

# HOW TO PRACTICE

As with anything, consistency and repetition are the keys to success. The big question is how often and how long to practice is adequate . What ever the reason you have decided to play guitar, understanding what to expect, and managing expectations are key factors in success .

Before we get started set up an area that is designated "the practice space", you do not need to have a separate room . A corner spot or a space off to the side of a room will do just fine. Whats important is that the space is comfortable and inspires you to practice. Here are some things you may want to have in your practice area.

- MUSIC STAND • GUITAR STAND • COMPUTER • CD OR MP3 PLAYER WITH
- SPEAKERS • PRACTICE JOURNAL • COMFORTABLE CHAIR WITH NO ARMS

Keep the guitar out in plain sight that way you will see it and you will be more inclined to practice. If you need to hang the guitar on the wall to keep it out of harms way even better it doubles as art.

## **1st: Practice Philosophy**

Let's understand my personal practice philosophy. When learning how to play the guitar it is important to stay focused on your topic . Here's an analogy I frequently share with my students.

*If you have one hour to dig a hole it is better to dig one deep hole as opposed to several shallow holes.*

This philosophy is meant to help you use your "new tools" quickly ( i.e.; new chord, scale, rhythm etc. etc.)

## **2nd: Practice Journal**

Most of us have several things we " juggle " in our lives, keeping a practice journal can help you stay focused, especially if you don't practice daily. There could be several ways to keep your practice journal, heres one example .

## EXAMPLE:

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- 1) Memorizing chords : C , D7 Emin, F (20min) Prog. 4
- 2) Amin pentatonic scale Form 1. ( 10min) Prog. 6
- 3) Played songs : Purple Haze, Back in Black , Crossroads  
(30 min)Prog. 6

All you need is a small notebook . Each time you practice put down the date, what you are practicing ,how long , and also rate your progress with a number scale 1= no progress 10 = perfection .

*( Note: The digging one hole metaphor should not be taken literally . In the above example we have three items two that represent the one hole . Item 3 is most likely the fun component . It is important to continue to enjoy playing, so always allot a portion of your practice time to play what ever makes you happy : )*

### **3rd: When to move on to a new topic**

The progress number you assign to your practice topic is there to help you practice efficiently . When the progress number reaches 6 , then in my opinion you can add another element or topic to your regime. By staying focused on topic till you reach a proficiency of 6 you start using your new scale , chord etc . etc. quicker. Also once your proficiency reaches a certain level you will start to see them naturally appear in your playing . Just be realistic, things will pop up sparsely at first and then as you progress , they will appear more frequently until you get to the point of mastery !

### **4th : Practice session duration:**

Being fresh and alert is very important. We absorb new information better when we can focus. We focus better when we get enough sleep, when we are mentally engaged, and when our attention span is at it's strongest. Everyones length of time that they can stay focused is different. Your attention span is strongest at the beginning of your practice session, so several shorter practice sessions will be more beneficial than a few longer sessions. For example if you can practice for two 1hr sessions that would be better than one 2hr session.

## **5th: Practice Order:**

Always practice the hardest things first. The reason for this is because it involves more brain power and as already stated, you are fresh and your focus is better at the beginning of your practice session. Secondly, by doing the more difficult things first, as your attention span starts to diminish so does the difficulty of the work, this will help make your practice session more efficient and productive.

## **6th: Always Listen**

No matter what you are practicing ALWAYS LISTEN !! ALWAYS LISTEN !!

You should be able to sing everything you play.

A great way to learn how to hear what you play is to slow down and sing or hum the scale, arpeggio, or chord etc. you are practicing. When practicing, never play the scale etc. faster than you can sing it. Continue to do this until you can sing the form without playing it. A common mistake I see my students make is trying to play the scale, arpeggio, or chord too fast. I sometimes think that some students think faster is better, that may be the case in a race but not in music. Actually, speed is just another "tool" for your palette . Melody is king !

## **7th: Manage Expectations**

In my opinion staying enthused is arguably the most important aspect of learning to play the guitar. Have you ever heard the expression "time flies when you're having fun?" Have you ever experienced it? Why does time appear to pass quicker when we are "having fun"? I hope the answer is obvious . When your mind is engaged you are focused you don't think about time passing. Similarly, when you are happy and content you don't think about time passing . On the contrary when you are bored or doing something you don't like, time seems to drag on and you may catch yourself watching the clock, which is why staying enthused is so important . Find fun creative ways to enjoy your practice time.

- Keep your goals realistic
- Shoot for small manageable goals.

Example:

Instead of trying to learn all 5 patterns of the pentatonic scale in one week shoot for one or two patterns per week. Remember, if you have to think about where to put your fingers for more than a 1/2 second, you don't know the form yet, and that's being forgiving. Realistically any thought about where to put your fingers is too long . If you are thinking about where to put your fingers, how can you think about making melodies?



Heres's another analogy, lets say someone holds in their hand a sign with the number "3" written on it . How long does it take for you to recognize the number? I realize that this sounds silly , but if you looked at the number and it took you a few seconds to realize it was "3" . Would you consider that fast enough?

The point is to keep practicing till you are comfortable enough that you don't think about what you are playing. You should just listen and play, thats being a master. I believe everyone can achieve that to varying degrees of success.

As a final thought, some people may feel that they are not gifted enough to play guitar. In my 25 years of teaching and playing professionally I have played with and met some world class musicians. To be successful as a musician you do need a certain level of skill , and I believe skill is the operative word.

The Merrian / Webster dictionary defines skill as follows : *the ability to do something that comes from training, experience, or practice.*

With that said, my point is that if you are organized and consistent with regard to practicing anyone can be a world class musician. I realize that it may come more natural and come easier for some people, but hard work in my opinion will always "trump" "talent." In my opinion, talent is not the key ingredient, persistence is the key ingredient. By being organized and having realistic expectations, everyone can be perceived as "being talented."

**GOOD LUCK AND HAVE FUN**

*Jeffrey Nevaras*