

A stylized graphic of a guitar body and strings. The guitar body is represented by dark blue and black shapes on a red background. The strings are shown as six vertical orange lines. A horizontal orange line crosses the strings. The bridge is a dark blue rectangle at the bottom with six orange dots representing the bridge pins.

Learning to Play Lead Guitar

by Charlotte Adams

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Music in the soul can be heard by the universe.

Lao Tzu

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Introduction

Lead guitar is cool. While the guitarist indulges in an endeavor that is as challenging as it is liberating, the listener has the opportunity to experience the solo as a personal, sometimes provocative and often impressive artistic expression. If you love guitar, chances are you will love playing lead, whether it's with a rock, blues, folk, bluegrass or jazz band, and whether you are playing to a crowd, jamming with some friends or entertaining yourself in your own living room.

The creation of a compelling solo requires the guitarist to possess a variety of attributes, the most important of which may be a flexible mind. The player may think alternately of chord shapes, chord construction, scale patterns, scale degrees, and ultimately, the pure melodic lines heard in the mind's ear. While actively engaging in this cerebral and aural activity, the soloist is called upon to generate and express fresh ideas in the form of melodic lines. Preparation for creating these melodic lines should, then, include the practice of a variety of skills that contribute to both creativity and the musical craft, while simultaneously addressing the emotional and intellectual growth of the musician.

This book is a guide to all of those skills and more. Be certain that you study it from cover to cover – preferably repeatedly. As you grow, you will continue to find new meaning in the concepts and exercises presented.

In order to understand the instruction in this book, you will need a basic knowledge of music theory. Note reading is not required, and neither is mastery of advanced concepts in theory, but it will be helpful to know how to find notes on your guitar and to understand how scales and chords are constructed. If you haven't yet been introduced to the musical language, you can fill in any gaps in your knowledge by using A Guitar Player's Guide to Music Theory as a companion manual to this book.

*Sometimes the questions are complicated and the
answers are simple.*

Dr. Seuss

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Efficient Learning

Before launching into your study of lead guitar playing, it's worth taking a little time to assess and revamp your approach to learning. Read through this chapter thoroughly and often. These skills will serve you throughout your guitar-playing career.

Learn a Little, Use It a Lot

Taking on more information than you can process and retain is a sure-fire way to waste years of practice time and experience chronic frustration. Unfortunately, most structured learning in our culture takes place in a classroom, where a specific amount of information is expected to be absorbed in a given amount of time. We are all aware of how little of that information we retain after we have completed our tests and received our degrees! The only information we seem to consistently retain is that which we use on a regular basis. Apply your awareness of this observation to your study of guitar.

Once you begin to experiment with each new concept or skill you acquire, you will be amazed at how much you can do with a small bit of information. By putting your new information to use, you will enjoy your study more, because you will actually be playing music, rather than postponing it for prolonged periods. In addition, you will be cultivating your capacity for creativity by coming up with new ways to apply what you've learned.

Slow is Fast

Although it may be difficult to discipline yourself to take a very small bit and practice it slowly, it is actually the quickest way – and often the only way – to ingrain new material. You can solve most technical or conceptual problems you encounter simply by slowing down.

When working through mechanical challenges, start by slowing down until you find the tempo at which you can play a passage correctly. That tempo, however slow it may be, is your starting point for practice. When you have practiced the passage until it feels natural and comfortable, increase the tempo slightly and repeat the process. Continue in this manner until you have reached the desired tempo.

If you reach a point of confusion or frustration with concepts such as counting or chord construction, taking a small bit at an unhurried pace will help you to work through any difficulties. Allow yourself the time to find a solution by going step by step. Identify the elements involved and either learn or review each of them. Refer back to *A Guitar Player's Guide to Music Theory* for definitions and explanations, and complete any relevant worksheets. If you break down the problem into small enough parts and take enough time with each step, you will invariably clear up any confusion.

Practice Thoughtfully and Correctly

There are two poor practice habits that routinely sabotage a guitarist's progress. The first habit is to avoid or postpone the work that you find challenging or frustrating. While it is human nature to resist tasks we find difficult, doing so will only hold you back and compound your frustrations. Be on guard for this tendency in your practice and override it. Two areas of study that are commonly avoided or resisted in various degrees are rhythm and technique. For example, many people who are beginning to practice a new piece, want to "just find the notes" without regard to correct rhythm. Spending a few minutes locating the notes is a wise approach, but repeatedly playing the notes with incorrect timing is nothing more than incorrect practice. Likewise, indulging in poor posture or hand positions, with the excuse of "I'll fix it later" can create some monstrous repair projects.

