that you subconsciously play in a similar style so that your solos just sound too close to their style? This is closer to the truth, but probably not the true answer for most guitar players... so what is it?

The real reason why so many guitar solos tend to sound very similar to each other is due to the choices guitar players often make when creating them. For most guitar players, the process of creating guitar solos is the same.

One of these common guitar solo writing processes that guitar players use is listening to the rhythm section of the song and improvising licks and phrases until something starts to sound good. This is often how the initial ideas are created and then refined into a finished solo.

There's nothing wrong with that approach to creating guitar solos, but the resulting solos may tend to sound similar to other solos since so many other guitar players create their guitar solos in the exact same way.

A lot of his guitar solos have a similar sound to them because the process he uses to create them is often the same. To be clear, this is not a criticism of Yngwie, it's merely an observation. I personally love the sound of his guitar solos and cannot wait to buy the next album to hear more of the same solos that will be all over it, so I'm the last person to complain that his solos may sound very similar to guitar solos he's written in the past. Clearly it doesn't bother him that his solos have similar sounds to them over the years, so because he is fine with that, there is no problem in his case. However, if it bothers you that your guitar solos tend to sound very similar to other guitar solos, then you clearly do have a problem.

So what is the solution?

There are many solutions to this problem, here is one of my favorites (and extremely effective).

Create your guitar solo by basing it on the vocal style of your favorite

singer's vocal melodies. There are lots of ways you can do this. I'll show you one of them in this article and demonstrate it in the video below.

**Step 1:** Choose a vocal melody from your favorite singer.

**Step 2:** Learn how to play the melody 'exactly' as the singer sings it (not just the notes, but every little nuance of phrasing, vibrato, etc.)

**Step 3:** Determine what you think are the 'most important' structural notes in the melody, and write them down (in tab, or music notation).

**Step 4:** Remove the less important pitches.

**Step 5:** Compose a new guitar solo by keeping the most important vocal pitches intact and filling the spaces between them with guitar licks and phrases that are based around the vocal pitches.

Watch this free [How To Create Guitar Solos](#) video... Oh, by the way, I brought Fabio Lione (Rhapsody Of Fire's singer) all the way from Italy to Chicago to sing the vocal melody for this 2-hour guitar solo master class (here is a short excerpt of it).

Once you have created many guitar solos in this way, it will become easy and natural for you to play in this new way any time you choose. The result is that your solos will sound less like your previous solos or the solos of your favorite guitar players. Your solos will also sound more naturally melodic as if they are almost 'singing'.

# How To Play Awesome Rhythm Guitar Riffs

by Tom Hess

One of the common questions I'm asked by guitar players is how to create cooler sounding rhythm guitar riffs for rock and metal guitar styles. After learning basic power chords and a few simple rhythms, many guitarists feel like they have run out of rhythm guitar ideas and begin to wonder how their favorite guitar players come up with awesome rhythm guitar riffs. In this article, I'm going to show you several effective rhythm [guitar practice methods](#) that will help you to get out of your creative rut and learn to consistently create great rock and metal rhythm guitar riffs.

To begin, you need to realize that the processes for creating great rhythm guitar riffs have a lot more to do with 'how' you play the notes (or chords) than with 'what' notes you play. It is possible to take the most basic power chord riff you can imagine and make it sound amazing without adding any new notes. This means that you don't have to search for 'new' notes/chords to play in order to improve the sound of your guitar riffs. This also means that in order to master rhythm guitar playing, you are going to need to develop a variety of guitar playing skills that you probably have never considered practicing before.

You probably are already aware of at least some of the elements you need to practice to become a better rhythm guitarist. However, if you are still struggling with creating your own rhythm guitar riffs, it means that there are other aspects of this guitar playing skill that you need to improve (whether you realize this or not). Unfortunately, unless you are a current guitar student of mine, I don't know anything about your musical background and current skill level, so there is no way for me to tell you in this article what specific things YOU need to practice to create better rhythm guitar riffs. However there are several general areas of rhythm guitar playing that you must constantly seek to improve no matter how advanced you become. It is mastery of these fundamentals that will ultimately enable you to quickly write and play amazing sounding rock guitar riffs:

1. Work on playing rhythm guitar TIGHT and clean. This skill is the foundation that determines whether or not your rhythm guitar riffs will sound good. Most guitarists know that 'playing in time' refers to playing along with a consistent beat, but few actually know 'how to tell' if they are truly locking in with the metronome (or drums). If your timing is inconsistent, it will be difficult to make your guitar riffs sound good, no matter what notes you play. One simple way to test your timing on guitar is to record yourself playing a series of

quarter notes using a single power chord. Do this over a quarter note drum beat or a metronome click. If you are playing in perfect time, it will seem like the click has 'disappeared' (become silent) while you play because your guitar playing is perfectly "on top" of it. However, if your playing is slightly behind or rushing ahead of the click, this will be a sign that your timing needs work.

In addition to playing guitar in time, 'tight' rhythm guitar playing refers to having control over palm muting, picking articulation and other nuances that are needed to make your rhythm guitar riffs sound awesome. Having control over these elements will not only make all of your rhythm guitar ideas sound much better, but will also save you A LOT of time and money if you ever record guitar parts professionally. Read this free guide on how to [record guitar in the studio](#) to learn how to master these areas of rhythm guitar playing.

2. Isolate the rhythmic structure of your rhythm guitar riffs. Just like with guitar solos, many guitarists have a tendency to "overplay" when it comes to creating guitar riffs. Fact is, you can create super heavy and intense metal and rock guitar rhythms by using only a single note (or chord). Although it is cool to search for new and exciting ideas to play on guitar, don't lose sight of the fact that the primary element of cool rhythm guitar riffs is, well... 'rhythm'!

Creating a guitar riff by playing only a single note (or chord) will force you to think hard about the actual rhythm of what you are playing. One way to do this is to write out (on paper or on a computer) a series of eighth notes for 4-8 measures (in 4/4 time). Next, randomly go through and delete 3 eighth notes in each measure (put rests in their place). Now play the resulting rhythm using your single note or chord. You will likely be pleasantly surprised by how cool this idea sounds and you can quickly come up with dozens of such patterns to use as basis for your rhythm guitar riffs (before even adding any notes!) Once you become more advanced, you can also do this using odd meter, mixed meters and more challenging note groupings.

3. Use the same rhythm to create multiple guitar riffs. Take a cool rhythmic pattern without notes (such as described above) and apply it to playing 10-20 completely different sets of chords (or notes). Doing this will greatly challenge (and improve) your rhythm guitar playing creativity. Also try the same idea in reverse: take the same set of power chords and play it using 10-20 completely different

rhythms. These variations will give you a lot of new ideas for [rock guitar riffs](#) to use in your songs.

4. Work on your pinch harmonics and vibrato techniques. These two techniques add a huge amount of intensity to your guitar riffs (particularly in rock and heavy metal styles). Vibrato gives your guitar a very 'vocal' sound, and once you can combine it with pinch harmonics, the result is a screaming guitar riff that DEMANDS attention! Practice this by adding very heavy vibrato onto the end of your riffs. By finishing your guitar riffs strong, it will help to add power to the overall sound of your rhythm guitar playing. Once you are comfortable with this, add in pinch harmonics together with heavy vibrato.
5. Learn how to combine guitar chords in creative ways. This will enable you to consistently come up with progressions (groups) of chords that sound good in your rhythm guitar riffs. You will have a much easier time doing this if you already know how chords are grouped together into keys. If you don't understand this concept yet, simply experiment with playing the full Major and minor triads together with power chords. For example, if you have a guitar riff containing an E power chord, you can replace it by playing the notes of an E Major (or E minor) chord instead of the regular power chord. Take any power chord guitar riff and experiment with extending one or more of those power chords into a full Major or minor chord. The creative sounds you can come up with by doing this are nearly endless!

Learning to consistently play highly creative rhythm guitar riffs is a skill that will take time to develop. However, as you can see, there are specific things you can do to practice this area of guitar playing in a very tangible way. Once you learn to make your own rock and metal guitar riffs, you will have a lot more fun playing guitar and coming up with your own musical ideas very quickly. Aside from helping you become a better guitar player, these concepts will also make you a better overall musician for any band that you care to join. If you want to become a professional musician, these rhythm guitar skills will prove invaluable, both on stage and in the studio.

To learn more about becoming a really TIGHT rhythm guitar player, read this free guide on how to [record guitar in the studio](#).

To get more help with your guitar playing, check out these free [guitar playing tips](#).

# How To Improve Your Guitar Technique And Play Guitar Clean - Part 1

By Tom Hess

Do you want to improve your guitar technique, play guitar clean, eliminate sloppy playing and unwanted string noise? Sloppy guitar technique is a very common problem. Many guitarists have been asking for solutions. This article will help you to play guitar clean and improve your guitar technique.

There are 5 main challenges that electric guitar players must overcome in order to learn and [master guitar technique](#). These 5 guitar technique challenges are divided into 3 groups:

1. Awareness
2. Sounds you 'want' to hear (the notes you are attempting to play clean)
3. Sounds you do 'not' want to hear (the sloppy sounds you sometimes hear such as unwanted string noise)

Today we will take a look at the first two groups. In Part 2 of this article series we'll focus on the last group of guitar technique challenges.

**Focused Awareness** - Many guitar players are not fully aware of every imperfection in their guitar technique. Some of these players do sense that 'something' may be wrong, but are not sure about exactly what their specific guitar technique problems are. Obviously, you cannot effectively correct a technical problem until and unless you know exactly what it is.

There are 2 main ways you can approach this:

1. [Record yourself playing a guitar technique](#) you want to improve on. Listen back (carefully) at 25%-33% speed so that you more easily identify any unclear notes, excess string noise, scratchy noises between the notes, inconsistency in your pick attack, etc.). You may or may not be able to hear everything on your own (many people simply can't yet) and you may or may not be able to 'correctly' identify the cause of each imperfection present in your guitar technique. If you can that's great, but if you're not sure then...

2. [Work with a guitar teacher](#) to evaluate your playing and use that feedback to clean up your guitar playing and improve your guitar technique. Not only will a good guitar teacher help you to play guitar clean by telling you 'what to do', but also because he will hear problems that you may not really be hearing when you play guitar.



*IF* you have an excellent ear, you should be able to identify the fine details of your problem, if not, work with your guitar teacher.

## **Articulation - The First Half of Two Hand Synchronization**

The second step to improve your guitar technique is to focus on your articulation. Articulation is the first half of two hand synchronization. To [play guitar clean](#) you need your hands to fret and pick each note at precisely the same time (simultaneously).

There are 3 critical things you need to do to improve your guitar technique:

1. Use a clean guitar tone when practicing (no distortion and NO effects!). Distortion and effects will mask any imperfections in your articulation, so do not practice with them when focusing on "Articulation" (the rules will change when we talk about "The Release" in the next section).
2. Play loud enough so that you can truly hear what is happening as you are playing.
3. When you are practicing something slowly MAKE SURE that you do NOT change ANYTHING about how you approach and articulate each note. Fact is, most guitar players actually play very differently when playing slow compared to when playing fast. If you change anything in the way you are articulating the notes (such as playing guitar with a lighter touch, using a weaker or stronger pick attack, changing your hand position, pick angle etc.) you will NOT fully improve your guitar technique because the sound you make when playing will be different and therefore harder to detect and identify any problems with your articulation.

## **The Release - The Second Half of Two Hand Synchronization**

The third step toward clean guitar playing is 'the release'. For most guitar players 'the release' is the hardest problem to detect and correct. That's generally because once players articulate a note cleanly, they ignore what immediately comes after (small sloppy noise in between the notes or 2 notes slightly 'bleeding' together).

And [practicing your guitar](#) with a 'clean' tone (no distortion) - as described above when focusing on articulation - almost always masks problems in the release phase of playing a note. This is why many people think their guitar playing sounds pretty clean when practicing without distortion but

sense something is wrong when later playing with distortion... but they are not sure what the problem is... or worse, they actually do not hear the problem at all (but other people do). This is why focused awareness is so critical.

I use multiple steps to help my guitar students fully solve this problem (not all of which can be fully demonstrated or expressed in an article), but here are the absolutely necessary steps toward correcting problems with 'the release'.

1. Practice your guitar WITH distortion (but NO EFFECTS!) now. (Notice, this is the exact opposite advice I gave you to identify and correct 'articulation' problems above).
2. Again you need to play your guitar loud enough to hear precisely what is coming out of your amplifier (other noises in the room can mask the subtle things you need to be listening for).
3. Practice slow (but as stated above, do NOT change ANYTHING in the way you articulate OR RELEASE a note compared to when you play guitar fast!).
4. Listen for any subtle noise in between notes (you will probably notice a 'scratchy sound' just before you play the next note). If you have a hard time hearing anything, then record yourself and listen back to the recording at 1/4 or 1/3 speed (I guarantee you will hear this short scratchy sound now!).
5. Now that you know what to listen for, you will probably notice it all the time whenever you listen very carefully... and THEN you are ready to being to correct the problem...

