

# 5 Steps To Take Your Guitar Playing To The Next Level E-Book



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# The Beginning

## Into the Unknown

I believe this little book can be used as a great resource. It can help you out at any stage in your guitar playing to keep you on track. It will come in really handy down the road and should be a regular reference. So, give it a good read first. You'll find that the content is not only about your technical skills, but also your mental state. You may have heard that physical things like running and working-out is 20% physical and 80% mental. Playing guitar is the same. Most of the information you'll find out there is about technical and physical application. As a teacher I've found that 99% of the time when a student has reached a plateau in their playing it is a perception issue, not a physical inability to improve their skills as a guitarist. Most of the content in this book is to prepare you to do whatever it is you want to do as a guitar player. This is not all there is to know on the subjects discussed, but I believe it will take your guitar playing to the next level and beyond.

## FAQ's About Beginning Guitar

You can skip this section if you're not a beginner, but it might be helpful for an intermediate or advanced player if you're questioning further progression as a guitarist.

I often get questions from people about playing guitar that should not be a concern and often limit us mentally. These questions are normal and I want to cover some of them, so you can remove them from your mind.

Q. Are my fingers too short/hands too small?

A. No. Go online and watch some little 4 year olds playing guitars bigger than them and dominating it.

Q. Are my fingers/hands too big?

A. Probably not. I've had many students with huge thick fingers who can play guitar great. There are guitars that have wider spacing between the strings that could make it easier for someone with large finger tips. But most often this is not necessary.

Q. Is my child too young to start playing guitar?

A. Like I said, go online and watch videos of 4 year olds shredding.

Q. Am I too old to start playing guitar?

A. No. Though your physical condition can hinder or stop you. Such as, if you have horribly bad arthritis or something else that causes the hands to be in great pain or not move much. Django Reinhardt is known as one of the greatest guitarists ever. He had two partially paralyzed fingers in his left hand(the fretting hand).

Q. Do I need natural talent?

A. No. You need desire and perseverance. It does take work to play any instrument, but it is more than worth the time and effort to be able to play for the rest of your life.

Q. Do I need to know how to read music?

A. It helps, but it is not necessary. Most guitarists don't know how to read music or even understand how it works. For help with understanding or reading music it is wise to have a great guitar instructor.

Q. How long will it take to get good?

A. I have no idea. It is different for everybody. It comes down to dedication and practicing consistently with proper guidance. Be patient and respect how long it took the great guitarists out there to get to where they are. This isn't like learning to ride a bike which most anybody can do or pick up on quickly. Think about how great it will be to learn, not how hard it will be. A great home cooked meal takes time, but tastes amazing.

Q. What if I'm left handed?

A. Not an issue. Jimi Hendrix, Kurt Cobain, Tony Iommi, and Paul McCartney played/play left handed. The only problem will be that there is a lot less guitars to choose from. Most guitars are made right handed and are a little cheaper.

Q. Should I start with an acoustic or electric?

A. Whichever you prefer. I wanted to start on electric, but my father made

me start on an acoustic. It took more effort, but it also encouraged me to work hard so I could get that electric I wanted. Electrics are easier to play. It is best to just get a guitar and begin.

## **Basic Steps and Right Mindsets**

### **The First Step**

Get a guitar.

Well, that's obvious, right? Yes, but if you're doubting, then investing money in an instrument will help motivate you to play it. You don't have to spend a ton of money to get a good beginners guitar. For experienced guitarists who want to get better, it might be beneficial to buy a guitar of higher quality. The greater the investment is the more you will be spurred on to be a greater player. Also, it will be more fun to play and sound better than a cheap guitar. I don't advise this for beginners. Many people will wait too long because they want to be sure they get the 'right one'. It is extremely common for people to replace their guitars many times over for many reasons. If you get the 'wrong one' it's not the end of the world.

Next, don't put your guitar in it's case.

