



with Kevin Downing

Develop Your Own Style

Many guitarists find developing their own style is a difficult thing to do, and I'm often asked how you do so with ease. Well the concept is simple, but it is definitely not easy to put into practice. It comes down to three components – imitate, assimilate and innovate. Those three words have been the cornerstone of success for some of the world's top musicians, not just guitar players, and must be learnt in that order. Now let's break them down.

Imitation is when you take an idea, phrase, or something from a favourite player and learn it until you can play it really well. The content of this idea, phrase, or something must be small and easily grasped for your own playing level. Don't make the mistake of biting off too much in the first place. That is a big mistake and the main reason many guitar players don't do this first step very well, or never get past it.

Assimilate is when you take the idea you have just imitated and begin to incorporate it into your playing. When you do this, it might not come all that easy, but you should work hard to find places in songs (or when

jamming) you already play so you can use the idea straight away.

Innovating is when you have a good command of that idea, or something you have just spent time assimilating, and are now ready to take it to the next level. This next step involves you coming up with your own original play based on the ideas you have just spent time assimilating. It could be just a simple changing of the idea or using it to completely transform it into something new.

With careful listening to any of your favourite players, from Charlie Christen or T-Bone Walker in the 1930s, right through to the big names of today, you can hear how each new generation has copied from the players before them, using the 'imitate, assimilate and innovate' formula. As a classic example listen to Joe Bonamassa. You can clearly hear him using the ideas of Clapton, Page, Hendrix, the three Kings etc.

Now let's put this idea into action by imitating a simple lick taken from a popular recording. You can see in Exercise 1, a simple lick and only one bar long. What you need to do is to get it going well and up to speed, maybe 120 bpm on your metronome.

In Exercise 2 you practice putting that lick into a solo line that you are very familiar with. Here I have it in a blues progression or a static A7 or Am7 setting. The idea is once you can play this lick in one solo to then get it working in many of the solos you play. This is an example of assimilation. Once you know that you can incorporate that lick into many solos with ease, then it is time to move on to Exercise 3.

In Exercise 3 you can see that I have now taken the lick and transformed it into something more challenging. It is the same lick, but played on different string sets across the fingerboard. Take your time working on this one and when you have it down try putting it into your solos as well. This and the following examples are of the innovation process.

With Exercise 4 you can see I have changed the rhythm for the lick. Exercise 5 changes the contour of the lick. Exercise 6, is the lick inverted. See how you can easily innovate when you know your licks really well?

You can easily use the imitate, assimilate, and innovate principle for rhythm guitar ideas, or anything else you choose. So get your guitar out and get cracking using this process. If you have any trouble with this process seek the services of a good teacher.

To hear these examples played, visit my website at <http://www.guitar.co.nz/category/resources/freelessons/>

Kevin Downing is a professional guitarist, teacher, and author. His contact details, along with many freebies, are on his website at www.guitar.co.nz

Ex 1.

Ex 2.

Ex 3.

Ex 4.

Ex 5.

Ex 6.