Fact is there can be several reasons why your guitar playing is not clean during the release of a note, but the most common cause is this: When you release a note your brain is probably telling your finger to 'lift off' (make an upward motion away from the string you just played). This can cause all sorts of nasty guitar technique problems (fatigue, slower guitar playing speeds, and sloppy guitar playing... among other things).

The solution is to stop your brain from sending your fingers instructions to 'lift off' of each note and instead to simply 'relax'. When your finger relaxes it will naturally, immediately and effortlessly 'release' the note you just played. There are 2 main benefits to this:

1. Because the motion is effortless, you can [play guitar faster](#) and for a much longer time (and most importantly) with greater ease.
2. Because your brain does not give the finger the instruction to make a 'lift off' motion this actually prevents your finger from moving (or preparing to move) prematurely (which is a major cause of the sloppy 'scratchy sound' that may be present in your guitar playing).

It is now very important to realize two things. First you CAN [solve these guitar playing problems](#) and improve your technique. Second, it won't happen over night, this will take time and some consistent practice (possibly over several weeks or longer). But the benefits of being able to play guitar clean are well worth the patience required.

In [Part 2 of this article series](#) we'll focus on the last group of guitar technique challenges so that you have all 5 key elements to improve your guitar technique and play guitar clean.

If you have a specific question you would like me to answer, ask me at <http://asktomhess.net>.

## **How To Improve Your Guitar Technique - Part 2 Stop Unwanted Guitar String Noise And Sloppy Guitar Playing**

by Tom Hess

If you are still suffering from sloppy guitar playing, the cause is likely unwanted guitar string noise. For some guitar players, [improving guitar technique](#) may have nothing to do with how they are playing the notes they 'want' to hear. The sloppy noises we sometimes hear are caused from the notes (strings) we do 'not' want to hear.

If you are articulating the notes you want to play accurately, but you are still hearing sloppiness in your guitar playing then this article will greatly help you to improve your guitar technique by eliminating unwanted guitar string noise.

To effectively mute guitar strings we do not want to be heard we need to use two totally different sets of muting techniques: One to stop unwanted guitar string noise from LOWER (in pitch) strings; and another to mute the higher (in pitch) strings.

Although there is more than 1 way to mute guitar strings, some methods offer advantages that others do not and are therefore (in my opinion at least) better.

### **Muting The Lower Strings**

Many guitar players use the palm of their picking hand to mute lower strings. Although this technique is pretty good at keeping most of the lower strings quiet there are two big disadvantages with this [picking hand technique](#).

1. Muting with your palm will cause a slight delay in the muting of a string which has just been played a moment before. This delay causes brief moments of unwanted guitar string noise. This happens for 2 main reasons:
  - a. The flesh of your palm is much softer than the side of your thumb and therefore takes more time for your palm to actually stop the string from sounding.
  - b. It is not easy to get your palm in the perfect position to consistently and reliably mute strings that are adjacent to the one you are playing in all playing situations.

2. When you use your palm to mute unwanted string noise, the natural position of your guitar pick (when not playing) is now away from the strings. This is what I call your "Natural Point Of Rest".



When your pick is at rest up and away from the strings (in between playing each note), it causes your picking hand to work harder and significantly increases the chance for sloppy playing, string noise and slower picking speed.

A great solution to these problems (and to improve your guitar technique) is to mute with your picking hand thumb for all lower (in pitch) strings like this.



Notice that the "Natural Point Of Rest" when using thumb muting is now ON the strings (as shown in the picture above). This greatly reduces wasted motion and enables you to pick faster with much less effort.

### **Muting The Higher Strings**

Many guitar players are totally unaware of the possibilities for muting unwanted guitar string noise from the higher (thinner) strings and this part of their playing is often one of the causes of sloppy guitar playing.

There are actually two main techniques for muting noise from the higher strings that I teach to my students when training them to improve their guitar technique.

The first technique involves using the underside (the fingerprint side) of the fretting hand's index finger. This part of your finger is used to "lightly touch" the higher strings that you want to mute. The key word in the last sentence is "lightly". You do not want to press down so hard that these notes begin to sound like regular fretted notes. Simply rest your finger on them thus preventing them from sounding.



In addition, you can also mute these higher strings by using the unused fingers of your picking hand (fingers that are not being used to hold the pick, such as middle, ring and pinkie).



This extra layer of muting ensures that there is no possibility for the strings higher than the one you are playing to ring out and add sloppy unwanted guitar string noise into your guitar playing.

When these ideas are combined with the string muting techniques of muting the lower strings, your playing will instantly become much cleaner than before. Now, every time you play, the only guitar strings that will be making sound are the ones you are playing!

If you have been working hard to perfect your guitar technique and two-hand synchronization (as mentioned in [How To Improve Your Guitar Technique - Part 1](#)) then you already know that if your articulation/synchronization is developed well but your muting is not, the result will still be sloppy guitar playing. So, when trying to improve your guitar technique keep in mind the 5 areas discussed in this article series:

1. Focused Awareness
2. Articulation - The First Half of Two Hand Synchronization
3. The Release - The Second Half of Two Hand Synchronization
4. Muting The Higher Strings
5. Muting The Lower Strings

To get more guitar playing help check out my 15 Free [Guitar Tips](#).

## 7 Ways The CAGED System Hurts Your Guitar Playing

by Tom Hess

**WARNING:** The CAGED system is one of the most dangerous things for guitarists to learn. If you spend time learning this system or if your guitar teacher is forcing you to learn it, here are the problems you will end up with in your playing:

### **Problem #1: You Can Forget About Playing Guitar Fast (Your Guitar Speed Will Become, Quite Literally, "Caged")**

To be clear (and to state the obvious), of course there are MANY reasons why guitarists may struggle with [building guitar speed](#). So of course the CAGED system is not the *only* cause of slow guitar playing. That said, if you struggle to play guitar fast AND you use the CAGED system, here is why your guitar speed challenges will be much harder to overcome:

When using the CAGED system, the only scale patterns you end up learning contain a mix of 2 note-per-string and 3 note-per-string fragments. This causes 3 interconnected problems:

A. You are forced to use inconsistent picking motions to play the notes of each scale shape. This makes the job much harder for your picking hand (and makes it harder to play guitar fast).

B. Not only is there a mix of 2 and 3 note per string fragments within each scale shape, but each CAGED scale box has its OWN picking pattern. Yes, that's right: you need to learn a new picking pattern for each scale shape. So not only is this harder to play physically, but it also takes longer to memorize. This obviously limits your speed by default, both on a physical and mental level.

C. Because of the limitations above, you are not able to apply the most [effective picking technique for guitar](#) - restricting your speed in yet another way.

Instead of using the awkward system of scale patterns as prescribed by CAGED, switch to using scales that consist of 3 notes per string on every string. By doing this, your picking hand learns just ONE consistent picking pattern for EVERY major and minor scale. Not only is this infinitely easier and faster to memorize (compared to learning a new picking pattern for each shape of the same scale), but it also allows you to take advantage of the highly effective directional picking technique to play any scale you are



trying to play FASTER. (Learn why directional picking is the [best way to pick on guitar](#).)

## **Problem #2: You Will Have A Hard Time FLUENTLY Improvising Guitar Solos Using The Entire Fretboard**

One of the most common problems I see in new guitar students who come to me for lessons is that they can't fluently solo all over the guitar. Here is why this problem is so common (and hard to correct) in users of the CAGED system:

Although CAGED is often claimed to be a complete system for all scales, it is anything BUT "complete". In fact, it is not even a complete system for *major* scales. It teaches you to play major scales based on FIVE scale patterns, based on arbitrary chord shapes. The problem is that the major scale actually consists of SEVEN interconnected shapes that span the entire fretboard...NOT 5. (There are 7 shapes, because there are 7 notes in the major scale - 1 shape starting from each note).

By randomly excluding 2 of the 7 major scale patterns, you are left with only 71% of available shapes to play in a particular major key under the CAGED system. The remaining 2 major scale shapes are mysteriously left out and ignored. Hmm... 71% hardly sounds like a *complete* system to me.

But that's not even the worst of it...

The 5 shapes of the major scale that the CAGED system *does* account for makes it impossible to *easily* transition from major scales to natural minor, harmonic minor, melodic minor or modal keys, or to use exotic scales. To learn any of these scales, you must completely abandon the CAGED system to memorize TOTALLY new patterns that have ZERO resemblance to the major scale box patterns of CAGED.

In contrast, the 3-note-per-string system of playing scales mentioned above makes it SUPER simple to see which notes of the major scale are adjusted (or left out) to create other scales. This makes total mastery of how scales work in music a whole lot easier to achieve.

## **Problem #3: All Your Guitar Solos Will Sound The Same... Here's Why**

It is easy to tell when guitarists try to use CAGED system for soloing. Why? Because their solos often sound "boxed in" and restricted to one box shape of the CAGED system at a time. It typically sounds like this: you

start playing around in one of the 5 boxes of the scale, then you get bored of it and move to the next box and play in it for awhile. Then you jump to the next one, and so on. The worst part of this is that these transitions from one box to the next are extremely obvious to most listeners (and your solos sound boring as a result).

The above problem is caused by only visualizing scales as “vertical boxes” (from the 6<sup>th</sup> string to the 1<sup>st</sup> string), but not on a single string / horizontally (from the 1<sup>st</sup> fret to the last fret on the same string). So fluent, seamless and expressive phrasing is difficult to achieve because of this severe limitation.

To be fair, of course the problems of having too much similarity in guitar solos (and only visualizing scale shapes vertically) is NOT only limited to CAGED system users. However, those who use CAGED scale shapes for soloing have this problem MUCH worse than those who don't (and the problem is much harder to correct). Why? 2 reasons:

1. Because the CAGED scale shapes are limited to 5 patterns, it's impossible to completely visualize scales horizontally from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the last fret on your guitar.
2. Trying to visualize scales horizontally will make it impossible to use the visual “crutch” of the 5 chord shapes the CAGED system is based upon. Without this crutch, most CAGED users are hopelessly lost when it comes to visualizing scales on the fretboard.

When I teach new guitar students who learned the much better way of playing scales (using the 3 note-per-string system), fixing their creativity problems in guitar solos becomes a whole lot easier (for me and for them). This is part of the reason why [my guitar students](#) become AWESOME guitar players quickly.

#### **Problem #4: You Won't Be Able To Creatively Use Arpeggios In Your Guitar Solos (Yes, Blues Guitarists - This Hurts You Too!)**

No matter what style you play - mastery of arpeggios is KEY to effortless and creative guitar soloing. Why? Because arpeggios are nothing more than “chords”... that are simply played “one note at a time”. Whether you choose to play them fast or slow (or with distortion or without distortion) is completely irrelevant to the fact that arpeggios / chords are used in EVERY popular style of music. Furthermore, you must be able to not simply “play” arpeggios - you need to be able to VISUALIZE how they fit into scale positions you use for soloing. This is needed, so you can easily find the right notes to play when improvising over specific chords (more

on this below). This applies in exactly the same way to soloing over a 12-bar blues progression as it does to soloing over a progressive rock tune.

The CAGED system completely fails to help you achieve either of the goals above. Here is why:

CAGED is based around major open chords that move up and down the fretboard (using your index finger as a barre to represent the nut). This might work for playing *open major* chords (only), but playing non-open chord arpeggios on all strings becomes nearly impossible. The resulting major chord arpeggios (under CAGED) are awkward to play accurately and fast (especially compared to standard [sweep picking](#) arpeggio shapes).

Worst of all, if / when you ever have a [great guitar teacher](#) who can teach you the easiest and most efficient fingerings for playing arpeggios on guitar, those shapes will NOT integrate well with the CAGED system. Why? Because the notes of arpeggios follow the logic of how scales ACTUALLY work in music (instead of fitting into the random 5 scale shapes arbitrarily created by CAGED). As a result of this disconnect between your visualization of scale and arpeggio shapes, you will have a very hard time [creatively applying your musical skills](#).

This is one of the primary reasons why most guitarists (and CAGED users in particular) falsely think that music theory is boring or useless (or very difficult to understand). In reality, the problem is NOT with “music theory” - it’s with the incomplete, segmented, illogical and limiting system you use to LEARN chords and scales in music :) Watch this to understand why [learning music theory](#) is one of the most liberating skills you can achieve on guitar.

### **Problem #5: Your Guitar Solos Will Lack Emotion... Don’t Believe Me? Here Is The Proof:**

What is the easiest and most reliable way to achieve maximum emotion when playing / improvising guitar solos? The answer consists of the following steps:

Step 1: You must understand your emotional “options” when [playing guitar solos over any chord](#) (and chord progression).

Step 2: You must learn to take advantage of these options when soloing over *each* chord and apply them when soloing.

Using CAGED makes doing these steps nearly impossible. The CAGED system only focuses on visualization of major chords...completely ignoring

minor, diminished, augmented, 7<sup>th</sup> and extended chords. This makes it extremely difficult to creatively target the notes of any of those chords *while* actually soloing. This often leads to what I call: “soloing by spray and pray” approach. This method consists of figuring out the key of the song, moving the scale shapes to the right position on the fretboard and mindlessly playing notes, *hoping* that you will get lucky and that your notes will sound good and emotional over each chord. It’s obvious that such an approach cripples your ability to [play guitar with emotion](#).

