



ROB'S
TIPS & TRICKS
FOR
GUITARISTS

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Any questions? Feel free to contact me through my website:

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“Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not: the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.” Calvin Coolidge

Practice and Technique

1. *Practice, practice, and then practice some more.*
2. Think about learning an instrument like learning a language. Kids learn languages by being immersed in the language. *Immerse yourself in music.* Listen to music constantly, play constantly. Play everyday.
3. Surround yourself with musicians who are better than you. When I first started playing I had friends who had already been playing for a few years. I learned a lot of from them. In college I was surrounded by students who had been playing for YEARS. I started classical guitar my freshman year in college. I had a lot of catching up to do. I practiced my butt off and within a couple of years I had caught up.
4. *Practice everyday.* Even if it is for just 10 minutes. This is particularly important if you are just starting out. Playing an instrument is all about muscle memory. You develop that memory through repetition.
5. *Stay inspired.* It's up to you to be inspired. How does one stay inspired?? Listen or watch a video of a great artist. Go to a concert. Jam with friends.
6. Take a break from the instrument. I realize this is the opposite of #4 but sometimes it is nice to get away from things and recharge your batteries. Take a couple days off from playing or even listening to music.
7. Ignore people who say there is only one way to do something.
8. Develop a repertoire. A repertoire is a group of pieces you can play. I always suggest that my students, regardless of style or ability, have 7-10 pieces they can play from beginning to end. I would recommend running through your repertoire 2-3 times a week. Your repertoire will continuously change. You might get tired of a piece and replace it with another piece. I will have pieces I get bored with and not play them for a couple of years. When I return to them they are fresh to me.
9. Practice in small segments. I'll often practice 20 minutes at a time. I don't set a timer. I just listen to my body. If I find that my mind is wandering or if I am tired, I'll take a break and do something else. If you practice 20 minutes at a time three times a day you will have practiced for an hour and that hour will probably be far more productive and enjoyable than if you had practiced an hour straight.

“Do. Or do not. There is no try.” –Yoda

10. *Have fun. Music is fun.* Practicing and playing is fun. If it seems like hard work or like it’s pulling teeth to play, then find a way to make it enjoyable. You don’t have to play music. There is no law that says, “YOU MUST PLAY MUSIC!”
11. Keep your instrument with you at all times. Maybe the opportunity will arise that you can practice, or perform for somebody, or jam with people.
12. Find a good teacher.
13. Have a question? Search YOUTUBE. Want to learn how to play a G chord with ease? Search, “How to easily play a G chord” and see what comes up.
14. *Practice slowly.* Like half speed or even slower. For example, I spend time practicing this *Bouree* by Bach at quarter note=60 or even slower.

Example 1

Example 1 shows a musical excerpt in treble clef, key of D major (one sharp), and 4/4 time. The melody consists of eighth notes: D4 (0), E4 (1), F#4 (2), E4 (1), D4 (0), E4 (4), F#4 (0), E4 (1), and D4. The guitar tablature below shows the corresponding fret numbers: 0, 2, 3, 2, 0, 4, 0, 2.

15. Break up anything difficult into smaller sections and practice each individual move. In the Bach excerpt above there are six different moves (Example 2).

Example 2

Example 2 is identical to Example 1 but includes brackets and labels above the melody line to identify specific moves: #1 (D-E), #2 (E-F#), #3 (F#-E), #4 (E-D), #5 (E-F#), #6 (F#-E), #7 (E-D), and #8 (D). The guitar tablature remains the same as in Example 1.

I would do ten repetitions of each move and then start combining them. I would practice #1 and #2 together. Repeat that ten times. Then practice #2 and #3 together and repeat that ten times. I would make my way through the section that way. This practicing technique works very well for scales, too.

16. Practice the parts separately. Melody/bass. Here is the first couple measures of Francisco Tarrega's famous, *Lagrima*.

Example 3

	4	4	4	4	3	
T	4	5	7	0	2	0
A	2	4	6	1	2	0
B						2

It is made up of a melody:

Example 4

	4	5	7	2
T				
A				
B				

An inner voice:

Example 5

	0	0	0	0	2	0
T						
A						
B						

And a bass voice:

“If you want to be a rock star or just be famous, then run down the street naked, you’ll make the news or something. But if you want music to be your livelihood, then play, play, play, and play! And eventually you’ll get to where you want to be.” Eddie Van Halen.

Example 6

Musical notation for Example 6, showing a melody in treble clef and guitar tablature for bass, middle, and treble staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody consists of four measures: E4, F#4, G#4, A4, B4, A4, G#4, F#4, E4.

