



**BOOST YOUR PICKING
SPEED**

by

50%

THE SEVEN SINS OF PICKING TECHNIQUE

If you eliminate everything holding you back, you'll play fast. It's that simple.

All you have to do is avoid the pitfalls and stick with it. If you do that, you're guaranteed to get results.

These seven mistakes are the ones that hold people back from picking fast. Even doing one of these will sabotage your progress, because they all create extra challenges that are very difficult to overcome.

I used to really struggle with fast picking on guitar, but once I figured out what I was doing wrong, all it took was a bit of practice and I could play anything I wanted.

MAIN POINT: Avoid all of these mistakes at all times.

1. USING THE WRONG PICK

PICK

You've probably heard this before, but we're starting simple to make sure you can get everything right.

One of the most important parts of picking fast is making sure your hands are synchronised – so that your left and right hands both hit the notes at exactly the same time. If you don't do this, you'll just get sloppy noise rather than clear notes.

If you use a thin pick, it will bend every time you hit a string. This means there will be a slight delay in between when you move your hand and when the string is actually plucked.

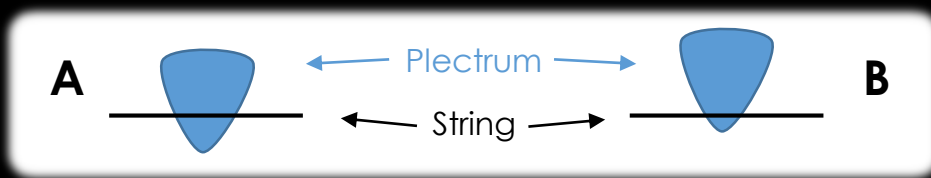
This makes synchronisation very difficult, and sabotages your progress.

REMEDY: Use a thick, sturdy pick (1mm or heavier) that doesn't bend.

2. USING TOO MUCH PICK

PICK

So now you're using the correct pick - next you need to learn how to use it. Take a look at this diagram:



In example A, there's lots of the plectrum below the string when you pluck. This increases the amount of plectrum that you have to force through the string, making it more difficult to play.

In example B, it's just the tip of the plectrum that is in contact with the string. This makes it much easier to play because you only have to move a tiny bit of the pick through the string. The less of the pick you use to hit the string, the easier it'll be and the faster you'll play.

REMEDY: Only use the very tip of the pick to hit the string.

3. USING LARGE MUSCLES

Picking guitar strings is a very precise movement. If you're a millimetre out, you'll miss the string.

Despite this, I always see people using elbow motion to pick the strings. Their whole forearm and wrist are "fixed" and then they move their arm at the elbow to pick the strings!

This engages large muscles that aren't made for precise movements at all. Sure, some pro's do it, but you're making things more difficult for yourself.

REMEDY: Use finger or wrist motion to move the pick. This picture shows the joints I personally use. I mainly move the bone behind the thumb, known as the thumb metacarpal.



3. USING LARGE MUSCLES (CONTINUED)

It's *possible* to play fast using large muscles, but it makes it more difficult.

This is because you need *precision*. Otherwise your picking won't be accurate and you'll find it very difficult to stay in control (especially when changing strings).

However, it might take a week or two to get used to the new motion. At first it *will* feel awkward and you *will* have to slow down.

Once you've got used to the motion, though, your picking motion will be much more efficient and you'll have far more control. This will result in more speed.

REMEDY: Start very slow to get used to using smaller muscles. Then, after a week or two, the new motion will be second nature.

4. USING TOO MUCH FORCE

Guitar speed is all about relaxed control. The more relaxed you are, and the more control you have, the faster you can play.

If you try to force your hands to move faster, you're violating these two principles.

Your muscles are now tense, and you haven't got as much control because you're using a lot of force and energy for a task that doesn't need it.

This will stop you from ever playing fast, and can result in injury.

REMEDY: Keep your hands as relaxed as possible and let the pick do the work.

4. USING TOO MUCH FORCE (CONTINUED)

The question is: How do you train yourself to stay relaxed?

It's easy to let excess muscle tension slip in. Excess tension will limit your speed – so you need to get rid of it. You need to train yourself to stay relaxed when you play, otherwise you'll never be able to increase your speed. This applies to *both* hands: your left and right hands both need to be relaxed.