Note: of course the above problem of mindless guitar soloing is not *exclusive* to CAGED system users only. That said, CAGED makes it much easier for this problem to develop in the first place and this issue becomes infinitely harder to correct (due to all the interconnected problems described in this article).

### **Problem #6: You Won’t Be Able To *Consistently* Write AWESOME Songs (Except For Occasionally “Stumbling Upon An Idea”)**

A hugely common problem among CAGED system users is inability to actually use chords creatively to write a song. This problem comes from the fact that the 5 major chords making up the system (C major A major G major E major D major) are taught as if they have some *musical connection* with each other or belong to the same key. In reality, none of the chords in the CAGED system fit into any standard major or minor key (and you will quickly realize this when you try to make music with them). Although you can (of course) use these 5 chords in your music, not knowing how to make these chords actually sound GOOD with each other means that your [songwriting skills](#) will be severely limited.

### **Problem #7: You Will Have A Hard Time Communicating With Other Musicians**

By now you know that the single biggest weakness of CAGED is that it is not based on how scales ACTUALLY work in music for all instruments. It is promoted as a specific system just for guitar players. This means that, all of its limitations aside, the CAGED system is IMPOSSIBLE to understand for any non-guitarist. If you ever want to write songs with other musicians who don’t play guitar (or bass), you will have a very hard time communicating your musical ideas to them. By extension, YOU will have an extremely difficult time understanding the musical ideas communicated by other musicians to you.

Want proof? Just try to have a discussion about CAGED with a piano player (or write a song with one by relying only on the CAGED system) and see what happens :)

When I explain all of the above to my new guitar students (who suffer from the debilitating effects of CAGED), 99.99% of the time, they understand me perfectly and begin to trust my ability to help lead them to their musical goals (see for yourself [the results my guitar students have achieved](#) after doing this). Yet there is ALWAYS the 0.01% of guitar players who come back with arguments such as:

**CAGED System Defense #1: "All systems of learning scales are equally valid. It can't hurt to know the CAGED system, because it's just another way to visualize scales. The more systems you know for playing scales, the better of a guitar player you will be."**

**My answer:** Just because you "can" learn the highly inefficient and crippling system of CAGED, doesn't mean you *should*. Only because the system *exists*, doesn't mean that it's worth your time to learn it. You want to become a great guitar player in the least amount of time without doing any extra unnecessary work, right? The numerous limitations of the CAGED system are obvious and undeniable (as pointed out throughout this article). Unless you have nothing better to do with your time than create bad habits in your guitar playing only to spend months (or years) undoing them later, I suggest you take the [most efficient and direct path to your musical goals](#) :)

**CAGED System Defense #2: "The CAGED system can easily be modified to adjust for all of its limitations, so it is just fine to learn it, if it is taught correctly."**

**My answer:** Yes, you can modify CAGED to adjust for its limitations...in the same way that you can modify a child's tricycle into a Tour De France quality racing bike :). To properly "modify" CAGED to fix all of its limitations, you must start over from step 1 and begin anew with another system, until the result looks NOTHING like the CAGED system you started with. The point is, just because the CAGED system *could* be modified to adjust for its limitations, this doesn't change the fact that it's simply a bad system on every level. It's infinitely more time-efficient to simply learn to play scales in the best, most logical and most efficient way from the beginning than trying to "patch up" the limitations of a bad system only to justify its existence :)

**CAGED System Defense #3: "\_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank any guitar player's name) used / uses CAGED system all the time and he plays great! So CAGED system can't be all that bad if \_\_\_\_\_ used it."**

**My answer:** First, unless you have actual proof to back up your statement (such as analysis of that guitar player's music that prove that he does / did use CAGED in his solos), stop believing everything you read online. Be skeptical about taking guitar playing / musical advice from anyone who has no [proof of being able to teach guitar](#).

Second: even if one *could*, in theory, become a great guitar player using CAGED, that doesn't AT ALL make it the best, fastest and easiest system for guitar players. So you have a choice to make. Either you choose the fastest, easiest and most proven method for learning scales on guitar, or you continue to struggle against the obvious limitations of CAGED and simply "hope" that you were right in your *assumption* above. :)

Oh, and in case you want even MORE proof that the CAGED system is dangerous for your guitar playing, read this great article by Tommaso Zillio: [9 Reasons Why The "CAGED System" Of Learning Guitar Scales Sucks](#).

Now that you know exactly why the CAGED system holds you back from becoming a better guitarist, let me show you how simple it truly CAN be to reach your musical goals and become the guitar player you want to be. Come to this [online guitar lessons](#) page and tell me more about your guitar playing.

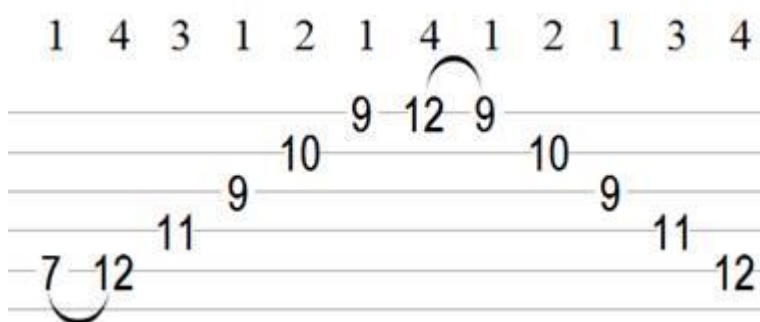
## Why Fast Sweep Picking Is A Lot Easier Than It Looks And How Knowing This Will Massively Improve Your Entire Guitar Playing

by Tom Hess

No matter how difficult sweep picking feels for you right now, you are about to learn why this technique is actually MUCH easier than you think. More importantly, once you understand WHY sweep picking is not all that hard, you will be on your way to making ALL your fast guitar playing feel much easier than before.

I'll prove it to you right now...

Look at the following sweep picking pattern:



(Note: I intentionally did NOT use an [arpeggio with finger rolling](#) in this example...you will learn why below.)

At first glance, this sweep picking pattern might seem difficult to play fast, because there are a lot of notes to play, but here is why it looks and sounds much harder than it really is:

1. The motions you must make with the picking hand don't require you to move fast at all. Yes, at faster speeds the pick is moving faster than it does at slower speeds, but compared to tremolo picking, string skipping or even playing normal scale sequences, the pick is moving VERY slowly when you sweep pick. In fact, to play all 12 notes of this arpeggio you must make only...TWO movements with your picking hand (you'll see me demonstrate this in the video below).
2. None of the individual fingers on the fretting hand have all that much work to do. Here is how it works in the arpeggio above:

- The middle finger plays just one note on the 10th fret of the second string.
- The ring finger also only plays one note (on the 11th fret of the fourth string).
- The pinkie plays two notes: one on the 12th fret of the fifth string and another one on the 12th fret of the high E string. Note: what makes the job of the pinkie finger so easy is the fact that it has A LOT of time to move from its first note to its second note in the arpeggio.
- The index finger plays three notes total, one on the 7th fret of the fifth string, one on the 9th fret of the third string and another on the 9th fret of the first string. Note: similar to the pinkie finger, the index also doesn't need to move all that fast, because there is at least 1 other finger fretting ITS notes in between the notes played by the index finger.

In comparison, playing a simple 2-note trill requires INFINITELY more work (and faster motions) for your fretting hand than sweep picking arpeggios does.

Learn how to use these concepts to make it super EASY to learn sweep picking arpeggios that sound advanced, but are really very simple by watching this [sweep picking lesson video](#).

[Get the tab here.](#)

**“Wait a minute Tom! If sweep picking is really so easy as you say, why is it that so many guitarists cannot sweep pick fast and clean at all???”**

Great question! There are many reasons why most guitarists do not master sweep picking. The FIRST reason (besides simply “not practicing”) is misunderstanding of what TRULY makes sweep picking challenging. You already saw ironclad proof that this technique is not hard on a physical level, nor does it require each hand to move fast at all. Unfortunately, most guitarists do not realize this simple fact and wrongly put their energy on trying to move their hands faster when sweep picking. This takes their focus far away from where it needs to be to master this technique.

That said, here are the REAL obstacles that prevent most guitarists from playing fast and clean [sweep picking arpeggios](#):



**Lack of basic fretting and picking hand coordination** - Although neither hand has much work to do when you sweep pick, few guitarists take the time to correctly train each hand to perform its respective job (either fretting the notes or picking the strings). To solve this issue, spend more time practicing each hand's motions in isolation without the other hand. For example, spend 5 minutes per day practicing the movements of the fretting hand in each arpeggio you play (do NOT use the picking hand when doing this - simply fret the notes with the fretting hand ONLY). Also spend 5 minutes repeatedly training the picking motion only (without using your fretting hand at all).

**Lack of 2 hand synchronization** - In addition to practicing the technique of each hand separately, you must also train both hands to fret and pick notes TOGETHER. When you haven't mastered this technical element of sweep picking, one hand will often move a bit slower or faster than the other (causing your fast playing to sound very sloppy). This problem can easily be solved by isolating the parts of the arpeggio that you struggle with and turning them into individual exercises (learn how to do it in this article about [playing cleaner sweep picking arpeggios](#)).

**Stopping the momentum of the picking hand** - One of the most common ways guitarists fail at sweep picking is by stopping the sweeping motion of their pick in order to pick each string individually. To sweep pick clean and fast, you must NEVER break up the momentum in your picking hand. Instead, you must continue moving in a smooth, continuous motion from one string to the next. This is the only way you can reduce the work your picking hand has to do when sweep picking down to only "two" motions. THIS is true economy of motion and is one of the reasons why I teach [directional picking](#) to my students (to help them master fast guitar playing MUCH easier).

Watch the video at the link above to see a thorough demonstration of this concept.

**Sloppy finger rolling motion in the fretting hand** - I intentionally left out "finger rolling" element from all examples so far, to stay focused on the basic picking and fretting hand motions that make up the biggest part of what makes fast sweep picking possible. That said, lack of mastery over fretting hand finger rolling is another reason why most guitarists can't play arpeggios cleanly. Good news: this motion is also NOT all that hard once you understand how to do it correctly. Watch this video to learn how to correctly practice [finger rolling for sweep picking](#).

**What can you do to apply this to the rest of your guitar playing?**

The above realizations are incredibly liberating and should make you feel empowered to not simply sweep pick arpeggios fast, but to make ALL fast guitar playing much easier than ever before. Here is how to apply these concepts to the rest of your guitar playing:

1. Stop thinking in terms of “moving your hands fast” to build guitar speed. Instead, focus on improving efficiency of the motions you make in your picking and fretting hands. Here is an example of how this concept can be applied to [increasing tremolo picking speed](#).
2. Learn to “separate the hands” when practicing difficult parts in your favorite [guitar licks](#) or exercises. Spend several minutes continuously practicing using only your fretting hand, and several minutes using only your picking hand, before using both hands together.
3. Get to the bottom of the TRUE causes of difficulty of all [guitar exercises](#) you practice. Put each exercise under a mental microscope and identify the job of each hand (and individual finger). This will save you from wasting time searching for answers to misdiagnosed problems (that get you no results). This leads me to my next point:
4. Work with a guitar teacher who can instantly identify and correct all the inefficiencies in your technique, so you can quickly increase your maximum speed and reach your other [guitar playing goals](#) very fast.

**To learn even more about how to apply the above strategies to becoming a speed terrorizing demon on guitar, check out this free guide on how to (literally) [double your guitar speed](#).**

## How To Build Lightning Fast Tremolo Picking Technique On Guitar

By Tom Hess

So, you want to tremolo pick lightning fast but struggle to do so? The #1 reason why you and many guitar players can't tremolo pick at high speeds is the common MYTH that simply *moving* your hands faster enables you to actually *play* guitar faster. This assumption could not be further from the truth. Fact is, most guitarists already have more than enough speed in their hands to play at highly advanced/virtuoso levels. What's holding them (and you) back is the distance that the pick travels for every note you play on guitar. Most guitarists NEVER become aware of this and assume that their motions are efficient and that their lack of speed is a result of not moving their hand fast enough (when the truth is the exact opposite).

To make your tremolo picking insanely fast, you need to increase the *frequency* at which your pick strikes the string (this is NOT at all the same thing as moving the hand "faster" - more on this below). By doing this, you increase the number of times your pick comes into contact with the string and your tremolo picking speed skyrockets!

Before reading any further, watch the video below to see exactly how to do this when you practice speed picking:



As you saw in the video above, you will instantly double your tremolo picking speed by simply cutting your pick attack distance in half. Now that you understand this concept, use the exercise below to start building your picking speed right now.

**Rule #1 of improving your picking speed:** you MUST LOOK AT your picking hand when you practice your picking technique! If you spend all your guitar practice time looking at your fretting hand or (even worse) not watching your hands at all, your picking speed will never reach its full potential.

