

the  
**GUITAR  
SHOW**

**“How to Practice Like a  
Professional Guitar Player”  
(even if time is your biggest hurdle)**

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# PRACTICE

**Practice makes Perfect!** Practicing is performing (an activity) or exercise (a skill) repeatedly or regularly in order to improve or maintain one's proficiency. So, as they say, "practice makes perfect" ...right? Kind of! It's more like, whatever we practice we will get proficient(good) at. BUT, what happens if we are practicing the wrong stuff OR practicing the right stuff, the wrong way? Yes, both can occur. It goes like this, science tells us that whatever we do in repetition, will build neural paths to further support or do that thing better, faster and more efficiently. SO, it would make sense for us to not only be practicing the right stuff, but to be practicing the right stuff, the RIGHT way. For example, if I am new to guitar and another guitarist says, you should practice the pentatonic scale because its the most used scale for improvisation, this is TRUE! However, what if I played those scales with only my index and middle finger, because that is what felt easiest? You got it, we would be practicing, but practicing incorrectly as it would be developing a bad habit because we would not be exercising ALL the fingers and this would slow our technique down. Now, let's say we are using the right techniques to practice those pentatonic scales that I teach about in ALL my materials, however, if I ONLY want to play rhythm guitar and don't care whatsoever for playing melodies and solos, is this the best use of my time? Probably not. Learning more chords, rhythms and progressions would probably be a much better way to better myself as a rhythm guitarist. So these are two great questions that one should ask themselves when practicing. Is this getting me closer to who I want to be as a musician AND am I practicing it the right way?

**Why do you want to play guitar?** That leads us to, "Why am I playing guitar in the first place?". This is a question that most guitarists never ask, but it's VERY important to address, because the answer will have EVERYTHING to do with how and what you will practice. Since we are all limited on time, knowing what NOT to practice is possibly more important than knowing what to practice, as there is always another guru telling us what it is we should be practicing. For example, if your only desire is to lead others around a campfire in choruses of classic songs with the acoustic guitar, why would you need to take the time to learn scales, music theory, musical notation, jazz chordal theory etc.? Instead, practicing your open chords, learning new songs and understanding how to use your capo efficiently, would be a much better way to focus your energy.

HOWEVER, if you wanted to be Nashville's "first call" session guitarist, you are going to need to know ALL the components that make up such a musician, and an hour a day of practice WON'T do the trick. Why is that? Because the other players who ALSO want that positions are practicing at least 8 hours a day, so unless you have some sort of magical way to bend time, you are going to need to practice a LOT more. SO, why do YOU want to play guitar? Ask yourself this question on a piece of paper and it give the answer as much detail as you possible can, because doing so is going to save you a LOT of time and a LOT of heartache practicing the wrong stuff. Do this NOW, otherwise you will forget and the price to pay down the line is HUGE.

**Break it down, slow it down!** Now, it's known that everything, from the universe, to the atom, can be broken down to its individual pieces or assets. When we have a seemingly impossible task, it can ALWAYS be broken down into smaller, more doable/possible tasks. Doing so not only allows our minds to believe that the outcome is possible, it also gives a sense of forward momentum. As opposed to feeling a sense of accomplishment once we have scaled a mountain, how pleasant would it be that after each milestone/phase we accomplish, we have a sense of fulfillment that continues to pull us forward? This my friend, is one of the secrets to successful, effective practice that allows us to FINALLY realize our goals, instead of being a "wisher". And often times when it comes to big shifts like this in our lives, we first must make a mental shift before anything else will move. You know how I always says that playing guitar is 80% psychology? THIS is exactly the kind of stuff that I am talking about.

So how do we break things down? The easiest way is to SLOW things down. In doing so, it's like using a magnifying glass on something that we cannot see very clearly. Another way is to break something down into its individual assets.

For example if we have a song that we are singing and playing at the same time, I might learn each of these parts individually before putting them all together:

- What chords are being played and can I play them?
- Learn the progression of chords as they appear in the song.
- Learn the strum.
- Play the strum with the progression at tempo.
- Learn the song lyrics.
- Learn the song melody.
- Perform them with a track.
- Sing the lyrics with the chord progression(slow it down if necessary)

All the while, I would most likely be doing this for ONE section of a song instead of all the sections AND I would be slowing it down to a comfortable pace that was doable. No need in performing to tempo, if it's sloppy or lyrics/chords are missed. We won't be fooling anyone. AND how we practice is how we will perform. So, if you are practicing at tempo and stopping at each chord, you are building a habit...

Practice subjects: I also like to break practice down into a few accessible subjects. For example, all guitar comes down to three areas:

- Striking strings:(strumming/picking/fingerpicking)
- Fretting:(manipulating pitch with melody or chords)
- Theory:(what patterns are you playing on the guitar and why)

So if one of your hands is out of commission, it does not mean you can't practice the other hand, and if you don't have a guitar at all, you can always conceptualize music theory.