Think about the way practice works: each time you play something, you are likely to play it the same way or similarly the next time you play it. With each repetition the mental and physical grooves deepen, which is why it is important to play slowly and thoughtfully enough to create the grooves that you intend to create. If you play a passage ten times incorrectly while becoming familiar with

it, you will have created unwanted grooves and will need to play it ten more times correctly just to get back to your neutral starting place. At that point, you will have invested precious practice time, with little or no real progress. Instead, take the time and make the commitment to play as correctly as you possibly can from the beginning.

The second way to sabotage your progress is to practice without being fully present. If you practice in front of the television or while carrying on a conversation, you will not only limit your absorption of learning, you will also be far more likely to experience anxiety when you perform. As a performer, your awareness is heightened, and everyday sensations and perceptions can seem strange, foreign or exaggerated. If you practice without being fully present, you will develop the unfortunate habit of zoning out to some degree whenever you pick up your guitar. As a result, you may feel shocked or overwhelmed when confronted with an experience, such as performing, that catapults you into awareness.

Perform Sufficient Repetitions In One Sitting

People often think that once they have played a passage correctly, they are ready to move on. In fact, it is not until you are able to play something correctly that you are ready to begin practicing it.

Don't fall into the trap of investing too little time or walking away altogether when you have played something correctly. Continue practicing until you are reasonably certain that when you come back the next day, your mind and fingers will recall the information that you have rehearsed.

This does not mean that you should not take a break or stop for the day when you are physically or mentally fatigued. When your body tells you to shift the way you are sitting, change what you are practicing, or put down your guitar for the day, listen to it. You may be surprised, however, to discover that you can practice for long periods without experiencing any physical problems if you follow a few guidelines: take frequent small breaks, stay mindful of your posture and technique, stay fluid and relaxed and use your breath properly.

Visualize it on the Fretboard

On the train, in the park, lying in bed - you can practice guitar anywhere! Not only is visualization a convenient and efficient way to ingrain new material, it is an excellent way to deepen your knowledge of the fretboard.

Practice visualizing the notes on the fretboard for any song that you are working on. Be sure to include proper fingering in your visualization. Listen to the music inside your head as part of your mental practice. In addition to using this technique to learn new material, you should use it to practice scales, arpeggios, and fingering patterns within the scales. It takes a lot of concentration to play mentally in this way, but you will increase your stamina with time, and you will be amazed at how productive this type of practice can be.

Disallow Self-Judgment

If your mind is occupied with judging yourself and your performance, you will not be able to sufficiently focus on playing your music. The more you indulge chatter from the left, more analytical hemisphere of your brain, the more you will block the full functioning of the right, or musical, hemisphere.

As a musician, it is important for you to develop a discerning ear, but do not confuse self-judgment with an ability to search out details for improvement or correction. Unlike self-judgment, critiquing from an objective perspective and correcting in a productive way is a highly valuable process; it is also one that must be emotionally detached.

Be vigilant about any tendencies to berate yourself based on your guitar-playing abilities or performance. If you witness this sort of mental and emotional distraction, simply drop the negative thought and refocus on your playing. By doing so, you will progress more quickly and have a lot more fun!

Use a Metronome

The metronome is an essential tool and should be used at every practice session. When you play with other musicians, you will begin to notice that most

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Scales and Arpeggios

Scales and arpeggios are the foundation of your lead work. The arpeggios (broken chords) are born of the scale, so start by understanding and working with scales and then move on to your work with arpeggios.