To improve your picking speed on guitar, choose an open string to begin your tremolo picking practice and go through the steps below:

**Step One:** Pick continuously using 4 notes per beat (16th notes) at a slow tempo for about 10 seconds (you don't need to use a metronome for this exercise). Keep your pick angled towards the head of the guitar (where the tunings pegs are) at about 30-40 degree angle. This slant will help you to minimize picking motions without sacrificing dynamics or having to pick any softer. Just like this:



Tip: You will also create more power in your pick attack with less effort by using a thick pick (around 1.50 mm or so) rather than a thin/flexible one.

**Step Two:** Now, play about 10% faster and continue picking for another 5-10 seconds. As you do this, keep watching your picking hand and keep your picking motions just as compact as they were in the previous step. This will ensure that no unnecessary movement is used that would prevent you from gaining speed.

**Step Three:** Continue increasing the tempo you are picking at while paying close attention to your picking hand and keeping the distance between up/down strokes to a minimum. As you do this, also pay attention to the following:

- Don't make the mistake of sacrificing power and articulation as you shorten the distance in your pick attack. Maintain a high degree of articulation by sticking more of the pick into the string. This will

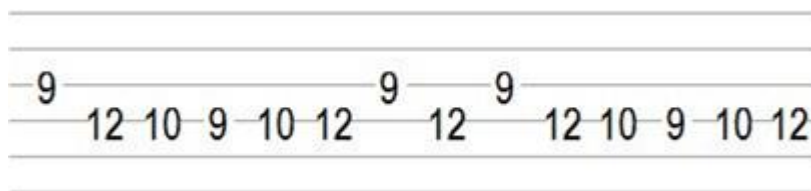
allow you to make small picking motions but still maintain a loud, powerful attack (as opposed to picking with the very edge of the pick as many guitarists do - limiting their articulation).

- Your upper arm and picking hand shoulder need to be relaxed when you pick fast. Tensing these muscles does nothing to help your guitar playing and only makes you tired and more prone to injury. Concentrate on keeping these muscles relaxed as your speed increases.

Continue gradually increasing your speed until you are tremolo picking at the highest speed you can play at. Sustain this speed for 10-15 seconds.

**Step Four:** Rest your hands for 30 seconds and repeat steps 1-3 several more times (for a total of 15-20 minutes of practice). To refine your tremolo picking technique even more, alternate between picking open strings and using fretted notes (this will create different levels of tension on the string and challenge your picking control in different ways). Add this exercise to your [guitar practice schedule](#) and work on it on a regular basis to see HUGE results in your speed picking ability.

IMPORTANT: Don't limit this concept of shortening the distance while picking to single string tremolo playing only! As demonstrated in the video above, you should also apply this concept to multiple string guitar licks and scales. This will integrate your tremolo picking skills with other aspects of your [lead guitar playing](#) and improve your overall speed. Apply the exercise above to the lick below. As you do this, remember to pay close attention to your picking hand to keep your pick attack as compact as possible (while STILL picking the notes with lots of power and volume).



[Listen](#)

Now that you understand how to build tons of tremolo picking speed on guitar, realize that this is just ONE aspect of [becoming a faster guitar player](#). To learn more about the other elements that go into building fast guitar speed, check out this [guitar speed mini course](#). To learn a whole lot more about how to not only build scary guitar speed but also become a highly creative and expressive musician, work together with me by taking [online rock and metal guitar lessons](#).

# How To Improve Your Musical Creativity And Play The Music You Hear In Your Head

by Tom Hess

Do you know how to make your listeners feel exactly what you want them to feel with your guitar playing? Are you able to accurately and consistently [express very specific musical emotions](#) on your instrument and play any sound that you hear in your head?

Many guitar players struggle to express significant emotion with their music even though most have a strong desire to do this well. In rare cases when guitarists actually set aside time to practice becoming more creative, they often end up frustrated from not being able to improve this musical skill.

For most guitarists, the process of training their [musical creativity](#) primarily revolves around looking for tab and learning the guitar licks and solos of their favorite guitarists. As fun as it may be to learn your favorite music on guitar, practicing in this way will do very little to help you express yourself with your own music. Too much time spent on searching for new "notes to play" will distract you from developing two essential elements of musical creativity, which are:

1. An understanding of HOW your favorite guitarists create the music that you are learning to play. If you want to have the same ability to consistently express yourself with "your own" songs and guitar solos, you must learn the art of making the same highly expressive "musical choices" that your favorite guitarists make. This is completely different from "copying the song" or the style of music and instead focuses on developing the "ability" to consistently express powerful emotions in your own music according to your own musical goals. This skill is what will enable you to develop true musical creativity without sounding like a "clone" of your favorite guitar players. There is nothing wrong with practicing the licks and [guitar solos](#) of your favorite guitarists for fun, but understand that doing so only shows you the "result" of the creative processes that made the music possible. In order to express YOUR emotions in music, you must learn how musical emotions are created and controlled by making appropriate musical choices.
2. The ability to "explain and predict" emotion in music. When great musicians make certain musical choices in their music (as described above), they do this with a specific intention of making their audience "feel" a specific musical emotion. Unless you learn how to

do the same, you will be restricting yourself to a lifetime of playing your favorite songs but being unable to create any truly expressive music yourself.

Most guitarists already have their mind made up one way or another about music theory. Some stay away from learning it, believing that music theory is only about "rules" that restrict one's musical creativity. Others consider music theory important for understanding "how music works" in order to have an easier time writing songs and communicating with other musicians. The fact is that neither of these arguments gives one a complete understanding of what music theory (and being a truly creative and self-expressive artist) is REALLY about.

"Music theory" is also a lot more than a mere set of "theoretical explanations about how intervals, chords and scales work". The true purpose of music theory is only to explain and "predict" the emotions that will be felt when certain musical elements are used in a particular way. All of the tools of music theory exist only to serve this fundamental purpose.

So How Does Music Theory REALLY Help You To Express Emotions In Music?

Shifting your mindset from thinking about music theory as a set of theoretical explanations about "how music works" to seeing it for what it REALLY is (a way to explain WHY we feel what we feel when we hear music) will make it much easier for you to boost your musical creativity.

Here is just one possible example of how this can be achieved. When I train my students to improve their musical creativity, one of the things I have them do is to make lists of various emotions they want to express in a song or a guitar solo and then write down all of the musical tools (various music theory concepts) that can be used to achieve that emotion. Doing an exercise like this will greatly help you to see the link between music theory and its real world application, while at the same time developing the skills needed to produce any sound that you hear in your head. However, in order to see how that actually works, start by watching this free [music theory for guitar](#) lesson video.

Here are the most important objectives that learning music theory (and doing exercises such as the one above) will help you to accomplish:

1. You will begin to understand WHY you like the music that you like. This will enable you to re-create the same musical emotions and feelings in your own music without having to blindly copy the same notes/licks that your favorite guitarists play in their solos. This will

make you a MUCH more creative musician overall.

2. Approaching the process of creating music with the mindset described above will enable you to express yourself with greater accuracy and consistency. Many musicians rely on "happy accidents" to create songs, however such an approach makes it much harder to consistently [write great music](#). In contrast, if you know exactly what you want to express and have the musical tools for achieving that creative goal, then composing music becomes a much more productive (and enjoyable!) process.
3. Having a set of proven musical tools at your disposal will help you to "remember" musical ideas much more easily. When you can identify the music you composed not only by remembering the exact notes you played, but also by relating the musical concepts you have used to create the music, it will become much easier to recall (and complete) unfinished musical excerpts.
4. When you learn to associate musical emotions with specific musical elements that cause that emotion, it will become easy to predict and control the response that your music will create within your listeners (and within yourself).

### What Should You Do Now?

If becoming more musically creative and expressing the emotions you want to convey is one of your musical goals, you should do the following steps to start moving towards that result in your guitar playing:

1. Watch this [music theory for guitar](#) video.
2. Understand that although music theory is the gateway into true musical creativity, studying music theory is only "one" of the steps you must take to maximize your ability to express yourself in music.
3. Realize that your current level of music theory mastery is measured NOT by the number of theoretical concepts you have memorized, but instead by your ability to use appropriate creative tools to express specific musical emotions. Challenge yourself to complete the exercise described earlier in this article that will test your ability to truly [apply music theory to music](#). If you have trouble doing this exercise, it is a sign that either your general music theory knowledge is lacking OR (most common) you have not learned how to apply your musical knowledge to real world music. Invest your



guitar practice time into learning how to integrate your musical skills on a deeper level and watch your musical creativity explode!

Above all, I want you to think deeply about the true definition of music theory that I have explained in this article and consider how you can use this new understanding to improve your ability to express musical emotions. Approaching the process of creating music with these insights in mind will help you to move beyond being a "guitar player" into becoming a truly expressive musician!

# How To Clean Up Your Arpeggio Playing And Create Killer Sweep Picking Licks In The Process

by Tom Hess

Ever have trouble playing arpeggios on guitar, and having no idea how to make your sweep picking faster and cleaner? Be honest - most guitarists have this problem ...and I had it too (years ago). Playing arpeggios cleanly is one of the most common guitar technique challenges I help [my guitar students](#) overcome in their playing.

After teaching thousands of students to become awesome guitar players, I've learned that there are 2 general ways guitarists approach cleaning up their arpeggio playing. One way sets them up for frustration and sloppy guitar playing, while the other allows them to progress a whole lot faster and easier and enjoy the process of practicing much more.

## Which Approach Do You Take?

Guitar Practice Approach 1: When your arpeggio playing doesn't sound as clean as you want, your instinct tells you that you need to find more/new/different [arpeggio sweep picking licks](#) to practice. The assumption is that simply *more practice* of different sweep picking licks will make your arpeggio playing cleaner. The biggest problem with this approach is that it ignores the fundamental problems in your technique that prevent you from playing ALL arpeggios cleanly. Until you master these elements of technique, looking for more sweep picking licks to practice will only distract you from fixing the REAL [problems holding back your guitar playing](#). In the end, you end up knowing lots of arpeggio licks, but playing all of them with the same sloppy guitar technique problems that never seem to get fixed.

Guitar Practice Approach 2: When you want to make your arpeggio playing cleaner, instead of distracting yourself with new exercises, you transform whatever arpeggio you are practicing into its OWN exercise. The goal of doing this is to expose and pinpoint the exact notes in the arpeggio that aren't clean and identify WHY they aren't clean. This has 2 huge benefits to your guitar playing:

- After you correctly identify and fix fundamental guitar technique problems in one arpeggio, you will have a much easier time learning (and playing cleanly) any and all arpeggios you practice in the future.
- As an added bonus of following the approach above, the exercises you create by modifying standard arpeggio shapes will often sound

VERY cool and creative. This helps you to come up with new [arpeggio guitar licks](#) to use in your solos.

To see one of many possible examples of how to do the above, watch this video about cleaning up your arpeggio playing and turning standard arpeggios into killer sweep picking licks:



Get the tab for this [5 string arpeggio lesson](#).

### **How To Apply This Idea Into Your Guitar Practicing To Make Your Guitar Playing Better:**

I want you to realize that the biggest lesson for you here is NOT the arpeggio exercise itself and NOT even the idea of playing arpeggio notes with tremolo (that you saw in the video). The biggest value for you is in acquiring the correct mindset for how to approach solving problems in ALL areas of your guitar technique:

1. Your guitar playing problems and mistakes don't happen *at random* - they always have some kind of cause. The cause can (and must) be identified, isolated and fixed. Never settle for and simply *accept* [sloppy guitar playing](#).
2. Looking for *more* guitar exercises is rarely the answer to your guitar playing problems. Instead, understanding exactly what specific notes are not clean when you play the *current* exercise will help you to see what must be fixed in your technique to make EVERYTHING you play sound better.

3. You can creatively modify even the most plain/boring sounding exercise into an awesome sounding lick that will [improve your guitar technique](#) at the same time.

The arpeggio exercise you saw me demonstrate above is merely ONE (of many) examples of how you can improve your sweep picking and make your general guitar technique cleaner and more accurate. To learn more killer strategies for improving your guitar playing while cutting your practice time in half, check out this page on how to [double your guitar speed](#).

# How To Play Better Guitar Solos Than You Ever Imagined Possible

## Part 1: Using Vibrato To Enhance Your Guitar Licks

by Tom Hess

Your lead guitar solos and licks will sound 'average' at best when you make these extremely common [guitar soloing](#) mistakes:

1. Using either no vibrato or poor, 'out of tune' vibrato throughout your solo
2. Beginning your guitar solo in a very 'weak' manner by using narrow vibrato or no vibrato at all
3. Applying vibrato technique in the 'exact same way' every time you use it on a note

Before I show you how to use vibrato expressively to play incredible guitar solos, watch the video below to see and hear a demonstration of how much better any guitar solo can sound once the vibrato is improved (the solo is played by one of my students):



Here is how you must practice vibrato to improve YOUR guitar solos:

### 1. Keep Your Vibrato 'In Tune' At All Times

While applying vibrato to a note, you must ALWAYS make sure to keep the vibrato 'in tune'. This is essential! If your vibrato is not in tune, it will totally ruin an otherwise killer solo. Keep your vibrato in tune by bending the string all the way up to the target pitch and returning the string back to the original pitch where you began. For example, while applying vibrato

that is a 'half step' wide, you must bend the string so that it matches the pitch precisely one fret above the fret you are on. Then release the string so that you return to the original pitch you are playing.