T				
A				
B		2	4	6
				1
				2

I would practice these parts separately for a couple of reasons: first, it allows you to practice the technical aspect of the piece without worrying about the other voices. Second, it allows you to focus your mind on each individual part so that you can better hear each part when played all together.

Here is another section from the same song:

Example 7

Musical notation for Example 7, showing a melody in treble clef with fret numbers IX and VII, and guitar tablature for bass, middle, and treble staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody consists of four measures: G#4 (fret IX), A4 (fret IX), B4 (fret IX), A4 (fret IX), G#4 (fret IX), F#4 (fret VII), E4 (fret VII), D4 (fret VII), C#4 (fret VII), B3 (fret VII), A3 (fret VII), G#3 (fret VII).

T		12	11	9	7	9
A		11	9	9	7	9
B						

The melody:

Example 8

Musical notation for Example 8, showing a melody in treble clef and guitar tablature for bass, middle, and treble staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The melody consists of four measures: G#4, A4, B4, A4, G#4.

T		12	11	9	7
A					
B					

“Don’t be afraid, just play the music.” –Charlie Parker

An inner voice:

Example 9

Musical notation for Example 9, showing a treble clef staff with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes: F#4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5. Below the staff is a guitar fretboard diagram with strings T, A, and B labeled. The fret numbers are 9, 9, 7, 9 for the first four measures.

The bass line:

Example 10

Musical notation for Example 10, showing a treble clef staff with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes: F#4, A4, B4, C5. Below the staff is a guitar fretboard diagram with strings T, A, and B labeled. The fret numbers are 11, 9, 7, 9 for the first four measures.

What I find interesting about this passage is the inner voice. It rises. Most students I have had who have worked on this song never hear it rise until they played the parts separately.

17. *Record yourself.* When you are playing and listening to yourself play you can't focus 100% attention on how it sounds because part of your brain power is focused on actually playing the piece. If you record yourself playing you can focus 100% attention on listening to it afterwards. I also find mistakes to be less obvious when I listen to the recording than when they happened in the moment.
18. Practice with and without a metronome. Metronomes can be a great tool to practice with. It is also important to be able to play without a metronome.
19. Don't have enough time to practice? Look at your schedule. Maybe you can get up a ½ hour earlier or go to bed a ½ hour later (that's my personal choice since I am sooooo not a morning person).
20. Practice technique but remember that music is more than speed.
21. Remember why you started playing music. Don't lose that feeling.

“Information is not knowledge. Knowledge is not wisdom. Wisdom is not truth. Truth is not beauty. Beauty is not love. Love is not music. Music is THE BEST.” — Frank Zappa

Nails (Classical/fingerstyle players)

22. The most important thing about nails is that the nail must be super smooth. I use a cheap emery board I pick up from the grocery store to do the large shaping and I use Micro Mesh Sanding Sheets I order from Amazon to do the fine tuning. I use the 3200, 4000, 6000, 8000, and 12000 grit sheets.



23. Buff your nails everyday. Keep them smooth. One reason people break nails is because part of the nail isn't smooth and so it will catch on clothing.
24. I like my nails to be as short as possible on my right hand while still getting the sound I want.
25. Experiment with the shape of the nail. Some people like ramps and some people keep the nail the same shape as their finger. In general, I like to have a slight ramp. Here is my ideal shape and length:



Reading Music

26. Learn the names of the notes on the odd frets. For example, starting from the sixth string and going to the first string, the notes at the first fret are F, B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, C and F. If I am somewhere where I can't play the guitar (waiting room at the dentist), I will often practice that in my head. Learn the notes on the odd frets. That way you can figure out the even numbered frets pretty easily. For example, if you have a note on the 6th fret, first string and you know that the 7th fret is a B; one fret away will be a B-flat.
27. Pick a note and learn where that note is on every string up to the twelfth fret. For example, the note E can be found on the first string as an open string and the twelfth fret. On the second string it is at the fifth fret. The third string it is at the ninth fret. The fourth string it is at the second fret, the fifth string it is at the seventh fret and at the sixth string it is the open string and twelfth fret.
28. Practice sight-reading. For the longest time I had a problem reading bass clef on the piano. When I was working on my doctorate a teacher of mine suggested I play through all of the cello suites by J.S. Bach with my left hand. I did that and guess what? I can read bass clef on the piano. Start slowly. Get a book of popular melodies and read through melody or bass line.

Interpretation

29. Roll chords (but not all the chords) for interest. Practice rolling chords at different speeds. In the recording I have played this with various “rolling speeds” so you can hear the effect.

