

How to Practice

The most important thing you will ever learn is how to learn! Fulfillment in your life with the guitar can easily become frustration if you lack a good approach to study. You will never learn to play well by practicing poorly. By the same token, you can reach the limits of your potential through good, methodical and regular practice.

How Long Should You Practice?

The amount of time you spend will reflect the depth of your interest, and what your aspirations are. If you want to become a great professional concert artist, you will spend many hours each day practicing, especially in your first few years. If you love the guitar but are pursuing it as a hobby, it is a good idea to find one hour a day to practice—although not necessarily in one sitting. It is important that your powers of concentration be at their best when practicing. Even many experts in the art of practicing an instrument find that their concentration wanes after about twenty minutes. Try practicing in three twenty-minute sessions, or even four fifteen-minute sessions. Anyone who really loves the guitar will want to pick it up several times a day for a few minutes, and a lot can be accomplished this way. You may find that your ability to concentrate for longer periods will increase, and, if your schedule allows, the total time that you practice will increase, too.

Set Goals

More important than how long you practice, or even what you practice, is *how* you practice. You should always have specific goals for your practice. For instance, "Today, I want to be able to play these two exercises smoothly and with confidence," or "Today I will review everything I did yesterday and learn these two new notes." If you find yourself never accomplishing your goals, try setting easier goals...it's important to try to succeed every day. Nothing breeds success like success! If you find yourself reaching your goals before an hour has passed, try setting higher goals for yourself. Never play aimlessly. Remember that you are always getting better or worse. Nothing you do on the guitar is ever meaningless.

Prepare - Repeat - Review

Everyone eventually establishes their own personal approach to practice. All successful approaches, however, follow a pattern similar to the one given here.

When learning a new piece or exercise, follow these five steps:

•Prepare

- Step 1. Take a very small portion of the piece, such as two measures, or a short phrase, and familiarize yourself with the rhythms by counting the beats aloud and clapping. Do this very slowly, since you will be playing slowly.
- Step 2. Familiarize yourself with the names of the notes in this short portion by pointing at each one and saying its name aloud.
- Step 3. Learn the left-hand fingerings in this short portion by pointing at the notes, picturing your left hand playing them on the guitar (*visualizing*) and saying the finger numbers out loud. Then name the fret numbers.

•Repeat

Step 4. When Steps 1-3 are easy for you, pick up your guitar and begin playing this portion of the piece very slowly. Make sure to play slowly enough to guarantee success; you should be able to think of the note names and visualize the fingerings before you play each note. If you are getting confused or making errors—if you feel rushed at all, slow down! Frustration is never fun, anyway. You may find that a metronome, set as slowly as it goes, may help you keep control over the speed at which you play. Repeat the passage as many times as is necessary to feel confident. Usually, confidence comes when something has been done well many times in a row. Your goal here is to develop habits of ease and confidence, and habits are formed through repetition.

•Review

Step 5. Repeat Steps 1-4 with the next small portion of the piece, and then play through all the sections you have learned thus far, until you can play through all of them in succession with confidence. The next day, when you continue your study of the piece, start by playing everything you learned today as slowly as possible, until confidence returns. Remember there is always attrition from day to day. In other words, if you master an exercise after an hour of practice today, it won't necessarily be mastered when you wake up tomorrow. It may take a little while to regain that progress. Three steps forward and one step back is normal for many of us. Stay in there! That's why review is so important.

Put this practice method to work as you learn the studies and pieces in this book. Have fun!

Mauro Giuliani

Probably one of the most brilliant guitar virtuosos ever to have lived, Mauro Giuliani was born in 1781 and died in 1829. His fame was such that the first classical guitar magazine ever published, in 1833, "Giulianiad," was named for him. He was born in Italy, but died in Vienna, where he spent most of his career. It was Giuliani's excellence that inspired Beethoven to say that "The guitar is a miniature orchestra in itself." Giuliani composed over three hundred works for guitar.

