

Beginning Classical Guitar: How to Practice

In order to learn guitar most effectively, here are some basic guidelines that you should follow every day. Guitar practice should be oriented toward sharing music; the real enjoyment and satisfaction of guitar playing comes from being able to play even simple pieces well, but requires a certain type of attention and discipline.

1. *Schedule your practice time.* For many, a discipline like guitar practice is a new concept, and requires special effort until a habit is maintained.
 - Establish *at least* a half-hour block of undistracted time each day that you can spend with the guitar. Do not try to squeeze in a few minutes of practice here and there, or simply hope that the time will materialize at the end of each day. Notice any resistance that arises to practicing.
2. *Create a good practice environment:* Find a quiet space where there are no distractions. Make sure your sitting area is one where you can maintain good posture and correct guitar-holding position. This means that slouched on the couch in front of the television is incorrect!
 - Your music should be directly in front of you near eye level (I keep mine on a stand just to left of center, so that I can keep an eye on my left hand without taking my eyes off the music).
3. Make sure your guitar is *well-tuned*.
4. Using your **Practice Log** as a guide, *establish your goals/routine* before you begin, i.e., “I am going to learn to shift accurately between ‘C’ and ‘G’ chords and learn to stay relaxed while playing rest strokes on open strings.”
 - Place your practice logs on top of your guitar before you close the case so that they are the first thing you see when you begin to practice.
5. Follow the Classical Guitar Checklist to *adjust posture, body and hand position, right and left-hand technique*.
 - Shift your awareness to each area of the list as you play, adjusting your position as necessary
 - Be sure to spend time with *technical exercises* each day—they will greatly accelerate your skills and allow you to concentrate on proper execution of technique without having to worry about note-reading or musical continuity.
6. *Use your metronome every day* (or cd version). Set it on a speed that you can synchronize with for the whole song or exercise; slow the beat, or use two clicks per beat if necessary.
8. *When learning a song* (as opposed to sight-reading)
 - Using your metronome, *practice clapping or singing a song’s rhythms* before you attempt to play it, and continue to use this technique for difficult rhythms.
 - Make sure you can say all the note names, away from the guitar
 - Make sure you can say all the strings/frets of each note, and visualize its position on the fingerboard before playing.
 - Make a mental note of difficult areas, so that you are prepared for them as you approach them in the piece.
 - Do **not** start over when you make a mistake, and do **not** keep going. Stop, isolate the problem, practice this by itself, making it into an exercise until you can do it easily, then reinsert into the song. **This is the most important bit of advice on this handout!**
 - Try to memorize as quickly as possible so that you can then watch your hands.
 - Return to the music score frequently once pieces are memorized—a visual memory of the score is very important, and will help you to check for wrongly learned notes, etc.
9. *Practice awareness.* This includes active listening to both your sound *and* your body. Notice any tendency to tense either your hands or other parts of your body. **Stop**, consciously relax, resume again, trying to establish the location and cause of the tension. **Notice self-defeating thought-chatter.**