REMEDY: Do 10 minutes a day of this practice method:

- 1) Put your metronome away, and choose a small lick of 4-8 notes that you'd like to play.
- 2) Play it really slowly and see how little force you can use while still playing cleanly. How lightly can you pick and still get a clear note? How lightly can you fret while still playing the note cleanly?

This will show you what real relaxation feels like. Then you'll be able to detect excess muscle tension much more easily, which will allow you to improve your speed.

5. FOCUSING ON SPEED BEFORE CONTROL

Like we said, speed is a by-product of relaxed control.

You need control in order to play fast. Otherwise, your skills will be inconsistent and you'll never be able to rely on them.

If you don't have control, then when you need to pull off a lick or solo for an audition or a live show you'll never know whether you'll get it right or not.

It'll also mean that playing fast *always feels hard*, no matter how much practice you do.

REMEDY: When you practice, focus on relaxed control and forget about speed. Then, speed will develop all on its own... or will it? (See the next page)

5. FOCUSING ON SPEED BEFORE CONTROL (CONTINUED)

Focusing on speed *before* focusing on control is a mistake...

...but that doesn't mean you *shouldn't* focus on speed. You need to push the limits of your speed occasionally to ensure that you actually get faster.

If you push your speed too much, your technique will be tense and messy. If you don't push it at all, you'll get very slow progress.

REMEDY: Most of the time you should play slower than your maximum speed to make sure that you have relaxed control. However, once a day, just for a couple of minutes, you should push your speed right to the very max.

Try to play as fast as you can, and then push beyond that point too. Go beyond where your technique breaks up, and forget about control for a while. Remember, though – this is only for a few minutes each day.

6. TAKING ON TOO MUCH AT ONCE

Fast picking on guitar isn't just one skill – it's a combination of lots of different things.

First there's single string picking on one note. Next, you have to bring in the left hand and synchronise your hands together.

Then there's string changing – first with the pick slanted one way, then the other.

Then there's moving it across all 6 strings, and combining everything.

If you try to learn all this at once, it'll be too much for your brain and you'll get practically no progress at all.

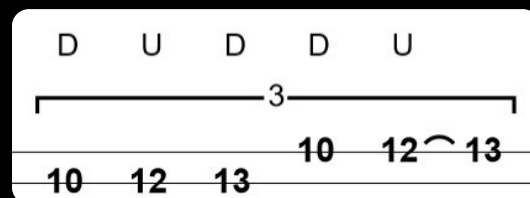
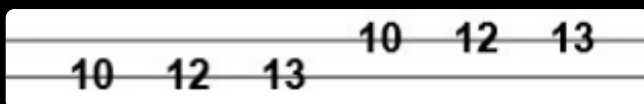
REMEDY: Break down the challenge and master each thing individually. Use the steps above to do this.

7. THINKING YOU MUST PICK EVERY NOTE

This is the most vital thing so far. This alone increased my speed by 50% or more.

When the pro's play fast, they often don't pick every note – even in “picking” runs. Yngwie Malmsteen is a great example of this.

He adds in pull-offs and sweeps to make fast string changes easier – and you should too. Look at this:



The one on the left is pure alternate picking. The lick on the right will be much easier to play fast in the long run, but it will sound identical up-to-speed. Your ear won't be able to pick up the different sound of the legato when you play it really quickly.

REMEDY: Add in occasional hammer-ons, pull-offs, and sweeps to make string changes easier.

7. THINKING YOU MUST PICK EVERY NOTE (CONTINUED)

The pros frequently play licks with pure alternate picking, of course. But if you're playing something that has a lot of string changes, then try making it easier using other techniques.

As long as 80-90% of the lick is still picked, you'll still get the same sound. However, the lick will be much easier to play. Take this, for instance:

D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	U
12	13	15	12	13	15	13	12	15	13	12	15	13	12	15	13

All the string changes make it very difficult. Try this instead:

