



5 Tips for Fun Guitar Practice



HEARTWOOD
GUITAR INSTRUCTION



If it's not fun, why do it?

My 12-year mission as a guitar teacher has been to spread joy through teaching music. Here's what I've learned, distilled into five simple tips. They've worked for my hundreds of private students, and over 18 million online students since 2004. Check it out!

Rob Hampton | Heartwood Guitar Instruction

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Be a Musician With a Mission

First things first: Why do you play guitar?

Imagine that over the next five years, you truly fall in love with the guitar. You miss it like a sweetheart when you're away. Your family gets a little jealous. You practice like it's your full-time job.

What would you do with your new skills? Join a band? Play at holiday gatherings? Perform at open mics or religious services? Compose and record songs? Or perhaps playing music is a private activity, something you do purely for yourself?

This is the first question I ask my new students, and it's the first thing

you need to define in order to enjoy your practice. Your mission will guide everything you learn.

Practicing guitar without a mission is like building a house without blueprints, or sailing the ocean without a map. I often have students come to me who know tons of cool licks, but can't play a single song start to finish, even though what they really want to do is entertain other people. Sorry, but cool licks by themselves are not entertaining. Mission Failure!

Once you've defined your goal, you can seek advice from a teacher or experienced musician on how to get there.

2



Learn the Songs You Love

If we were all soulless robots, incapable of emotion, I'd recommend that newly minted cyborgs download some basic music theory into their data banks, and wrap their mechanical hands around a few scales before they started learning songs. Having this foundation would definitely make learning songs easier.

But of course, we're emotional beings, subject to boredom and frustration. We must somehow find a way to make our guitar practice more alluring than the million other activities that clamor for our time.

For most of us, that means feeding our souls a steady diet of great music to practice. The skills we

work on are the skills that music requires. Practicing bends in isolation is boring and painful. But practicing bends because you want to learn Clapton's "Layla" is much more fun (still painful though).

The tricky part is to find songs appropriate for your skill level: Challenging enough to teach you new stuff, but not so hard that you're frustrated. If you don't have a teacher helping you, you'll need to comb through chord chart and tablature websites looking for appropriate songs. My website, [Heartwood Guitar Instruction](#), has 650 chord charts, most of them of beginner or intermediate difficulty. Check 'em out!

3



Always Have a Gig on the Horizon

Who paints and then burns their artwork? Who shoots baskets all day but never plays a game? Who studies cooking but never makes any food? No one I know.

Yet many, many skilled guitarists have come to me whose only audience is the four walls of their bedroom. And they wonder why they're having a hard time staying motivated.

I'm using the term "gig" loosely. Any opportunity to share your music with others can be a gig. Here are some gigs that anyone can book:

- Film your performance and share it on Facebook or YouTube.

- Make an audio recording and give it as a holiday gift.
- Bust out your guitar the next time you sing "Happy Birthday."
- Serenade a beloved family member.

Nothing motivates practice like anticipation of a glorious performance and/or terror of flying tomatoes. It's why, twice a year, my students perform in a rowdy student recital we call The Coffee Shop Jam.

I'll admit, my students don't always practice hard. But when the Jam's approaching, it's sore fingertips (and good music) all around.

4



Look Over Your Own Shoulder

They say self-awareness is one of the traits that separates us from the rest of the known universe. Don't squander this gift: Practice like a human.

This means constant stepping back and evaluating your practice. Ask yourself these questions:

- What am I trying to learn?
- Is this the most effective way of reaching my goal?

This self-awareness is called *mindful practice*, and it's your key to excellence. Practice mindfully, and you will see your skills bloom like a bulb garden in the springtime. Practice mindlessly, perhaps while watching TV, and

you'll accumulate a host of bad habits that will be as tough as dandelions to weed out later on.

Granted, creating effective exercises for yourself can be tough. Unless you're a trained teacher, or already have years of music experience under your belt, you probably don't know how.

If this sounds like you, I urge you to take my online [Guitar Crash Course](#). It will give you in-depth training in essential practice skills, like breaking things down into manageable chunks and building muscle memory efficiently.

5



Practice in Slow Motion

You've heard it a thousand times: "Practice slowly." There are two reasons music teachers repeat this advice ad nauseum.

Reason #1: It's essential for learning difficult material while avoiding mistakes.

Reason #2: It's absurdly, inexplicably hard to do.

I've taught hundreds of students, and invariably, when I first tell them to slow down, they don't. Some even speed up a little.

My students aren't ignoring my advice, thank goodness. It's just that until practicing slowly becomes a habit, it requires major focus and willpower. It's a skill, and like foot-tapping and playing

with a metronome, it's deceptively difficult to learn.

Here are some cues that have helped my students to put on the brakes:

- If you're making mistakes, you're playing too fast.
- Pretend you're playing in slow motion.
- Imagine that every wrong note costs you \$10.

Keep in mind that slowing down isn't your only tool for making difficult material easier. You'll often need to simplify the music too, either by working on just a small section at a time, or by isolating the skill you're working on.



Ready to take the next step?



The Guitar Crash Course is a fun, video-based introduction to guitar. I'd love it if you joined the 18 million guitarists I've had the pleasure of teaching online since 2004.

By subscribing, you'll be on the road to mastering the skills I've discussed here, including:

- Mindful practice
- Playing slowly
- Building muscle memory
- Breaking things down

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