

7 Steps To Learn Any Instrument Quicker And Easier



Playing music is for everyone, including you!

A lifetime of struggles with physical problems and shyness kept me from playing music for years. Let me share with you 7 things I learned to help things seem less overwhelming and more joyful. Let's get you playing right away.

HappyRon Music Studio



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Music Coach

1



Have a Goal You Are Enthusiastic About

What do you want to do? What are you **enthusiastic** about in making music?

Picture yourself a few months down the road. What would you do with your new music skills? Write some songs? Join a band? Play at family gatherings? Or do you just want to hear the sound of your own music privately?

This is the first question to explore because it is what will help you enjoy your playing (I like to use the word playing more than practicing because music is play). It will bring enthusiasm and focus to all your music playing.

Most of the frustration that students feel is from not having a clear goal. Many students can play lots of cool riffs, which is great! But they can't finish a single song. If playing riffs alone is your deal, then great. If not find out what you really want to do.

I always start with finding out what the student wants to do. Then I figure out what skills they currently have. Then all there is to do is find the steps to get them to where they want to go.

Your long-term goals are important but on a day-to-day basis **FOLLOWING YOUR ENTHUSIASM** is essential. I wake up every morning with a goal of what I want to do, but I often find myself becoming curious about something unexpected. For instance, I may hear a song and then find that I really want to play it, so I'll spend the day practicing it. In a way, I may have turned away from my goal for the day, but my larger goal - to become a better musician and songwriter - is always served by learning something I'm enthusiastic to learn.

As Steven Memel says "Learning is non-linear and inevitable" as long as you follow your long-term goals. And going with your day-to-day enthusiasm makes it a delightful experience.

2



Play The Songs You Love

A few people (like me!) are music nerds and really enjoy studying music theory books. That's great as it will help you understand music, learn songs faster, and write your own songs. Others (not me!) like playing tons of scales for hours. This is wonderful as it builds a solid foundation for understanding your instrument on a different level and will help make you a great player.

But so many find these approaches to be uninspiring and frustrating. Often people approach scales and theory with too much tension, and that destroys the enthusiasm that got them into music in the first place.

We wanna play songs! That's what drives us! And when we learn a basic arrangement to a song, we often want to learn to add more advanced techniques such as riffs, hammer-ons, chord extensions, etc.

The tricky part is finding good songs that you love that are at your level of skill. Plus most chord charts don't tell you what strumming patterns to play when playing the songs, so they sound uninspiring. Fortunately, when I was learning, I found the excellent website Heartwood Guitar Instruction which has tons of chord charts with strumming patterns and more great educational courses.

3



Make It Easy On Yourself

There are so many simple things you can set up to make your music life simpler and easier and help you progress so much faster.

A) Get your instrument adjusted properly. Even if you don't have the best guitar, you can take it to the shop, and they can make adjustments on it that make it easier to play. Check how far the strings are from the neck. I also recommend lighter instruments, like my guitar-ukulele combo as it creates less tension when playing and you can carry it everywhere you go. (Always being seen with a unique instrument is an excellent advertisement for yourself as a musician as well)

B) Buy an instrument stand. If your instrument is not easy to access you'll end up playing less. Almost every day I pick up the guitar and play a bit during random times of the day when the mood strikes me, this wouldn't happen if my guitar were in a case. Instruments are usually physically appealing and make your

home more beautiful. Amazon makes a stand that works with any guitar and is inexpensive.

C) Buy a tuner. They are cheap and playing an instrument that is out of tune will impede your progress for no reason. You can get cheap or free tuners for both your computer and your phone and clip-on tuner for your guitar. I use the SNARK tuner, don't forget to buy inexpensive batteries to have them handy.

D) Buy a capo. A very cheap device that allows you to adjust the key of your guitar to fit your voice with ease. I use the Kieser capos.

E) Computers/phones. Having all the songs you are learning in a playlist on your phone/computer can make things much easier and motivate you to play/sing them more. I also have the chord charts to all the songs in an app on my computer/phone.

4



Go Slow (And I Mean Really Slow!), And Relax

It's like hammering in a nail, you move the hammer **slowly**, and in a **relaxed** manner (because you don't want to hurt your thumb!) until your muscles learn how to make the movement. Then you speed up. This builds what I call "**movement memory**" (some call it muscle memory).

As someone who struggled with music more than most because of a painful lifelong disability that created massive tension in my body, I am more aware of these problems in my students than many teachers. When my students tell me they are "frustrated" and "something is too hard" it's almost always that they are going too fast and/or holding too much tension in their body. What's actually happening is their nervous system is getting overwhelmed. It is often obvious when watching a student twist their body up like a pretzel or hold their face like they are trying to lift hundreds of pounds. All this works against building the fine-motor

coordination, body awareness, and connection to your instrument that makes music such a special experience.

It seems strange to spend 5 minutes on studying how to move your finger from point A to point B and practice it slowly and relaxed, but that is how the body learns. The irony is **the slower you move, the faster you learn**. If you start learning this way from the beginning, you can learn anything in music.

The best body posture is an upright but relaxed posture where you can easily see what you are doing. Of course by "relaxed" I mean more relaxed than what most of us do "naturally." The actual goal is to use **just the right amount of tension** in your body so that you can play easily.

Oh and don't forget to **BREATHE!** Holding your breath limits your singing and playing ability.

5



Play a Little Bit Almost Every Day

Play 5 minutes a day, 5 days a week, and in a few months you'll be ready to play a simple song for people onstage.

Play 10 minutes a day, 6 days a week, and in six months you'll be better than most open mike players.

Play an hour almost every day for a year, and you'll be in the top 10 percent of people who play music.