Another way that I like to think of theory is “**woodshedding**” or “**dress rehearsal**”? That is, is your gig in a month or in a day? Depending on your answer, you most likely will practice differently. A month before a gig, I will “woodshed” tunes, meaning I will learn EVERY little bit that I can possibly learn about that song, so that all the details are there and I can practice it the way it was recorded. However, the day before the gig, I most likely will not have the time to do this. If I practiced enough during the month for this gig, then as the date gets closer, I will want to practice more like a “dress rehearsal” as actors do in plays/operas/ballets. That is, you play like you are on stage. Should you make a mistake, you keep going and don’t try to fix the mistake. Fixing mistakes was for the woodshedding days. But Erich, what happens if I did not practice enough during the woodshedding practice and my gig is coming up soon (and I’m not ready)? I think you know the answer to that one my friend. You can’t change the past. Just embrace that the gig is NOT going to go like it would have, had you practiced enough. So, get another guitarist to do the gig, or let it hurt so bad that you NEVER make that mistake again.

And yet another way that I think about practice is **conscious versus subconscious** playing. Conscious playing could be thought of as “woodshedding” or very focused specific practice that needs all of your mind energy to get the job done. This is usually required for learning a new song, lick, rhythmic motif etc. I only do this when I have a new something that I am trying to learn that requires all my brain-power to be active. Without the hyper focus, the mountain won’t be scaled... Subconscious playing however would be when I run scales, chords, exercises or any repetitive lick that I already know and has been inserted into my subconscious mind through conscious/focused practice, but at this point am just trying to get better at. BOTH practices are valuable. If we had our druthers, conscious playing would be what we ALWAYS do. That said, sometimes I want to watch a movie, or talk to a friend on the phone. If I want to practice during that time, I will practice this way.

**How much to practice:** I have been asked this a LOT, so I have created some basic math below that will help you decide how much YOU should practice.

Not a lot of practice required: If you are okay with poor performances, being embarrassed, not realizing your dreams of being a great player etc.

Medium practice required: If you are okay with mediocrity, not impressing a lot of people, getting the basic job done and being complimented like, “that was not completely terrible”.

LOTS of practice required: If you are looking to be the best at what you do, impress people, make money, be a professional, change lives, feel great about yourself, inspire others, shall I go on?

**Conclusion:** So you can see that there are MANY ways to think about practice that will actually make us better players IF we take the time to understand these different areas. Gone are the days where you will not know what to practice or will know what to practice, but will be doing so the wrong way. Your outcome is TOTALLY based on how, how often and how long you practice. Don’t believe the lie that it is ANYTHING other than this. Take it from someone who has taught thousands of lessons, it’s ALL about the practice. NOW, go dig in!

# TALENT VS. PRACTICE

Have you ever seen your favorite guitarists tear up a fret board without even seemingly trying?

Do you think they got that way because they were lucky, or because they were born into it?

Let me both disappoint and liberate you at the same time with the answer. One guitar player isn't any luckier than another or born into playing licks easier than another. If you were to take the top guitar players of each genre and find out how much they have practiced and how much they continually practice, it would be quite mind boggling. Is it a coincidence that only the great players are the ones that practice so much?

Obviously, you can see where I'm headed with this. Guitar players who have been playing for a long time and still have not progressed past a certain point, have not done so because of lack of talent; they've not done so because of their lack of practice!

If it makes you feel better to believe that Eddie Van Halen or any of the other great guitar players were born with a gift that you were not born with, then believe away only to the detriment of your own playing.

However, it's NOT the truth and that type of small thinking will hinder your playing exponentially. Don't believe the lie!

This is a subject that is rarely addressed or, often times, misunderstood completely. The definition of "talent" is a natural aptitude or skill. As far as practice goes, we all know what practice is and that doing more of it makes us better at whatever skill we are trying to improve. I know I'm going to step on some toes with this portion of the book, but bear with me because I promise you that what I am going to share with you in this section will only empower you to become the best player that you allow yourself to be.

Simply put, the point of this section is that the belief that you must be born talented or have some natural inclination to excel above the herd is not only completely false, but also extremely limiting to your playing... and your life!

Many people believe so fervently in this idea of an innate need for talent – as opposed to sheer practice – that they talk themselves right out of excellence! Defenders of the talent theory like to use examples of great icons that excel in a particular field or genre and say "there, you can't tell me that they are not talented!" They assume that the person was simply born with the ability they are displaying in their excellent performance.

This assumption, however, is very insulting and negates the thousands – or even tens of thousands of hours – that a person has spent "perfecting" their craft.

What do Jimi Hendrix, Amadeus Mozart, Michael Jordan and Thomas Edison all have in common? Well, depending on who you ask, some might say they were gifted or talented. Others who have taken the time to step back, will realize that their gains are because of dedication, innovation, organization and perseverance. They understand that the more one practices, the better one gets.

Now I know that concept sounds logical, but see if you can step outside yourself for a moment and watch yourself slip into the "talent camp" when something appears to be out of your reach.

What I'm saying is, and I know this from personal experience because I used to do it often, it's easy to look at someone who has "mastered his craft" and say that they have some leg up on you. I've done it so many countless times throughout my life. I used to do it most often with musicians, but my love of illusions (magic), martial arts, etc., have also made me assume that somebody had a hidden key that I was not able to find.

