

Practicing

Learning to play guitar is about creating *habits*. Habits allow you to perform quickly, easily, and naturally – without having to consciously think through every move you make.

The way you develop habit is by *repeating* a set of actions *many* times. Anything that you repeat numerous times each day will become habit over a period of weeks. Consciously repeating things on a daily basis, so that they become habit, is the aim of practicing. If you repeat mistakes, confusion, and error when practicing, then those things will *also* become habit. So, the process of practicing effectively is about identifying and eliminating confusion and error, and repeating things *the way you want to be able to play them*.

To practice effectively:

- 1) Repeat manageable sections of music. You need at least 5-10 repetitions to notice any effective improvement, so practice only as much material as you have time/patience to go through multiple times. Going through a piece once does very little to form new habitual patterns. Likewise, the more you practice any section of music, the less you will need to think about every conscious action, and the easier it will get. Take breaks whenever you need to keep your mind fresh, and always return to practicing the same section again (this is great re-enforcement).
- 2) *Identify* spots that contain *repeated mistakes*. Sections that you can't play at tempo (i.e., things that you need to slow down to play correctly), or sections that you have to repeat to get right, typically contain the same errors time and again. Trying to perform or record the things you practice, and/or practicing with a metronome are several ways to find those sorts of repetitious mistakes. Without doing one of those things, your mind *tends to get used to practicing them wrong*. If you practice errors, they become habitual, and they begin to feel like a natural part of the music (only to you – not to your listeners). Identifying those kinds of problems is a primary focus, from the beginning of any learning process.
- 3) *Isolate* practiced mistakes and *repeat* manageable portions of difficult sections *slowly*. *** **Anything can be played correctly if you slow it down enough** *** You should practice each small chunk of a difficult section until you can get it right 3-5 times in a row, then practice it back in context with surrounding sections, until you can do it 3-5 times in a row without stopping or slowing down, and without mistakes. When you can do that, you have learned it well - it will become a solid habit, and you will be able to play it quickly and cleanly over time.
- 4) Repeat step 3 until you can perform the whole piece (the thing you are practicing) without problems.

A large part of any good teaching philosophy is centered around effective and progressive practice patterns. As described above, the main goals are to consistently identify problems, eliminate errors through slow repetition, and repeat manageable chunks of material in and out of context, so that they become fluent over time in the quickest and easiest way possible.

Most of the time in lessons and in practice is spent doing things based on the above concept. My job is:

- 1) to provide you the most effective and enjoyable materials to learn the kind of music you want to play (pieces of music, conceptual practice patterns for technical and improvisational advancement, etc.). You will be playing the things you practice *many, many* times, so they have to be enjoyable and desirable - you have to like the things you practice. They have to be at a level that is achievable, and they must help you develop the skills required to perform the types of music you set out to learn.
- 2) to help you overcome the technical and conceptual problems encountered in learning those pieces of music. That's done by constantly applying the process described above.

We will go through this process many, many times in lessons, sometimes focusing on very small details, and sometimes moving between different pieces to music to maintain variety and interest. It's important to understand and use the process above when practicing at home - it's what determines how easily and quickly you learn to play guitar.

If you practice things correctly, a little bit every day - and identify/isolate/eliminate confusion and error - you will be able to play those things within a short matter of time. The speed at which you progress is determined entirely by how much time you spend repeating those things each day, and how effectively you eliminate errors. Remember, it only gets easier, faster, more fluent, and more enjoyable as habits develop and become more ingrained.