Listen to the two examples below to hear the difference between perfect vibrato and vibrato that is out of tune.

Example 1 - Perfect Vibrato: [Hear It](#)

Example 2 - Out Of Tune Vibrato: [Hear It](#)

### **How To Best Apply This To Play Killer Guitar Solos Right Now:**

First, decide how wide you want to make your vibrato (the distance between the original pitch and the pitch you bend to). For example, you can make the vibrato a half step wide or a whole step wide. Then practice applying this depth of vibrato to several notes on guitar (on a variety of strings/frets), focusing on keeping it in tune as described above. It will be helpful to record yourself playing vibrato so you can later listen back to your recording with your full attention to identify which notes were perfectly in tune and which ones weren't.

### **2. Make The Depth/Width Of Your Vibrato Appropriate For The Music You Play**

Your guitar solos will sound weak if you 'always' begin them by playing the first note with either no vibrato or vibrato that is very narrow (less than a half step wide). To give yourself more creative options, practice starting your guitar licks with a 'punch in the face' by adding heavy and wide vibrato to the very first note! Using vibrato that is either a half step or a whole step wide is harder to do (well) and having the ability to do it will help you to have more expression and greater variety in your phrasing. Of course, you don't have to 'always' make your vibrato as wide as possible, just make sure that you also don't 'always' start the solo with little/no vibrato.

Listen to the examples below to hear the difference between narrow, wide and 'very wide' vibrato when applied to the same pitch:

Example 1 - Narrow Vibrato (less than a half step): [Hear It](#)

Note: Keep in mind that using narrow vibrato CAN sound good if the context is right for it - The problem you must avoid is 'only' using this type of vibrato because you lack the ability to make wide vibrato sound good/in tune when the context calls for it.

Example 2 - Wide Vibrato (half step): [Hear It](#)

Example 3 - Very Wide Vibrato (whole step): [Hear It](#)

Note: Using vibrato that is a whole step wide isn't necessarily always better than using vibrato that is a half step or less. While applying vibrato in your playing, pay attention to the musical context to determine which type of vibrato is most appropriate. For example, the advantage of wide vibrato is that it will add 'conviction' in contexts that demand this kind of intensity (something that narrow vibrato cannot achieve), while a more narrow/subtle vibrato is better suited for less intense musical situations. Make sure to master both narrow and wide vibrato so you can freely express yourself with the technique in any musical context.

### **How To Best Apply This To Play Killer Guitar Solos Right Now:**

**Step 1:** Create 2-3 short guitar licks. Make sure the first note of each lick a 'longer' duration (such as a quarter note or half note).

**Step 2:** On the very first note of each [guitar lick](#) apply either a half step or whole step vibrato.

**Step 3:** Repeat step two for each of your licks for 1-2 minutes in a row and continue consistently practicing this over the next several weeks until you have mastered this use of vibrato. After doing this, it will be easy for you to apply this concept every time you begin playing a new guitar solo.

### **3. Apply Vibrato In A Variety Of Different Ways**

There are 2 main variables to control when playing vibrato:

1. 'How' the vibrato sounds (a combination of how wide it is and how fast its pulses occur)
2. 'When' the vibrato occurs on a note after the note is played.

Most guitarists use vibrato in the exact same way in their guitar solos (either always narrow or always wide), and always apply vibrato in the exact same way every time they use it (usually applying it immediately as the note is played). When you do this without being aware of it, your licks (and vibrato) will quickly lose their novelty and will sound repetitive and predictable.

To make your guitar solos sound highly unique and creative, apply vibrato in a different manner by 'delaying' it for a few seconds after you play a note. This will not only sound unique (compared to the common approach

of applying vibrato 'instantly'), but it will add extra musical tension to the note and sustain it for much longer.

Here is an example of how this sounds:

Example 1 - Instant Vibrato: [Hear It](#)

Example 2 - Delayed Vibrato: [Hear It](#)

To add even more variety to your soloing, delay the vibrato and strike the string again to re-articulate/add extra power to the note. Here is an example of how this sounds:

Example 3 - Delayed Vibrato With Re-Articulation: [Hear It](#)

Example 4 - A short lick combining the 3 vibrato types above and varying the intensity/speed of the vibrato (from very wide/fast in the beginning to very soft/slower on the final note). [Hear It](#)

### **How To Best Apply This To Play Killer Guitar Solos Right Now:**

Choose a lick from one of your favorite guitar solos or licks and identify the notes of the lick that are held out longer. Then record yourself playing this lick for 3 minutes while using vibrato that is instantly applied, delayed or delayed with re-articulation. Use as much variety as possible (apply vibrato in different ways to different notes of the lick and keep playing for the entire 3 minutes to force yourself to think as creatively as possible.

The concepts above will help you to begin the process of transforming any ordinary guitar solo into a truly unforgettable one. However, this is only one (out of many) ways for you to learn how to play awesome guitar solos. In part 2 of this article series, you will learn a powerful method for using bends to 'shape' your guitar licks and make them sound even cooler!



## How To Play Better Guitar Solos Than You Ever Imagined Possible Part 2: Improving Your Guitar Solos Lick By Lick

By Tom Hess

The #1 reason why you struggle to take your guitar solos from 'average' to GREAT is because you (like most guitarists) only have 2 options for doing so:

**Option 1:** To 'add more notes' to the existing solo (and to licks within it)

**Option 2:** To 'play different notes' (replace some or all of the licks within your solo with different ones).

Although the 2 options above can be effective, they will not help you to vastly [improve the sound of your guitar solos](#) UNTIL you apply...

**Option 3:** This involves breaking down an existing guitar solo lick by lick and refining 'how' each note is played. Fact is, even if you don't change any notes in the solo and only change the phrasing ('how' the notes are played), in virtually all cases you will end up with a MUCH better guitar solo. The reverse is also true: if you never practice getting better at how you play the notes, then playing 'more' notes only will give you 'more of the same' (an average/plain/boring solo).

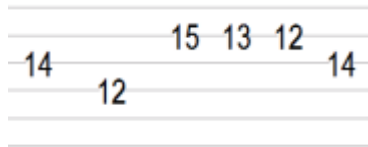
Check out this [guitar soloing video demonstration](#) showing how I helped one of my students to apply this idea to improve his soloing. We took one of his original guitar solos and made a few small tweaks to 'how' the notes were played to make the solo much better. Now it's time for you to learn to do this yourself. Choose a guitar solo you want improve and apply the techniques below to the individual licks within that solo. You have 3 choices for doing this:

Choice 1: Using one of your own original guitar solos (if possible).

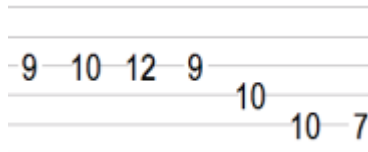
Choice 2: Using any guitar solo that you have learned from your favorite guitarists.

Choice 3: If you don't know how to play any guitar solos, come up with 3-4 guitar licks in the same key that can be played one after the other. (This of course wouldn't be a 'real' guitar solo, but it will still allow you to do this exercise).

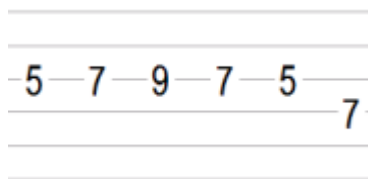
Here are a few short licks for you in the key of C major/A minor:



Lick 1 -  
[Hear It](#)



Lick 2 -  
[Hear It](#)



Lick 3 -  
[Hear It](#)

In past articles, I discussed lots of ways you can [improve any guitar lick](#) by using techniques such as slides, vibrato and double stops (among other techniques). Now I'll show you how to do this with every lick of your solo using string bends. Yes, string bends are simple and you probably already know 'how to bend strings'. However, there is a huge difference between 'knowing how to play' string bends, and specifically practicing to creatively use them in your guitar licks and solos. Simply knowing the technique will do nothing for your creativity until you practice applying it. Go through the steps below to practice improving your guitar solos using string bends:

### **Guitar Solo Improvement Technique #1: Using Bends To Shape Your Guitar Licks**

Step 1: Choose a single guitar lick in your guitar solo.

Step 2: Look for opportunities to connect some of the notes in that lick with a bend. The first and last note of a lick are usually the easiest to ornament using string bends. Make sure that the bend keeps the note in tune.

Step 3 (optional): Once you've bent up to the target note, add intensity and aggression to it by applying heavy vibrato. Here is an example of

what steps two and three sound like together (created as variations of Lick 2 above):

**Example** – A short guitar lick using bends and vibrato on the third note and the final note. You will hear 2 variations: one with vibrato on the 3rd note and one without vibrato: [Hear It](#)

(You can see a more detailed demonstration of this in the context of a guitar solo in the video above.)

Step 4: Play through this (slightly altered) guitar lick several times.

Step 5: Repeat steps 2-4 using the same approach, except this time you will bend up to a different note in the lick. Compare the difference in sound between the two variations you created. Then continue this same process for every other note in the phrase.

Step 6: After applying the technique above to each note in the guitar lick, decide which version of your lick sounded best and use it in the place of your original lick.

Step 7: Move on to the next lick in your solo and either repeat this process or apply the ideas in technique #2 (and #3) below.

## **Guitar Solo Improvement Technique #2: Using Bends At Different Speeds**

In most cases, people use bends in their guitar licks by first striking the note, then 'immediately' bending up to the target pitch. Here is an example of what this sounds like: [Hear It](#) (listen for the bend on the 3rd note)

Your guitar solos will sound much better when you use variety in the speed at which you apply bends. Do the following:

Step 1: Select a single lick within your guitar solo and choose two notes within that lick (that are within 1-2 frets of each other on the fretboard).

Step 2: Begin 'slowly' bending up from the lower note to the higher note. This will only move the note up in pitch a little bit (momentarily taking it out of tune).

Step 3: As you approach the target note of your bend (after beginning the bend slowly), speed up the bend to quickly reach the target pitch. At this

point you can either return the string back to the original pitch or do the next step:

Step 4 (optional): Apply heavy vibrato to the pitch you are on and finish the rest of the lick.

**Example** – Bend with slow beginning and fast ending: [Hear It](#) (notice how different the bend sounds on the 3rd note compared to the example above). Watch the video above to see me demonstrate this in the context of a guitar solo.

Step 5: Move onto the next lick in your solo and either repeat this process or apply the process in technique #3 below.

### **Guitar Solo Improvement Technique #3: Using Pre-Bends**

Pre-bends involve bending the string (without picking it), then striking the string and sounding only the 'release' of the bend. Here is an example: [Hear It](#)

Select any note within your guitar lick and instead of simply 'playing it', ornament it with a pre-bend. Start by bending the string (WITHOUT picking it) by half or whole step, striking the string and then releasing the bend. Experiment with which note of the lick the pre-bend sounds best on.

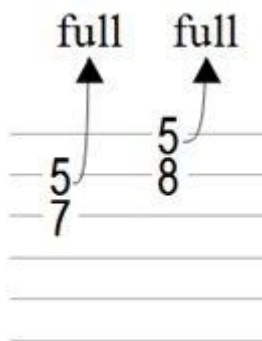
**Example:** [Hear It](#) Listen for the slow pre-bend on the first note of the lick (this is a variation of Lick 1 shown at the start of the article)

Continue this process of going through the rest of your solo to come up with dozens of creative variations for each phrase. Now, decide which variations you like the best and record a new version of the solo using them. Then compare the original you started with and the new version...and prepare to be blown away by how much better the new version sounds! Of course, string bends are only one of many [guitar phrasing techniques](#) you can use to improve your solos and licks. The point of this exercise is to show you just how many great ideas you can extract from only a 'single' technique. You should also go through this process using other techniques such as: slides, vibrato, double stops, different articulation styles, and of course these (and other) string bending variations. By using the techniques above you will easily be able to make any guitar solo sound killer! However, this is just the tip of the iceberg. There are MANY additional things you need to know about how to write creative and unique guitar solos. Read this to learn how to finally [master lead guitar playing](#).

## The Coolest Way Ever To Play Blues Guitar Licks Using Double Stops

By Tom Hess

One of the most common and most recognizable sounds in blues guitar is the “double stop” (two notes played at once) within the blues or minor pentatonic scale. Here are 2 classic examples of it:



[Hear It](#)

Although these double stop licks sound cool, there are several problems guitarists run into when applying them into their playing:

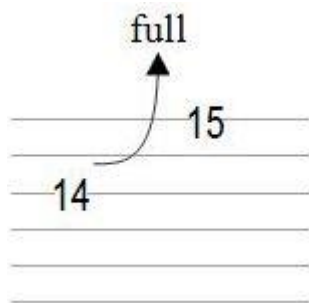
1. The standard shapes such as the ones above have been used thousands of times in countless [lead guitar solos](#) (so if you play them too often, you only end up sounding like every other blues guitar player).
2. Most guitarists think that ‘playing double stops’ equals playing one of the shapes above and never think about other ways this concept might be applied in blues. As you will see in a moment, there are A LOT of options for using double stops creatively in your guitar playing.
3. The very cool tension and dissonance that begins the traditional blues double stop is quickly resolved as both notes ring in unison after the double stop bend is complete. Because of this, the conventional blues double stop lacks the maximum intensity and aggression that it could have (more on this below).