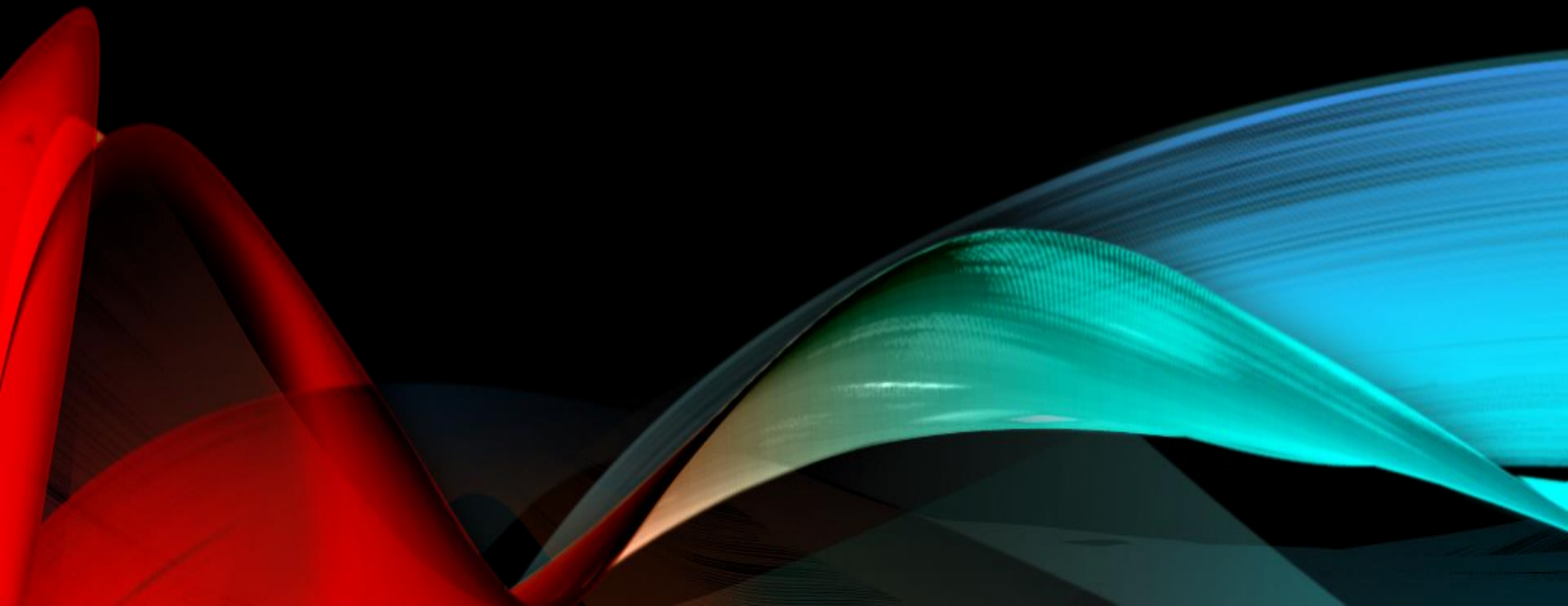
D	U	D	D	U	D	U	D	D	U	U	U	U			
12	13	15	12	13	15	13	12	15	13	12	15	13	12	15	13

REMEDY: You can pick every note if you like. But if you want a big boost in speed, then try combining techniques to eliminate challenges.

SUMMARY CHEAT-SHEET

1. Using the wrong pick
2. Using too much pick
3. Using large muscles
4. Using too much force
5. Focusing on speed before control
6. Taking on too much at once
7. Thinking you must pick every note

BONUS CHAPTER





BONUS MISTAKE: UNDERESTIMATING THE CHALLENGE

This is an extra to the seven mistakes, because it's more about mindset than physical motions.

That doesn't mean it's not important, though – this is probably the most important thing here.

Most people vastly underestimate the time it takes to develop picking speed on guitar. They expect great results from only a bit of practice, and then get frustrated and give in when they don't get what they wanted.

The easiest way to get around this is to prepare yourself in advance. Expect it to take ten times more practice than you currently think it will, and then hit the challenge with everything you've got.

MAIN POINT: Put in 10x the effort and time you think you'll need.

BONUS MISTAKE: UNDERESTIMATING THE CHALLENGE (CONTINUED)

Learn to play fast using other techniques (like legato or tapping) before trying to conquer fast picking.

Learning fast picking is simple – just avoid these mistakes, and keep repeating it until you succeed – but it takes time.

It takes more practice to build high-speed picking skills than any other shred technique on guitar.

Master something else (like fast hammer-ons and pull-offs, for instance) first to build your confidence and prepare for this challenge.

That way you'll already have something to build on, and you're much more likely to succeed.

MAIN POINT: Build confidence in your skills, and then commit to this challenge and never give in.

Thank you for reading this guide. I sincerely hope it helps you get to your guitar goals!

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