

Best Techniques and Tips for Guitar Learners

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If you watch any of the best players in the world, regardless of whether they play classical tunes or heavy rock, they all have one thing in common — good technique, meaning they're properly applying all those basic requirements for playing great guitar. Have a look at someone like John Petrucci (Dream Theater). Sure, on first impressions he's going to frighten the hell out of your grandmother, but check out his left hand as he performs. Those blistering solos and chord progressions are achieved with what seems effortless ease and minimal movement, all because Petrucci mastered how to play the guitar with good technique from the start. Good technique, in the final analysis, is the proven best and most proficient way to play, putting your hands and fingers in the right place at the right time.

A lot of the time we find myself getting frustrated and wanting to learn and move along faster. Well like anything else practice makes perfect, and there are no short cuts. And anything worth doing is worth doing right.

The best way to do is to apply the theory to the practical. Music theory, depending on who you believe, is either the cornerstone of all musical knowledge or a cavalcade of overly complex and ultimately pointless waffle. Plenty of high profile musicians consider themselves to be self-taught, and claim not to understand the conventions that make up traditional music theory. Yet by making music which uses chords, scales, rhythm and melody, players are by default using some form of theory. They maybe just don't realise it. As an aside, we should probably make a gentle disclaimer that this article doesn't intend to teach you music theory for guitar learner beginners in 800+ words. As a subject, it's far too wide and far-reaching to even scratch the surface. Instead, we'll offer you some thoughts, and hopefully some inspiration, as to why

biting the bullet and accepting music theory might just be the best decision you ever make as a musician.

Tip #1 – Forget technique (for now...)

Ask most guitar players what they rate above anything else and

you'll probably find 'speed' at, or indeed near, the top of the list.

When we were starting out, we'd see the guy at the local guitar

shop busting out all that sick hyperspeed shredding and think

that's what we wanted to do.

Or, we'd hear the guy noodling away over a blues standard, or

the jazz player with his fingers contorted all over the fretboard,

and wonder how they are able to do this. Witchcraft?! Actually,

no. Two very simple things a player does, usually early in the

journey, unlock these impressive skills; practice and theory. It's all very well playing like your fingers have servo motors installed at the knuckles, moving around the fretboard with effortless dexterity. But if you don't know where you're going, or why, it'll sound like a terrible racket. So the wise players take speed and technical ability, and apply it on top of a base of theory. Spend as much time on the 'why' as you do on the 'how', and your playing will come along twice as quickly.

Tip #2 – Learn the lingo

As with any new skill, the world of music theory is subject to a whole heap of its own idiosyncratic words and phrases. That in itself is enough to confuse the hind legs off a mixed metaphor. It doesn't help that large swathes of it are lifted from Italian, so there isn't always an obvious or easy answer. Don't let it put you off though. The truth is that you don't need to know the entire dictionary in one go. The same as you wouldn't if you were learning a foreign language. Identify what the common terminology is and swot up on that. Then you can gradually add to this as you progress.

Tip #3 – Unlock the secrets

Have you ever been improvising, and found that certain patterns of notes just work. Or embedded into your head – subconsciously or otherwise – where the duff notes are that you want to avoid after certain notes or chords? This, my friend, is exactly what music theory can help with. You see, it's no accident the way a fretboard, or a keyboard, is laid out. Hidden within those things lies the keys to your

innermost creative thoughts, just waiting to be teased out.

People who don't have a solid grounding in theory can access

the same notes. However, they'll take far, far longer to piece

together something than a theory-trained musician can.

Another way to think about it concerns song writing; how often

have you had a basic tune or melody in your head, yet struggled

to 'download' it from your head and onto the instrument? At

least with a working knowledge of theory, you can quickly get

yourself into the right areas. Consider it a musical headstart.

Tip #4 – Keep learning

Like with anything worthwhile, there isn't a shortened version of

music theory you can bluff your way into. If you want to truly

enjoy the benefits, you have to put the graft in. There is no

TLDR version of music theory. Well, actually there is here, but

even that will confuse you to start with.

You have to play the long game. Accept that it will take you

ages. Allow yourself the fact that you'll be rubbish to start with.

You'll keep forgetting things, and question the pointlessness of

it all. But stick with it and slowly you'll find ways in which music

theory will help improve your playing exponentially.

Tip #5 – Eyes on the prize

We'll end with a cautionary tale; many a learner has been put

off by what they see as hard work. Particularly when a lot of

that hard work doesn't involve learning to play the songs you

like. Going too hard on the theory, and forgetting why you

started in the first place, is an easy way to get into a rut.

Remember what it is about playing your instrument that you

like, and ring-fence that feeling. All those times that you're getting fed up with theory, remember back to how good it feels when you nail a riff or write something catchy. Remember as well that musical theory is only ever going to make you a better, more well-rounded player in the future.

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