Before I show you several ways to practice integrating double stops into your blues playing, watch this video [demonstration of blues guitar double stops](#) to see an illustration of the concepts you are about to learn so you can get the most from the rest of the article.

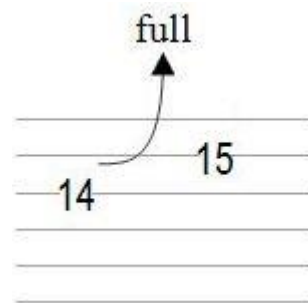
Now that you've seen and heard the demonstration of the double stop ideas in the video above, here is a detailed explanation of the elements that make these [guitar licks](#) sound so mean and aggressive:

### **Killer Blues Guitar Double Stops Element #1: Using different notes**

The conventional blues guitar double stops (demonstrated at the start of the article) are basically an ornament of the same note. A much cooler way to play double stops is to use different notes from the scale, like this for example:



[Hear It](#)



[Hear It](#)

First you bend one of the notes on the G string and then play a different note on either the 2nd string or the 1st string, creating a double stop. Playing 'different' notes together helps to build more tension and make your double stops more aggressive.

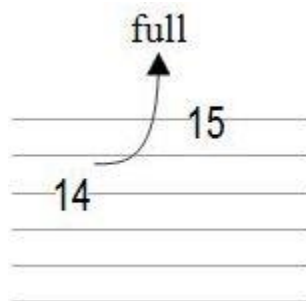
In the first example above, you can let the open B string ring out because that note is part of the scale. However, for playing in other keys you would need to mute the B string using your fretting hand index finger while you strum the G string and the high E string. Learn how to do this by reading this article about muting [unwanted guitar string noise](#).

### **Killer Blues Guitar Double Stops Element #2: Unexpected and prolonged dissonance**

A typical blues double stop begins with a dissonant clash between notes a whole step apart and then resolves as the lowest note is bent up to sound the same pitch as the higher note (a 'unison'). The licks I demonstrated for you in the video above follow the opposite pattern: first, a regular note is played from a scale that sounds normal and stable. Then, a clashing dissonant note from the scale is played together with it creating a double stop. This dissonance never resolves fully (until you stop playing). All of this makes the dissonance a lot more pronounced and builds A LOT more musical tension.

### Killer Blues Guitar Double Stops Element #3: Double stop vibrato

Guitarists typically only think of adding vibrato to a single pitch when playing licks and melodies. However you can easily add vibrato to both notes of your double stop. When you do, it will sound a whole lot more intense. Compare the 2 recordings of the example below: you will first hear the double stop played WITHOUT vibrato and then again WITH vibrato on both notes:

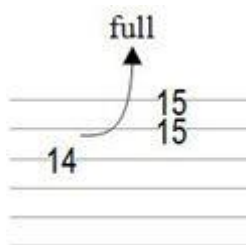


[Hear It](#)

Note: To evenly apply vibrato to all notes of a double stop, you must develop a very controlled [guitar vibrato technique](#), and/or use a floating bridge on your guitar or at least a standard whammy bar. Make sure to keep your vibrato in tune and mute any strings that are not being played to eliminate unwanted noise. Get help with this by reading this article about playing clean and aggressive [blues guitar licks](#).

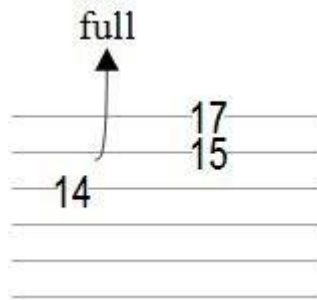
### Advanced Blues Guitar Double Stop Element: Adding even more notes/using a barre

You can further ornament your (already very mean sounding) blues double stop by playing more than 2 notes at the same time (as I illustrate in the video above at 0:44). A simple way to do this is to bend a note on the 3rd string in your blues scale and then play another pair of notes on strings 1 and 2. Here is an example:

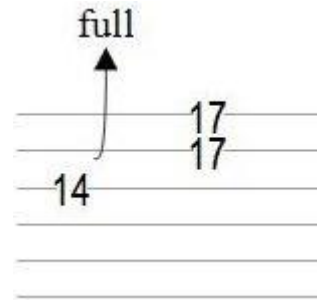


[Hear It](#)

You can use your ring finger or pinkie finger to barre the 2 notes on the 15th fret in the example above. Here are 2 more examples of this:



[Hear It](#)



[Hear It](#)

To [easily apply vibrato on guitar](#) in these more advanced double stop variations that use the barre and/or more than 2 notes, you need to have a floating bridge on your guitar that can be pushed back and forth with your picking hand (as I show in the video). However, don't worry if your guitar doesn't have a floating bridge. You can still use the concepts from this article (including these more advanced double stop variations) in your guitar licks and solos.

Practice these double stop ideas in isolation first and then integrate them into your guitar licks at the moments when you want to generate massive dissonance, tension and aggression in your playing.

By practicing these different variations you will quickly and seamlessly integrate blues guitar double stops into your guitar solos. However, being able to play killer licks is only one aspect of being a great guitar player. Watch this to learn about the other elements of [playing guitar with feeling](#).



# How To Play Awesome Blues Guitar Licks That Are As Mean & Aggressive As A Grizzly Bear, But Have The Precision Of A Laser Beam

By Tom Hess

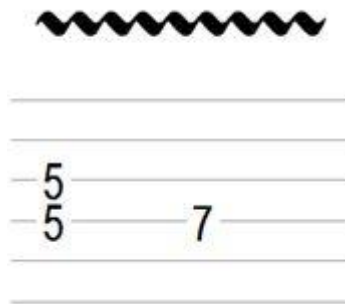
Want to know the secrets to playing KILLER blues guitar licks with maximum expression and power? To do this, you need to pick each note HARD but also eliminate sloppy noise from your guitar playing. Most blues guitarists are forced to choose between playing their licks aggressively 'or' cleanly, because their playing sounds like a mess when they try to do both at the same time.

Sloppy string noise often occurs when hitting the strings very hard or applying wide vibrato to notes and double stops (as you often have to do in blues). Until you understand exactly how to eliminate this problem from your playing, your blues guitar licks will continue to sound sloppy and your ability to express yourself in blues will be limited.

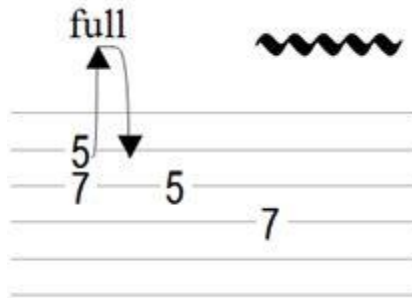
In this article, I will walk you through the step-by-step process of playing intense and clean blues licks. To get started, watch this [blues guitar licks](#) video so you understand exactly how to do the exercise that follows and hear the difference between clean and sloppy blues guitar playing.

After watching the video above, take your guitar and follow the steps below to make your blues guitar licks super aggressive:

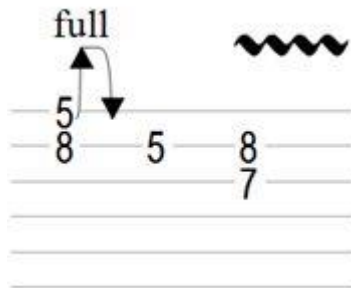
**Step One:** Begin by creating a short blues guitar lick, consisting of no more than 2-3 notes. Here are 3 examples for you to choose from (or you can create your own):



[Hear It](#)



[Hear It](#)



[Hear It](#)

It's important to NOT make your phrases more than 2-3 notes long. Using a small number of notes will force you to get the maximum [musical expression](#) possible out of each one, while allowing you to focus on the muting techniques you have to learn and master. Note: I intentionally did not notate the rhythm in the licks above, because you can freely vary the duration of each note in the lick. Don't practice all 3 of the licks above right now, just pick ONE lick and play it several times in a row to get used to it. Make sure that you play the final note of your lick with an UPSTROKE (this will become very important in the next step).

**Step Two:** Now focus on the final note of the lick and make sure that when your pick plays it (with an upstroke), it comes to rest on the next lower string - using the 'rest stroke' technique I described in the video. Don't allow the pick to fly up into the air (away from the strings), which is a common mistake. Either rest your picking hand thumb on the lower in pitch strings (this is what I recommend and demonstrate in the video above) or use your palm to do the same. Practice this technique now for a few minutes.

**Step Three:** Now, focus on muting the higher in pitch strings by using your fretting hand index finger (or the fingers not holding the pick) as you play the lick over and over. For more illustrations of these 2 muting techniques, read this article about muting [unwanted guitar string noise](#). Practice while focusing on this for a few minutes.

**Step Four:** Begin playing the lick with as much aggression as you can, by doing any combination of the following:

- Apply very wide/aggressive vibrato to the notes that are sustained in the lick.
- Whenever you play 'double stops' (2 notes played at the same time on 2 strings), apply vibrato to 'both' strings at the same time.
- Hit the strings with as much aggression, articulation and power as you can (you can see and hear demonstrations of this in the video above). Don't be afraid to hit the strings as hard as possible!

As you do this, you will notice that the techniques you practiced in steps 2 and 3 will allow you to play cleanly while picking each note of the lick with maximum aggression. If you still hear sloppy noise from the strings that aren't supposed to be ringing, go back to the earlier steps of applying the muting techniques that will help you solve this problem. Stay patient, and these muting techniques will soon become part of how you play lead guitar.

**Step Five:** Move on to practice the remaining blues guitar licks I gave you earlier in this article (or find your own), taking them through the same practicing steps and applying the muting techniques in both hands.

Now that you've practiced keeping your guitar playing clean as you play aggressive blues guitar licks, you are ready to focus on coming up with more creative variations out of your guitar phrases. Get lots of ideas on how to do this by watching this [classic rock guitar licks](#) video.

To learn how to improve your guitar technique so that you are not restricted to only playing slow blues guitar licks, watch this free video about [playing guitar fast](#).

## How To Play Awesome Blues Guitar Licks That Are As Mean & Aggressive As A Grizzly Bear, But Have The Precision Of A Laser Beam - Part 2

By Tom Hess

In the previous part of this article series about playing killer [blues guitar licks](#), I showed you how to ensure that your blues playing always remains clean and accurate no matter if you are playing softly or with over-the-top power and aggression. If you haven't yet studied that article, take a few minutes to watch this [blues guitar licks video](#) now before reading further, so that you get the most out of everything I explain below.

In this article I will show you how to combine your improved muting technique with a variety of highly expressive 'bluesy' phrasing elements that will help you get a whole lot more expression from your guitar licks and apply them creatively in your blues guitar solos.

Before I walk you through the steps for doing this, watch the video demonstration below to see and hear how it should sound when you are using the concepts of this article in your guitar playing:

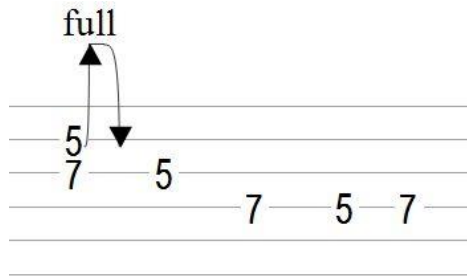


Now that you've watched the demonstration in the video above, here is an outline of how to put these ideas into practice to help you improve your blues guitar solos:

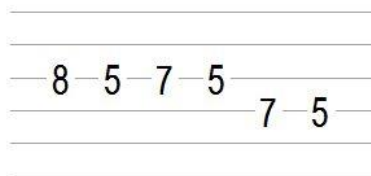
**Step #1:** Think of any 'short' blues guitar lick that you are familiar with (or quickly improvise one) and play through it several times. While choosing your lick, use no more than 3-4 notes in your phrase. This will

force you to get the most expression possible out of each note when you use the techniques described below.

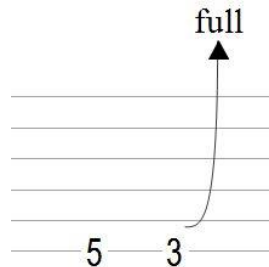
Here are three examples of blues guitar licks you can use (notice that the rhythm of these licks is not notated - be creative and vary the rhythm freely):



[Listen](#)



[Listen](#)



[Listen](#)

Note: these example licks are played in a very 'plain' way on purpose. Your task (in the next step) will be to ornament them following the techniques you saw in the video above (by following the steps below) so that they come to life and start to sound totally mean.

**Step #2:** Take your lick and ornament it by applying each of the techniques listed below, one at a time (you can hear the demonstrations of each in the video above). First play the lick a few times incorporating technique #1, then play it again incorporating technique #2 and finally technique #3.

