

What, When, Where, Why and How to Practice

Why: Daily practice is the key to becoming a good guitarist. Without it, it's impossible to play well. The reason for this is the complexity of playing well. It requires all parts of the brain (memory, muscle coordination, spacing notes in time, creativity) working together to play a song well. What you are hearing when someone plays a song well is hours of correct and consistent practice coming together at the right moment. It looks easy when a guitarist has prepared well. But you don't see the hours and years of practice it takes to make it happen. There are hundreds of programmed movements that need to be automatic to make the performance successful. What you should be trying to do during a practice session is correctly program those movements so that you don't need to think while your performing. You're trying to make as movements as possible become muscle memory. Your brain is constantly trying to forget and through off as much as possible. Through correct and consistent practice, you're programming your brain and telling it what is important and what you should remember clearly and recall quickly.

Mantras:

Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.

Perfect practice makes perfect.

Segovia: If I miss one day of practice, I know it. If I miss two days of practice my teacher knows it. If I miss three days of practice, everyone knows it.

Note: If you haven't practiced it is best to come to your lesson anyway because there is so much to learn and your teacher can usually inspire you to practice better the next week.

What: Every guitarist should practice in four basic categories every day: Theory, Technique, Ear Training, and Musicianship.

Theory is the science and language of music. It helps you understand how songs are put together and why they sound good. You should work through a book called Harmony and Theory by the Musician's Institute.

Technique is the physicality of music, making your fingers work quickly, efficiently, economically, and accurately. There are hundreds of exercises that I will share to help develop technical facility.

Ear Training is sharpening your listening skills to hear the fine details of music. If you can't hear it you can't play it. Try www.good-ear.com on the web.

Musicianship is the ability to play with soul and feeling, making a sad song sound sad. That is the ultimate goal of all musicians. The performer should try to enhance the beauty and power of what the composer has written. That is ultimately what technique, theory and ear training help you do.

When: Practice everyday for one to three hours if you are an adult. Children ages ten years and younger should practice thirty minutes to one-hour everyday. If you want to get better faster practice more. Most professional classical guitarists practice five to six hours per day. What I've found to be most important is how consistently you practice. If you have a particularly busy day, practice fifteen to twenty minutes to ensure you don't get rusty. If you miss days of practice it will only put you on a roller coaster ride and you will never achieve your full potential. The routine and self-discipline of practice is where most students fall short. It is difficult to practice consistently and stick with it everyday. Everyone has difficulty with practicing on a daily basis, even professional musicians, but there are ways to motivate yourself to practice daily. During lessons we can discuss how to get motivated. One trick is working on songs that you are very excited about playing. Good songs make it more fun to practice. Having fun with practice is the key.

Where: You should practice in a well light room away from distractions. You need a place where you can play loudly without disturbing anyone. Setting up your music stand, footstool, metronome, and a comfortable chair without too much padding in front of a mirror. If you have too much padding in a chair it can cause back support problems. If you practice in front of a mirror you can teach your hands to move more efficiently and you can really see what your doing. It's like teaching yourself. If you have all of your equipment set up and ready to go, it makes it easier to start your practice session. So make it a permanent practice area. You won't have to search for you music stand or guitar and you will be more likely to get started.

How: Practice correctly and shoot for quality. That is where a teacher can help the most. A good teacher can show you how to get the most out of each practice session, so you're making progress every time you practice. If you practice incorrectly you can actually do more harm than good. A teacher can help you avoid those problems and speed your progress many times over.

The quality you shoot for will determine how well you play. If your practice sessions are poor quality your performances will reflect it.

Always practice using your metronome and try to sing along as you learn the piece. You will be developing your ear and learn the piece faster too.

You should memorize the pieces you're working on. You will always play best from memory. Sight-reading is best for simple pieces only.

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