I have played guitar for several decades now, have learned thousands of songs and have attempted to imitate hundreds of guitar players. I have seen success in all of these areas. I've had many people comment on how "talented" I am. The funny thing is, when I started playing guitar, I was TERRIBLE! Why is that?

It is that way because everybody is terrible when they just pick up the guitar! It's just that some folks forgot the process and how long it actually took them. Jimi Hendrix was terrible when he first picked up the guitar! Eric Clapton was terrible when he first picked up the guitar! Yngwie Malmsteen was terrible when he first picked up the guitar!

Are you getting the picture?

We would be much better off to replace the word talent with perseverance. Now that is a pill I can swallow! If someone said to me "the reason that a particular player does not play as well as Jimi Hendrix is because he doesn't have the talent," I would never concur. If someone said to me, "the reason that someone does not play as well as Jimi Hendrix is because they don't have the same perseverance that he had," I would wholeheartedly agree!

Perhaps to define it better, instead of the word perseverance we could even replace it with "efficient practice time." Now how unromantic is that? I know, it kind of makes you want to call it "talent" again right? How much cooler to think that we would not have to work and that we could just be born into such a thing. Let's not fall into the trap. It's lame and it's lazy and it's NOT the truth.

Jimi Hendrix started playing guitar somewhere around 10 years old. If he were so "talented", he would not have had to practice so much? Why didn't we hear of him breaking into the music scene at 10 or 11? What about Amadeus Mozart, Michael Jordan and Thomas Edison? Mozart was known to utterly surround himself with music. He was constantly immersed in it from a very young age. It's true that some people catch "the music bug" earlier than others, giving them several years more practice than others. That is a truism that you can't escape.



If someone starts playing guitar at age 4 as opposed to age 14, when both reach the age of 15 the one guitarist will have been practicing for 11 years while the other will have been practicing for one year. It's simple math. Can you see which player might sound better? Is this what we're calling talented? I heard a story about Michael Jordan where he did not make the high school basketball team because he SUCKED! YES, that Michael Jordan!

However he was determined to play basketball. So he got that basketball out and started shooting hoops and still sucked for a bit, until continuous suckyness turned into kind of sucking, which turned into not so sucky, which turned into kind of good which turned into pretty good which turned into the best NBA basketball player to ever grace the courts!

Have you got it yet? It DOES NOT happen overnight! He made his own destiny by being determined and practicing. In essence he became talented.

What about Thomas Edison? Who the heck is that you ask? He's the guy that invented the light bulb. Yep, pretty important huh? He also invented hundreds of other things that we use today. Look him up on Google if you want to see a man who has changed the lives of billions of people.

When Thomas Edison was creating the light bulb he used hundreds of different filaments before finding the right one. The filament of the light bulb is that little thing in the middle that glows. He used everything under the sun including horsehair but to no avail. Finally he got it right. Enter sarcastic Sage voice, "Boy, that talented Thomas Edison. He is just so lucky. Stuff just comes to him SOOO easily." Can you see how insulting that is when he worked his hind end off to create such a technology?

In fact, it was Thomas Edison who said, "genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration" or in my words 1% talent and 99% practice. So that little 1% seed that was dropped into Jimi Hendrix, Amadeus Mozart, Michael Jordan, Thomas Edison and YOU, must be watered and fed and given all the conditions to make that seed grow into fruition. That's the harder part. Seeds like that are dropped all day long but rarely do they find fertile ground. If you've gotten this far in my diatribe, I would guess YOU are fertile ground and are going to run with this information.

There is NO-thing stopping YOU from becoming the next Jimi Hendrix or Eddie Van Halen IF you practice like they did. THAT'S the tricky part. You were already born into this world with the ability!

Now that you know this, I want you to be aware of how you view great accomplishments. It does take a little bit of the wonderment away, but empowers you to create that wonderment for yourself. There is no task too great, or goal too lofty that you cannot attain if properly mapped out and walked through step-by-step.

This is not a pep talk, as I rarely have time for pep talks. This is a truism and is good news for those of us that are willing to work hard and smart. It's bad news for those that are waiting for talent or the Publisher's Clearinghouse sweepstakes guy with a big check to knock on their front door. Now, DON'T go easy on yourself. Go practice as if you are the next Jimi Hendrix, because you ARE!

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1. The Core within UGS
2. Solid Foundation with UGS
3. Bar Chords

## **Songwriter/Guitarist**

1. The Core within UGS
2. Solid Foundation with UGS
3. Nashville Number System

## **Blues Guitarist**

1. The Core within UGS
2. Solid Foundation with UGS
3. Blues Scales
4. Improvisation
5. CAGED System
6. Bar Chords
7. The Blues Section of UGS

## **Rock Guitarist**

1. The Core within UGS
2. Solid Foundation with UGS
3. Power Chords
4. Playing By Ear
5. CAGED System
6. Bar Chords

## **Jazz Guitarist**

1. The Core within UGS
2. Solid Foundation with UGS
3. Swing Section of UGS
4. Chord Construction Section of UGS
5. Jazz Modes
6. Improvisation



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