**Technique #1 - Slide Accent:** Play any note within your blues lick and use the finger that is fretting the note to quickly slide up (in pitch) and then return back to the original fret to continue the lick. It doesn't matter how far exactly you slide up, since your goal is only to ornament the note of the original lick with the sound 'effect' of the back and forth slide (vs. sliding to any particular note on the guitar). This will accent the note in a very unique way, enhancing the [creative musical expression](#) of your lick (as you heard in the video above). Once you have practiced this technique several times and it feels comfortable, create several variations of your original lick by using slides to accent every note contained within it (in alternation).

There are dozens of ways to apply this concept (each one sounding cooler than the last).

**Technique #2 - Delayed Vibrato:** While playing through your blues lick, apply vibrato to any notes that are held out/sustained for a long time (usually the last note or second to last note). However, do NOT apply vibrato immediately after picking the string. Strike the string you want to play and wait a moment (letting the note sustain) before applying vibrato. After a short delay, use VERY wide and heavy vibrato! This approach builds a lot of tension in your lick by creating a strong sense of anticipation. Once you finally apply the vibrato, it makes your lick sound truly aggressive and mean! After you have worked on this for a few minutes and it feels natural, create several variations of your original lick by delaying your vibrato for varying lengths of time before applying it to the note.

**Technique #3 - Slow & Menacing Bend:** On the second to last note in your blues lick, perform a VERY slow, whole step bend up to the final target note in your lick. A good lick to practice this with is the 3rd example of a 2 note phrase I showed you in the tab above. This will create a menacing build up of tension that will add a lot of intensity to the phrase. Important: The effectiveness of this bend lies within the very long delay between the beginning of the bend and its resolution on the root note. Do NOT bend up to the root as soon as you pick the string (watch the video above again to see exactly how long this bend should last). When it comes time to resolve the bend, hit the note you are aiming for with MAXIMUM power!

Once you have practiced this and mastered it, apply the bend for varying lengths of time to create several variations of your original lick.

**Step #3:** Now that you have run through many variations with the 3 techniques above on your first lick, move on to do the same with another lick (repeating this for as long as you want). This can/should keep you busy for a LONG time because there are dozens upon dozens of ways to apply the 3 general [guitar phrasing concepts](#) explained above to just a single lick. Challenge your creativity to expand by thinking of all the possible ways you can creatively play just a small 2-4 note blues guitar phrase. Note: The reason I had you go through all 3 techniques with one lick at a time (rather than changing to a new lick every few seconds) was to make sure that you get 'as much musical expression as possible' out of each technique all within the context of the same blues lick. This is more challenging to do but will GREATLY improve your blues phrasing and soloing.

[Listen to a quick demonstration](#) of several phrasing variations created using the techniques above (applied to the first example lick I showed you in the tab above).

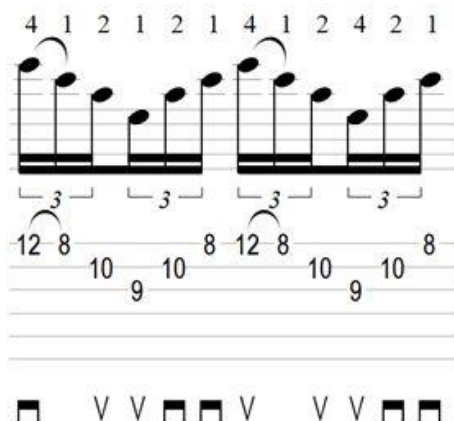
After following the steps above, you've learned how to easily create tons of blues guitar licks that sound totally badass. Now learn how to use 'rhythm' to enhance your blues guitar playing by watching this free [guitar phrasing video](#).

## How To Shred On Guitar Like A Beast And Make Your Shredding Sound More Intense Without Playing Faster

by Tom Hess

Want to breathe more fire into your shred guitar playing? Most guitarists think that playing shred guitar is 'only' about playing every note 'as fast as possible'. Fact is, if you take this approach, your [lead guitar licks](#) will end up sounding boring and repetitive. This is because playing awe-inspiring shred guitar goes beyond merely being able to play fast. In addition to playing fast, you must also understand how to creatively use the notes you play to make your guitar phrases 'stand out' and capture the attention of anyone listening. I will take you through the process of quickly and easily making your shred guitar licks more intense without playing faster. However, before you go through the steps in this exercise, it is crucial that you watch this [shred guitar video](#) so you can see and hear the concepts I will be discussing. By watching the demonstration in this video, you will be able to go beyond the examples in this article and easily create awesome new shred guitar licks of your own. Watch the video below right now, then come back and complete the steps in the exercise on this page. Now that you have watched the video above, follow the steps below to improve your shred guitar playing.

**Step One:** Begin by using a basic 3 string A minor arpeggio pattern. For this pattern, make sure to use a pull off from the highest note to the next highest note when descending. For example, in the A minor arpeggio, make sure to use a pull off from fret 12 to fret 8 on the high E string while descending. See the tab below if you are not sure how to play the notes of the A minor arpeggio:



[Hear the arpeggio](#)



**Step Two:** Play through the pattern several times (at whatever speed you are comfortable with).

**Step Three:** After playing the original pattern straight through several times, begin 'repeating' the highest two notes in the pattern every time the arpeggio starts over (exactly like you saw/heard me do in the video above). In other words, when you are playing the A minor arpeggio (A C E) and the highest two notes are "E" (12th fret) pulling off to "C" (8th fret), repeat these two notes once as you are descending in the pattern like this: E - C - E - C (and then continue the arpeggio). As you heard in my video demonstration, adding these two notes changes the overall contour of the phrase and causes the notes to be emphasized in a much different manner than how they were in the original pattern. By using this approach in your [lead guitar phrasing](#), you will instantly make any shred guitar lick sound totally badass.

The image shows a musical notation for a guitar arpeggio pattern. It consists of four measures of music on a six-line staff. Above the staff, fingerings are indicated: 4 1 4 1 2 1 2 1 4 1 4 1 2 1 2 1 4 1 4 1 2 1 2 1. Below the staff, fret numbers are indicated: 12 8 12 8 10 9 10 8 12 8 12 8 10 9 10 8 12 8 12 8 10 9 10 8. The notation includes slurs, accents, and triplets. Below the staff, there are four groups of symbols: V, a square, V V, and a square, repeated for each measure.

[Hear the example](#)

**Step Four:** Repeat the new variation you just created in the previous step several times. Then create 1-3 'additional' variations by changing the highest note in the arpeggio pattern to a different note. For example, instead of always playing "E" on the 12th fret, play "F" on the 13th fret or "D" on the 10th fret. Now repeat the same concept from the previous step using the new highest note in place of the old one. Play through your new idea several times.

**Step Five:** Play the original A minor arpeggio in combination with the new variations you created. You will hear a MASSIVE increase in the overall intensity and creativity of the original arpeggio pattern. Here is a possible example:

Once you have gone through all the five steps of this shred [guitar exercise](#), begin integrating this concept together with other types of licks and techniques (this exercise is NOT exclusive to arpeggios only). Replace the arpeggio in step one with any other guitar lick you want and use the basic concept of 'breaking the contour' of a straight ascending or descending phrase to create the same super intense feeling. Then simply repeat steps 2-5 and begin creating an endless supply of killer shred guitar licks. By integrating the ideas of this exercise into all areas of your playing, you will add a lot more creativity into your shred guitar licks!

4 1 2 1 2 1 4 1 2 1 2 1 4 1 4 1 2 1 2 1 4 1 4 1 2 1 2 1 4 1

12 8 10 9 10 8 12 8 10 9 10 8 12 8 12 8 10 9 10 8 13 8 13 8 10 9 10 8 12 8

V V V A A V V V A A V A V V A A V A V V A A V

4 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1

12 8 10 9 10 8 10 8 10 8 10 9

A V V A A V A V V

[Hear the example](#)

Enhance any of the shred guitar licks you created in the exercise above by watching this [guitar phrasing video](#) and learn how to play creative guitar solos.

## How To Make Your Lead Guitar Playing Sound Killer Using Exotic Guitar Licks

by Tom Hess

You will struggle to play killer sounding lead guitar licks if all you do is play the same pentatonic and blues patterns over and over. A great way to make your lead guitar licks grab your audience's attention with every note you play, is to use exotic phrasing. To do this, you need the following:

1. Knowledge of exotic scales and arpeggios
2. Mastery of general lead guitar phrasing (in other words: *how* you play the notes in your guitar licks/solos).

With both of these elements in place, you will give yourself endless options for playing [killer lead guitar licks](#) whenever you want.

Don't worry, this doesn't require any advanced music theory knowledge or advanced guitar playing skills from you - you'll see how extremely simple this all is in a moment.

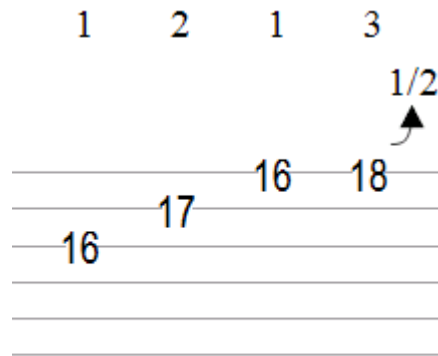
Before I show you how to play exotic and expressive guitar licks with phrasing that will blow people away, watch this video demonstration to see and hear exactly how these concepts will totally *transform* your lead guitar playing:



Now that you've watched the video above, do the following steps:

1. Check out the tab of the exotic guitar licks below and read the text explanation about them.
2. Play through each lick several times until you are comfortable with it.
3. Read the section below called "How To Use Creative Guitar Phrasing To Make These (And Any) Guitar Licks Sound Badass" to learn how you can make these licks sound totally killer.

**Exotic Guitar Lick#1:** This guitar lick is an arpeggio, based on the Lydian mode (don't worry if you are unfamiliar with modes - the lick is very simple to play and apply). The exotic sound of this lick comes from emphasizing the raised 4th note in the Lydian mode (circled in the tablature to the right) by bending it up to the 5th note in the scale. This creates unexpected tension and dissonance that sounds very exotic.

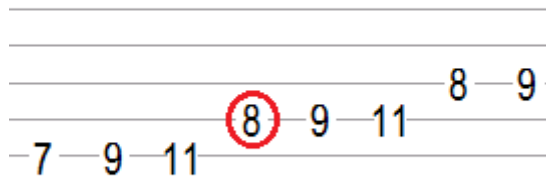





  
 Exotic Guitar Lick #1:

[Hear It](#)

1 2 4 1 2 4 1 2











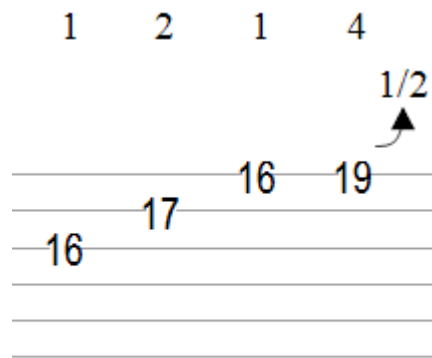

E Lydian:

[Hear It](#)

You can apply this lick over any major chord in a backing track or song (since the above lick is simply a major arpeggio with 1 note added), as long as the lick is moved to match the chord it's played over.

Note: the above scale is the basis for the lick #1, even though the notes are played in completely different octaves/areas of the guitar (the pitches of the scale and the lick are still the same).

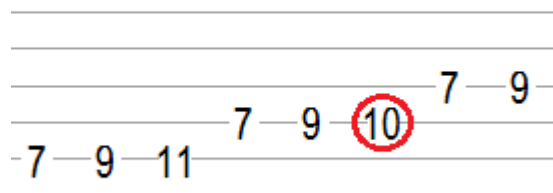
**Exotic Guitar Lick#2:** This guitar lick is an arpeggio based on the 5th mode of melodic minor. The exotic sound of this lick comes from emphasizing the flatted 6<sup>th</sup> note (circled in the tablature to the right) by bending up to it from the note below.



Exotic Guitar Lick #2:

[Hear It](#)

1 2 4 1 3 4 1 3



Melodic Minor Mode 5:

[Hear It](#)

Watch the video above again to hear exactly how to make these exotic guitar licks sound creative and unique.

You can also apply this lick over any major chord in a backing track or song. The notes of the lick are taken from the 5<sup>th</sup> Mode Of Melodic Minor shown above on the right (even though the octaves/positions on the guitar are different).

Note: of course there are more exotic scales than just the two I listed here (to cover this topic in full detail, work with an [expert guitar teacher](#)), BUT even these 2 scales will already help to make your guitar licks come alive...particularly when you combine them with the concepts described below:

## **How To Use Creative Guitar Phrasing To Make These (And Any) Guitar Licks Sound Badass**

Here are several creative guitar phrasing techniques that will make all your guitar licks sound exotic and totally badass:

**1. Bending From Notes *Outside* Of The Scale:** Instead of beginning all of your bends by bending from one note of the scale to the next, start the bend on a note *in between* two notes of the scale. This will create a very expressive and exotic effect in your bends that sounds awesome.