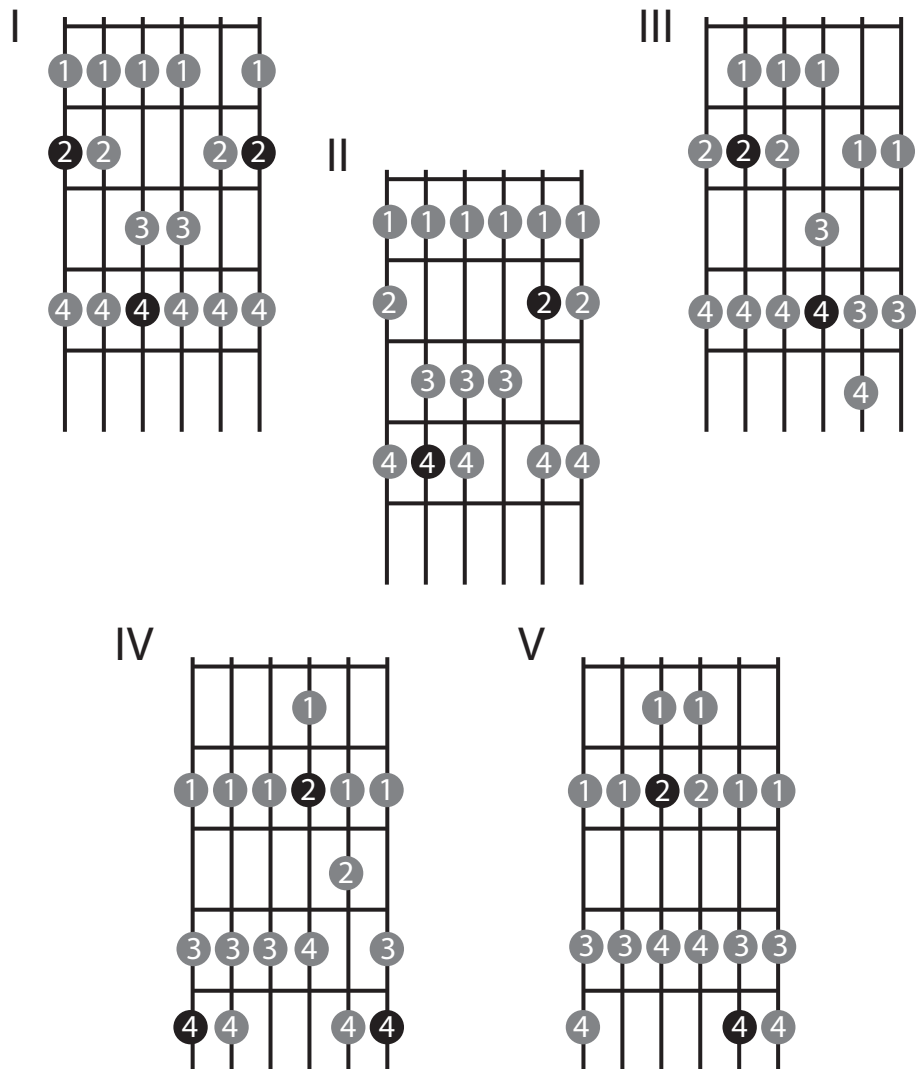
Read through this chapter and the next one entirely before beginning your scale work. Don't be concerned if the material is unclear on the first reading. When you return to this chapter, you will begin piecing together a practice plan that will enable you to fully comprehend and make use of the concepts presented.

This chapter contains eleven of the scales and modes that are most commonly used to create leads. If you are very motivated, you may be tempted to learn all of the patterns immediately. Please resist that temptation! Instead, begin with the first major scale pattern and the pentatonic pattern that is derived from the same scale, which you can find on pages 20 and 27. By using only those two patterns (which in fact is only one full pattern, as you will come to understand), and following the instruction in the next few chapters, you will be able to play melodies and create your own leads. As you gain experience, refer back to this chapter to add new patterns and to review the process of integrating those patterns into your playing. Working this way will not only keep you inspired and entertained, it will also provide a natural way for your mind and your ear to process the new information that you are acquiring.

The Major Scales

Focus first on the major scale, as it will serve as a foundation for your work with other scales. If you are not familiar with how the major scale is constructed or used in music, refer to *A Guitar Player's Guide to Music Theory* for explanations and exercises. You can find a list of all the major scales and their relative minors at the end of this book.

Only one pattern is required to play all twelve of the major scales, but in order to play a scale in various positions on the fretboard, you will need five patterns. In other words, you can stay in one position and, by changing patterns, play in five different keys, or you can play all of the major scales with one pattern, simply by changing positions. This will become increasingly clear to you when you work with the patterns on your guitar.



The Major Scale Patterns

Learning to Play Lead Guitar

by Charlotte Adams

Learning to Play Lead Guitar is a comprehensive guide to creating masterful solos. The clear instruction and easy-to-follow exercises are invaluable to both the novice lead player and the more seasoned lead guitarist.

Topics covered include:

Methods for Efficient Learning

Aural Comprehension

Scales

Arpeggios

Transcription and Analysis

Technique and Style

Cultivating Creativity

Balanced Performance

...and much more!

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