Example 11

30. Look up the composer who's piece you are playing. Why was this piece written? Was it a commission or was it in response to something that happened in his/her life?
31. *Exaggerate dynamics*. Especially for classical guitarists. The dynamic range on a classical guitar is pretty small compared to other instruments. A guitar's *fff* is more like a *mf* on a piano. Make your *ff*'s really loud and make your *pp*'s really soft. You can also use tonal contrast to create the illusion of volume changes. Ponticello sounds (playing near the bridge and/or with more nail) appear to be louder than dolce sounds (playing over the soundboard).
32. Listen to a lot of different recordings of the piece you are working on. Take what you like and ignore what you don't like.
33. *It's ok to play a piece differently than other people*. That's the beauty of music: a piece can be interpreted a variety of different ways.
34. Think of the sheet music as the skeleton of the piece. It is the performers job to fill in everything else.
35. The guitar is a colorful instrument. Use those colors!! For example, you have ponticello (near the bridge) and dolce (over the sound hole) and everything in between. Use those colors! Here are a couple examples. In the first example (example 12) I play this chord a number of times moving from ponticello to dolce.

Example 12

Example 12 shows a musical staff in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The staff contains a single chord, G8, represented by a G-clef and a 5 with an 8 above it. Below the staff is a guitar TAB staff with the letter 'T' on the first line, 'A' on the second line, and 'B' on the third line. The TAB staff shows a '5' on the fifth string, indicating the fretting for the chord.

In addition to dolce and ponticello you also have dynamics and articulations (like staccato) to further add to the color of the instrument. In the next example (example 13) I play the passage twice: first using ponticello and staccato and the second time I use dolce and legato.

Example 13

Example 13 shows a musical staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The staff contains a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, and a whole note G4. Below the staff is a guitar TAB staff with the letter 'T' on the first line, 'A' on the second line, and 'B' on the third line. The TAB staff shows fret numbers 0, 3, 5, 7, 5, 3, 5, 0, corresponding to the notes in the melodic line.

Performing

36. *Practice performing.* If you have a recital/concert coming up that makes you nervous then do some practice performances. Find a couple friends or family members who you can play your pieces for. You can also give your concert at a retirement community. I have found this to be a lot of fun and the audience is really appreciative.
37. *Focus on the music.* One effective way of doing that is by counting the rhythm in your head. In the next example I would count along with the melody. Use, “1, 2, 3, 4” for the strong beats and “&’s” for the weak beats.

Example 14

1 & 3 4 1 & 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 (4)

T 2 3 3 2 0 3 0 3 2 0 2 0 2 3

A 2 2 2 0 2 0

B 0 4 4 0 0

3 2 0

Counting while performing allows you to focus more on the music and less on the audience.

38. Performing confidently begins in the practice room. When you are practicing do you ever find that your mind wanders? If this is the case, then your mind will also wander in a performance. The difference is that it won't be thinking about what you are going to have for dinner but instead will be thinking, “what's the next chord????”
39. Learn the music ahead of time. I have had students in the past tell me three days before a student recital that they want to play the new piece they are working on. Guess what?? It usually doesn't go well. It takes a while to really internalize a piece of music. Just because you can play a piece at home by yourself doesn't mean that you can play it on stage in front of an audience.
40. Think of a performance more about sharing your love of a piece with an audience and less about you.
41. Mistakes are fine. They happen. *Nobody is perfect*
42. Focus on getting the “message of the piece” For me, the musical message is usually emotional. I try and focus on that rather than getting the performance note perfect.
43. Find a spot in the music you can jump to if you have a mental lapse.

44. Practice 'performing' a piece. Meaning, go from beginning to the end without stopping even if there are mistakes.
45. When a performance is coming up I find it helpful to practice 'performing' in different places other than my normal practice area. For example, I might play outside or play in a different room than where I normally practice. Take yourself out of your comfort zone.
46. Try to warmup as long as you need in the concert hall or wherever you are performing. Get used to the space and how it sounds that way it isn't a shock when you walk onstage.
47. When you get onstage take a deep breath and relax before playing. It's exciting and if your adrenaline is rushing through your body you will want to take a moment before beginning to play. Mentally count yourself in and then have the time of your life. You are playing music!!!!

Things to Avoid

48. Recording on Tuesdays at my house because my neighbor loves to mow his lawn on Tuesdays and apparently it's an all day event for him.
49. Comparing yourself to other guitar players like playing music is some kind of sporting event.
50. Making excuses. Everybody has 24 hours to work with and it is up to you to find time to practice. It has to be a priority. If it isn't a priority, then any little thing will keep you from practicing.

To sum up I would like to say this:

**Music is fun!! Learn to make practicing and
performing fun!!**

If you have any questions feel free to contact me through my website: <http://robertlunn.com>