Here are two examples for how to do this:

1. In Exotic Guitar Lick#1 above, bend up from the 17th fret on the E string to reach the 18th fret. [Hear It](#)
2. Using the same guitar lick, fret the 17th fret, but pre-bend the string to match the pitch of the 18th fret (bend the string without picking it). Then, strike the string and release the bend all the way down until it is *almost* matching the pitch of the 17th fret. Right before the string matches the pitch of the 17th fret, immediately play the 16th fret. [Hear It](#)

TIP: The slower you release the bend, the more tension you can create (this sounds really awesome – watch the video above again to hear how I do this). Additionally, this style of phrasing closely immitates the sound of a singer’s voice (more on this below). Check out this [guitar soloing video](#) to see another demonstration of this phrasing technique along with an explanation of how it is used to create a vocal-like sound in your playing.

**Important:** This style of guitar phrasing (landing intentionally on an out-of-key pitch and then slowly bending into an *in key* note) is an example of “controlled dissonance” – something I teach to all students who take [online electric guitar lessons](#) with me. By learning how to create tension in

your lead guitar playing (in a controlled manner like this), you will be able to easily play very intense and emotional guitar licks whenever you want. This is completely different than the approach most guitarists use of simply playing notes at random (without knowing how they will sound ahead of time) and hoping they sound good.

**2. Creating Aggression With Slides:** When using slides, you are not restricted to ONLY sliding from one note of the lick to the next. There are lots of variations you can create in your guitar licks by using slides in unconventional ways. For example, try this:

1. Play through any lick until you reach a note you want to emphasize.
2. Play the note you chose from the first step, then immediately slide up the fretboard a distance of 3-5 frets or so and return back to the original note. Tip: Do not focus on counting the number of frets you are sliding - simply slide up an undetermined distance and return to the original note.
3. Continue playing through the rest of the lick.

Read more details about using creative slides in your guitar playing by checking out this article on [playing intense guitar licks](#).

**3. Using Guitar Phrases That "Sing":** Most of the truly *great* guitar solos consist of guitar licks that ornament a memorable melody. One of the best ways to give this quality to your guitar licks is to play them similar to how a singer sings a vocal line: By holding out several important pitches (using them as the main body of the lick) and inserting faster runs or fills to fill the space in between.

One way to quickly apply this idea into your guitar playing is to study the vocal melodies of your favorite singers and observe how they structure the notes in their phrases. As you do this, pay close attention to the smaller phrasing nuances that the singer uses to enhance the expressiveness of each note (such as vibrato). When you use this vocalist-style approach in your guitar phrasing, you will easily transform any lick that sounds "robotic" and lifeless into a lick that sounds highly memorable and expressive.

See a demonstration of how you can instantly apply this concept into your guitar solos by watching this [video about writing guitar solos that sing](#).

**4. Applying Vibrato Creatively:** Using great vibrato technique is key for playing killer guitar licks. Apply the following phrasing approaches to the guitar licks discussed in this article (and the ones you create yourself):

1. Use different styles of vibrato on notes throughout the lick, such as narrow vibrato (less than a half step), wide (one half step) or very wide (one whole step).
2. Use vibrato *as soon as* you pick a note, but sometimes try *delaying* it while you let the note ring for a moment. By not applying the vibrato instantly, you create anticipation in the listener. As a result, it becomes much more intense once you finally apply the vibrato and release the built-up tension.

Learn more on how to make your guitar soloing sound creative using different types of vibrato by reading this article on [playing better guitar solos](#).

**5. Combining Guitar Phrasing Techniques:** To truly make any guitar lick sound badass, you can't just use a single guitar phrasing approach all the time (because then your solos will all sound the same). You must creatively combine *many* phrasing techniques. Combine the guitar licks and phrasing techniques in this article using the following steps:

**Step One** – Select one of the exotic guitar licks discussed in this article (or create your own).

**Step Two** - Play through this lick 10-15 times using one of the four phrasing approaches you saw/heard in the earlier examples. (Yes, this many variations are REALLY possible - challenge yourself to be creative!) As you do so, try to make each repetition sound unique and highly expressive.

**Step Three** – Combine the guitar phrasing approach from the previous step together with another one discussed in this article and repeat the process from step 2. Review the video demonstration above to see and hear how I use different guitar phrasing techniques together.

Apply the concepts in this article and watch your boring, cliché guitar licks turn into killer-sounding, exotic guitar licks. However, know that there is MUCH more to learn about guitar phrasing in order to become a truly *great* lead guitarist. Learn how to take your lead guitar playing to the highest level fast by starting [online rock guitar lessons](#).



# The Key To Mastering Even The Most Advanced Guitar Licks And Solos

by Tom Hess

STOP believing in this false *myth* about playing guitar solos:

*"To play difficult guitar solos that combine many techniques, you must practice these techniques in isolation until you can play them flawlessly. Doing this will give you the ability to play the entire solo fluently and easily, up to speed."*

Although practicing technical licks in isolation can improve your ability to perform *those specific licks*, it does NOT help you learn how to fluently combine them together in the context of an actual guitar solo. This is one of the big reasons why most guitarists struggle to easily play advanced guitar licks and why their improvisations often sound like a "collection of isolated licks thrown together" vs. a smooth and fluent "guitar solo".

**Important Note:** You must start practicing to combine guitar techniques together in a musical manner RIGHT NOW... not "later" when you have fully mastered them. Here is why:

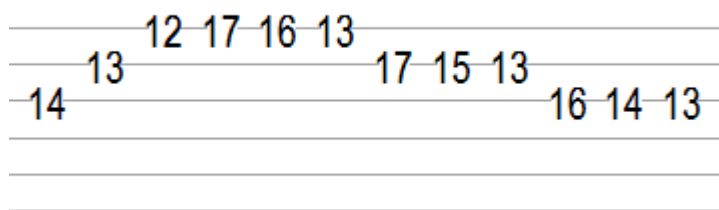
1. You do not need to fully master a technique before you can start using it to make music (in fact, it can take years to master some of the hardest techniques)
2. Do you really want to not be able to do/play ANYTHING with the techniques in the meantime (while you work on them in isolation)?

Additionally, by actively going through the process of learning to apply and integrate techniques that you haven't mastered yet into actual music, you will expose new weaknesses that you did not realize you had while only practicing in isolation. (Watch this [guitar practice video](#) to learn exactly how and why this approach is the fastest way to become a better guitarist.) These new insights will allow you to "master" the techniques in isolation many times faster than it would take you using the conventional (ineffective) approach.

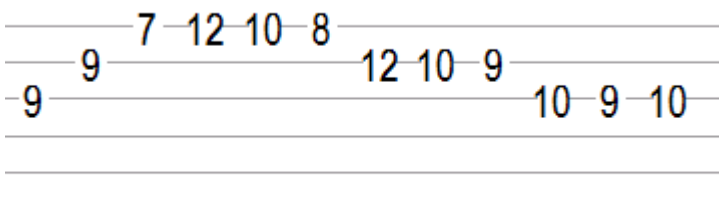
Good news is, learning how to combine different techniques together in a musical manner is actually very easy - You'll see why in just a moment. First, watch this video to see and hear a demonstration of how this process works and how it will help you to easily play difficult guitar licks.



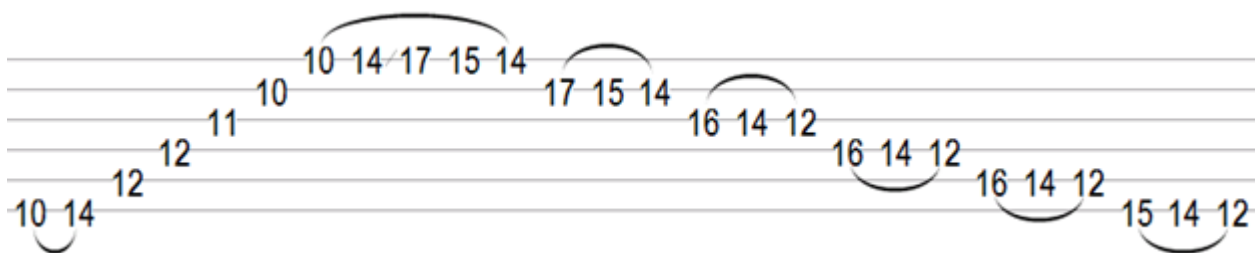
Now that you've watched the video above, use the steps below to learn how to practice combining multiple techniques together. To complete these steps, use any of the following example licks or think of your own licks:



[Hear It](#)



[Hear It](#)



## [Hear It](#)

### **Step 1: Find Or Create A Point Where The Two Licks Intersect**

Play through both parts of the lick at a comfortable speed and identify the note or general area where one lick ends and the other lick begins.

For example, in lead guitar lick #1 above, the last note of the arpeggio portion of the lick ends on fret 12 of the high e string (followed immediately by the scale run beginning on the 17th fret). This is where the two licks intersect. It is critical to find this point within the main lick, because this is where you will often need to change your picking motion (or general mindset) to play the second part of the lick. Referring back to lead guitar solo lick #1, observe how the arpeggio portion of the lick requires a sweep picking motion, while the scale portion of the lick requires [directional picking](#).

If you are not familiar with sweep picking technique, don't be intimidated. It's actually A LOT easier to master than you think. Become familiar with this technique by reading this article about [how to easily play fast sweep picking arpeggios](#).

Note: If you are practicing using your own guitar licks that combine multiple techniques, you need to find this point of intersection yourself. Do this before moving to the next step.

### **Step 2: Create A Smooth Transition By Isolating The Main "Problem" Area**

Now that you have located the point where both parts of the lick intersect, isolate this note from the rest of the lick by doing the following (in order):

- Play through the lick again at a comfortable speed, but this time play the note you identified from step 1 *several* times when it occurs in the lick. The purpose of this is to strengthen the transition from one part of the lick to the next. By doing this, the entire lick will feel

seamless and smooth (Note: do NOT make the common mistake of speeding through this note in an attempt to cover up any inaccuracies).

- Next, play through the lick as usual (without any repeated notes) three times in a row. On the fourth time through the lick, play the note from step 1 several times as you did previously.

Watch the video above one more time to see a demonstration of this and hear the immediate results that come from using this [guitar practice](#) approach.

Don't worry about fast playing at this point, focus on emphasizing the note where both licks intersect, and doing so cleanly and accurately.

### **Step 3: Create Variations Of The Entire Lick Using Different Rhythms**

After you feel more confident combining several techniques involved in the lick you are practicing, it's time to make the lick as musical as possible. To get started, do the following:

- For 5-10 minutes, focus on playing through the entire lick with completely different rhythms. For example, if you were originally playing the lick using only 8th or 16th notes, change it by holding some notes longer than others or using other rhythm variations such as triplets. Challenge yourself to create as much variety from one repetition to the next (this will massively increase your ability to be creative). Additionally, feel free to repeat notes as you like (you aren't restricted to playing each note only once).

Learn more about creating rhythmic variations in your guitar licks by watching this [guitar soloing video](#).

- As you play through each variation of your lead guitar lick, pay close attention to the musical tension (drama) that is created when you hold certain notes longer. For example, while playing guitar lick #1, compare the tension created by sustaining the last note on fret 13 of the G string, to the tension created when sustaining the note on the 17th fret of the high E string. As you can hear, the difference is MASSIVE (there is a lot more tension present when sustaining the 13<sup>th</sup> fret of the G string in this example).

Learn a lot more about creating TONS of musical tension while

playing guitar solos by watching this video about [attracting women with guitar](#).

#### **Step 4: Enhance The Entire Lick Using Creative Guitar Phrasing Elements**

The final step for making your main lick sound musical and expressive is to enhance it using creative guitar phrasing techniques. Choose any of the variations you created in the previous step, and use one or more of the following approaches to make your guitar lick sound as musical as possible:

1. Use strictly legato playing (little or no picking) by playing with hammer-ons, pull-offs and slides. See and hear lots of examples of how to do this in this [blues guitar soloing article](#).
2. Accent different notes in your lick and create more intensity in your phrasing using different types of vibrato - from narrow to extra wide. If you aren't sure how to do this, read this article about [how to play vibrato on guitar](#).
3. Emphasize notes that are a half step (one fret) apart by using creative trills and ornaments like the ones discussed in this [rock guitar soloing article](#).

After following the steps above, you now understand how to play killer lead guitar solo licks by combining any number of guitar techniques together. However, you won't become a truly great lead guitarist using this concept alone. To learn how to take your lead guitar soloing to the highest level, work with the best [online rock guitar teacher](#).

## About The Author:

Tom Hess

<http://tomhess.net>



Tom Hess is a virtuoso guitarist, composer, and recording artist who has [toured](#) throughout the world and released a top 100 hit single in Europe.

Tom's [Music Careers Mentoring Program](#) and the [Elite Guitar Teachers Inner Circle](#) have helped musicians and music teachers from all over the world to build highly successful music careers and teaching businesses.

Tom is also a very dedicated music teacher who has taught tens of thousands of music lessons to guitar players all over the world. In addition to teaching [private guitar lessons](#), clinics, workshops and master classes around the United States, Tom teaches guitar to students from all over the world through his [Correspondence Guitar Lessons](#) and [Improvisation Training Classes](#).

