



## Popular Learning Mistakes – And How to Avoid Them

**T**here are a few mistakes guitar players commonly make that can quickly become habits, but are easily fixed if you are aware of them. Entrenched bad habits can take time to get rid of, but if you stick to the fix you'll find your playing will improve quickly.

The mistakes outlined below are common at all skill levels. If you have just one of them it can kill all sense of getting ahead musically and stifle motivation. With that in mind let's check to see if you have fallen victim to any of them and find a fix.

### Trying to get ahead too quickly.

Of course you want to be able to play like your heroes by tomorrow, or maybe next week – but this is never going to happen as they've likely been playing for many years, if not decades, more than you. The main advice here is to enjoy your own journey of learning music and playing guitar.

What makes learning to play guitar slower than most people would like is that physically playing is only about 20% of what you need to know. The other 80% involves things like learning a bit of theory, learning to use your ears, learning songs, learning to play with others, etc.

Learning in other areas mostly only involves using your brain – while playing guitar (or any other musical instrument) simultaneously involves the physical aspect, which inevitably slows the process.

On the other hand, there is a positive aspect, known as 'compounding', which does speed up the process of learning music. For example, you learn a few chords, then play a few songs using them. At this point many inexperienced players won't realise they can now play millions of songs, not just those few. You learn a few scales – you can play millions of solos, riffs, not just stick to your scale patterns etc.

How can you change a 'get

ahead too quickly' attitude if you have one? How can you use the compounding effect to help you move ahead? The quickest way is to get some sort of help from a qualified teacher, mentor or school. Yes, you can learn by yourself, but it is the slowest way possible and mostly like reinventing the wheel.

Get yourself a good teacher and you will never look back. Find someone who has a great track record of turning out quality players. Steve Vai got lessons from Joe Satriani, and Joe Satriani got lessons from jazz teacher Lennie Tristano... Also, the software called Transcribe is brilliant for learning songs, solos, etc.

### Practising too much content and trying to learn it too quickly.

It's best to learn things one or two bars at a time or phrase by phrase if you like. It is what we call 'chunking' in psychology.

Typically self-taught players do not strip what they are learning into small chunks that they can handle much better and learn quicker while practising. Most also tend to want to practise new things at a much higher tempo than they can comfortably handle. An easy way to know if you are going / practising too fast is that you are making mistakes, fumbling notes, etc. Slow down, in fact halve the tempo.

Another issue here is that too-fast learners never learn things as thoroughly as someone who is taking their time to learn things deeply. Deep understanding of things musical is sorely missing in many guitar players.

Slowing down is the fastest way forward – it seems counter-intuitive, but it works. Try it.

### What can you do to chunk things down and learn more thoroughly?

The best players in history learnt their craft by listening to recordings and copying what

they were hearing, and that's how the skillful players still do it today. Not by mimicking somebody on the internet.

Since YouTube arrived, I've noticed most new players tend to listen with their eyes – rather than their ears. Music is an aural art form, not a visual one. Some of the best learning experiences of all are to play, or try and play, what you are hearing – and write it down on paper if you can, or memorise it. That uses every musician skill you have. If you have trouble doing so, then a competent teacher will be able to help.

True, you will find some good tips online, but the internet brings the problem of being overwhelmed more than helping with what you need. Another problem with online learning is it doesn't give feedback on your playing, improvement, what you need to work on next, or the order in which you need to learn new skills, which a good teacher will.

### How can you begin to listen and learn more by listening, rather than watching?

There are too many distractions in the world today, making it almost impossible to concentrate on anything without being distracted. While learning it's best to turn off all devices, and tell family members you are unavailable during your practice times. Also get your environment conducive to allowing you to practise best.

In the interests of tidiness many players pack their equipment away each time they finish rehearsing, but when it comes to practise time the next day they are unmotivated to get all that stuff out ready for action again.

If possible, it's best to leave all your equipment set up in a room, then when you want to practise or play you are ready to go immediately.

When playing along to tracks I recommend having a

good quality pair of speakers connected to your phone or computer. Keep your gear in top working order by getting it regularly serviced. Always make sure you have spare strings, picks, cables, etc..

### Not listening to enough music – recorded or live.

They say the best way to learn a new language is to really immerse yourself in it by living in that country for a time – and so, it is with music – but these days many new players don't actually listen to music much. We need to be surrounded by music if we are to become good at it.

Music is an aural language, and the best way to learn it is by listening at any spare moment you have. I don't mean in a background sense, I mean by active listening, doing nothing else but listening and taking in everything that is being played on that recording.

You should be listening to the groove and feel, what different instruments are doing, what is the interplay of the instruments, what kind of tone they each have, how many guitar tracks can be heard, etc.

The same is true with live music. You will learn a lot by going to concerts, pubs, clubs, etc. and listening rather than talking over the music. And how about even listening to some new genres? Music is a life-long study.

The areas mentioned above are not all the things that hold guitar players back, there are many more, but they are common practical ones. Now is the time to start thinking of how you can improve your guitar and music learning skills immensely in the new year. Hopefully, the above will give you some ideas about how to go about it.

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