It's an old truth that it's better to play 10 minutes a day than 2 hours once a week. This gives the mind and body time to absorb the material, and you are not having to remember where you left off every week.

It's also important to be conscious when you are playing and be honest with yourself and your teachers about where you are at any moment. One reason people don't practice is they hit a part that is difficult and they get overwhelmed and don't learn it. Almost always it is because they are not going **SLOWLY** enough and are not **RELAXED** enough.

When you stop playing for the day, try to clearly define where you are stuck or what you need to learn next. Your subconscious will start working on it.

An essential part of putting in the time is eliminating distractions as much as possible. Turn off your cell phone, email alerts, and instant messenger programs. One little interruption can disrupt the flow of concentration, a few interruptions and you can find that you spent 50 minutes and learned almost nothing.

The bottom line is this: what is the main difference between yourself and your greatest musical hero? The most significant single difference is they have put in 1000X more time than you have on their instrument. Albert Einstein said, "it's not that I'm so smart it's just that I'm willing to stay with problems longer."

6



Sing! (yes you!)

I encourage all my students to learn how to sing, and you can do it too! As someone who has sung poorly onstage for years before improving I don't judge peoples singing voices and neither should you. It takes a lifetime to become a great singer, but anyone can become a good singer. I can hear the unhappy thoughts already!

BUT I AM PITCH DEAF! No, you're not. Try listening to any piece of music or sounds; can you hear the difference between any two different tones? Of course you can! Everyone in modern times has an excellent sense of pitch because of having listened to so much perfectly tuned music all of your life.

THE HIGH NOTES IN THIS SONG ARE TOO HIGH! Most songs are singable by most people. The problem usually is that a song goes to a high note that is currently out of your comfortable range. The solution in this modern day is easy; you can use computer programs like ANYTUNE for Mac and iPhone and TRANSCRIBE! for PC to actually change the pitch of the recording and then you

can sing along with it. This results in a sometimes garbled, but in pitch, vocal to sing along with, although the instruments usually sound fine. Sometimes you can remove the vocals if you choose.

I have hundreds of songs on my iPhone, every one of which I can sing along to. I start off every morning by singing some in my most natural range and then move to the top of my vocal range. Usually within ten minutes of singing my voice is very strong and I get good practice on songs that way.

THIS ONE PART OF A SONG IS TOO COMPLEX. The solution is always the same, sing it slowly and relax into just the right amount of tension (most people use way too much). The above programs will play things at slower speeds, or you can just hear it in your mind and sing it on your own, SLOWER than the recording. If something is really complicated and will take time to learn, build confidence and skills by singing lots of songs without the fancier parts.

I'M TOO SHY - Start out singing in a private location or for your music coach. Read more in #7 and "Additional Resources."

7



Always Have A Performance Coming Up

Admit it! You want to be a show off and play your music for other people. For most people not having a gig coming up destroys their motivation to play. And having a concert coming up puts them into sharp focus which suddenly makes them very attentive students. And there are so many ways to perform in the modern world:

1) Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. And if you use "stories," they go away in 24 hours!

2) Open mikes. The atmosphere is really supportive and you are playing for people who are going through the same thing you are. I take my students to open mikes where I play and they love it.

3) I have gigs where my students play along on simple songs or play their own songs. Twice a year I host a fun recital called "The Happy Song Jam."

This ties into the great saying by Benjamin Franklin "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

4) Break out your instrument and play "happy birthday" at a party (it's also the song performing musicians make the most tips on!)

5) Ukulele Song Circles - there are several song circles in San Diego and other cities where everyone jams along learning the same songs! It's great and without pressure because nobody can hear you!

It's understandable to be nervous, but playing in the right environment (and preparing!) can do wonders in helping with performance nervousness. The first time you go onstage, it's just about getting through it without losing your confidence. As long as you can get through it without throwing up onstage, you've done great!



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The internet is one of the best things to happen to music, but it's a big place full of too much unorganized info (that is sometimes WRONG!) Here are my favorite sites for me and my students.

- For Guitar: www.guitarprinciples.com has the best explanation of muscle memory I've seen and lots of great information for beginners. And don't forget HeartWood Guitar for guitar chords and strumming patterns.
- For Ukulele: www.ukuleletricks.com is fun and easy like Ukulele should be! Don't forget to look for Ukulele Groups to play at in your city.
- For Singing: www.feliciaricci.com is a wonderful website that I finally found after years of searching. I love her teachings as she is in line with my philosophy of learning music through learning songs and her whole attitude is fun and encouraging. She has lots of free content on YouTube, and if you like it, I highly recommend her paid programs. I also have a book "7 Steps To Singing Quicker and Easier."
- For Keyboards: www.pianoforall.com teaches piano in the way I play and teach. This involves learning to play the chords and sing along, as opposed to learning full melodies and chords, which is an excellent thing to do but takes more time
- For Performance: www.stevenmemel.com is my favorite for learning that art of performance itself is an art. I also have a book "7 Steps To Confident Music Performance."
- For Songwriting: www.coursera.org/learn/songwriting-lyrics is a free online course that I recommend everyone take. The videos on www.songwork.com are one of the best and most intimate ways to learn about songwriting and re-writing. I also have a book "7 Steps To Writing Songs Quicker and Easier."

Would you like to go further?

Would you like to learn:

- Guitar
- Ukulele
- Vocals
- Songwriting
- The music business

I have a newsletter "Easier Ways To Learn Music".

I'm also taking on a limited number of students (to focus quality attention on people who want to learn in an easy-going environment.)

Let me help you bring music into your life.

CONTACT ME!