Unless you need to bring it with you somewhere, keep your guitar on a guitar stand. If it's a beginners guitar, then there is less to worry about. I used to keep my guitar locked up and would have to get it out multiple times a day to play it. This was fine when I was a teenager, but as I got older I started to practice less because it was always put away and I was less motivated to get it out. To get back in the routine I started always leaving my guitar on it's stand in arms reach of my desk when I spend a lot of my time. Now anytime I want to play for any reason it's right there. I also have one in my living room on a stand.

Write out a plan.

This doesn't have to take long. You'll want to practice everyday to progress quickly, so decide on a time of day you are available and clear minded. Are you a morning person? Maybe when you get off work is a good time. Instead of sitting down in front of the TV, pick up the guitar and get your mind off of work. Whatever works best for you. An excellent time to practice is right before you go to sleep. Your mind will retain the information better and process it in your sleep. When you wake up, you will have a clearer perspective and more focused approach to practicing. It's quite amazing.

Remember to warm up.

You don't want to start off playing as fast as possible. Your fingers won't be ready for it. When you sit down to practice, play something simple and enjoyable. Play it slow to get your fingers to warm up. Enjoy each note you play, it will make it easier to play slower. If you want to play everything a thousand miles an hour, you will get frustrated faster.

Keep records of your achievements.

It can be very encouraging to see your progression. Write down dates and when you achieved something. Write down any achievement. Don't downplay the small things. Sometimes something easy for you is very difficult for someone else. It's worth recognizing. After you write down what you did achieve, write down what you'd like to achieve next.

Get a great guitar teacher.

Most people begin by teaching themselves and most give up very quickly. Even with all the information on the internet available to us, it will never be able to replace real instruction from a great teacher. Find someone to help you. [The right guitar teacher](#) will show you what you need to know, when you need to know it, how to do it correctly, hold you accountable, encourage you, and walk you down the path to your goals.

## **Don't Fret**

Playing guitar is lots of fun. It is relaxing and energizing. For some people it can also be very frustrating. It was for me for my first few months. I also wasn't patient when I started at 13 years old. I wanted to bypass any work and just play great. This immature thinking didn't help at all, but it also didn't stop me. Thankfully I had something greater than my own self-doubt; I had desire. I wanted to be a great guitarist and I wanted it bad. Like most people I was greatly moved by music. I wanted to play just like the people I listened to. I would spend hours practicing everyday. The struggle because distant compared to the enjoyment which comes from playing guitar. If I went without playing for a day I would go through withdraw. It was weird. I'm telling you all this because it's an important ingredient. This isn't something you can buy. The good news is you have it already. Most likely if you're reading this you want to get better. It doesn't have to be a huge desire, just a real desire. Like anything, it can be strengthened and cultivated to grow over time. Desire is a seed and you can plant it, water it, and watch it grow. You can also uproot it and never get a harvest. Read this [article](#) I've written to learn more about that process.

Have you ever watched one of those TV shows where someone works super hard to loose a bunch of weight? It's really emotional stuff. Learning guitar isn't nearly as hard as loosing 150 lbs. The reason I bring this up is because it is very inspiring to see people succeed. It inspires us to not give up, to commit to our goals, and to succeed. This is a good thing as long as we are going out there and doing something, not just living vicariously though the television and movies.

## **The Curse of Perfectionism**

Not everyone has this type of attitude, but many do. Musicians can easily fall to this temptation for some reason. It might be the creative nature of those who choose to be musicians. What we create often becomes personal. It could be our culture and how all the TV shows about singing are very critical of any mistake. It turns art into competition. Competition

isn't inherently bad, but can become an idol(pun intended) pretty quickly depending on your tendencies and personality type. If you have a competitive nature, use competition as a fun way to challenge yourself to reach new levels in your guitar playing.

I used to be plagued by perfectionism. I never felt like I was good enough. I had something to prove to the world. There are a couple of serious problems with this.

### First

The world just doesn't care. If you really want to get better and actually enjoy it, I have to speak the hard truth to you. Everyone else is more concerned about themselves than they are about your personal crusade to be perfect. Even if you were perfect not everyone would like you. They'd become jealous and envious. Think about the famous people you seem to like even though you've never met them. I bet there is something that seems more real about them. They aren't just characters or names, they have imperfections. They're people just like you and when you see that you relate to them, you think, "So and so seems really down to earth. I bet they'd be fun to just hang out with."

### Second

What is perfection? Do you even know? Who is to judge? We adopt ideas from what we've heard from our peers or standards in the media. One little comment from someone who sounds like they know what they're talking about can get fixed into our minds and we don't even know it. We then measure everything by all these little comments we've heard or read in a magazine or blog or whatever. These are not reality. They are just opinions. Trying to be perfect is agonizing.

I don't want to leave you hanging with that last statement. How should you judge how good you should be? Is wanting to be great a bad thing? This can get complex, but I'll just give you some things to think about and you can decide for yourself.

I mentioned earlier how important desire is if you want to get better. I would recommend listening to the best guitarists possible. When you do this don't compare yourself or you will get discouraged very fast. Appreciate them and the hard work they've put into achieving that level of performance and skill. Let it inspire you. Don't let ego dictate the terms of your thinking or emotions. Be confident in where you are. If you aren't as good as you want to be you will have an emotional reaction inside. How you respond to those emotions will determine if you get better or not.

## **How to Deal with Negative Emotions**

### **Inadequacy**

This is normal. Just remember not to judge and compare yourself with others. It's crippling to your greatest asset; desire. Just stop thinking about it. Get back to developing your skills. Thinking about how much you suck takes a lot of energy. Picking up the guitar and having fun playing something simple doesn't take much energy. Music should be fun. If you don't get a hold on this type of thinking and emotion then you will feel this every time you listen to music you like. It will lead to jealousy, envy, and superficial pursuits. Inadequacy can lead to fear and fear can lead to anger.

### **Anger**

If you've reached this point take a step back. I'm not suggesting to stop playing guitar. Just stop for a few minutes or a day. This break should be short. It also should be a cleansing time. If you don't cleanse your mind of anger it will most likely come back to the surface. Frustration leads to anger. Why are you frustrated? Because expectations aren't being met. What are your expectations? Are they legitimate? Write them down on paper. It will take a few minutes and some serious thought, but it will save you tons of time and make you feel better. I'll give some examples you can use. Just think or ask them to yourself and respond to the questions.

Q. Is it realistic to think that you will just be great without out any positive effort?

A. No. Anyone who is great put in the time in advance to get the results afterward.

Q. If you were “perfect” without any effort would you really be proud of it?

A. No. You’d feel like you cheated and that is never gratifying. Also, it is impossible to be perfect, so there is no point in berating yourself because you aren’t “perfect”.

Q. How can you make practice fun instead of frustrating?

A. Write down every little achievement. Review and acknowledge past achievements. Reward yourself by being happy about it. Set realistic goals for today. Do one thing that is achievable today. Set realistic goals for today, the week, and the month. Tomorrow set a new realistic goal for that day. Remember that sometimes you will have an off day. This is normal. Don’t judge yourself harshly and throw the guitar. I’m kind of joking here, but I’m sure it happens. It’s not detrimental to have a bad day. You’re life still has meaning and you still have tomorrow to try again.

Years ago when I was 15 years old, I went to see one of my favorite bands play. There were thousands of people there. I went up to the front during one of my favorite songs. There was a part in the song when the band stopped playing for about 10 seconds and the guitarist played by himself. It was not a difficult part. He messed up! That’s humbling. Would you want to be him right then? Probably not. What stuck out to me the most wasn’t that he botched the simple guitar part, but how he responded. He laughed about it. Not a hysterical laugh, just a little smirk on his face. He found humor in it and didn’t make a big deal about it. I don’t think it meant he didn’t care. I think he was just enjoying himself and how ironic that he messed that up. He did great the rest of the show. Had he gotten upset about that little mistake, the rest of the show would have not been fun for him and he would have been distracted from playing good for the next hour.

Is it really worth the energy to beat yourself down every time you don’t meet an expectation?

## How to Practice Consistently

This is the last thing I'm discussing because it will be the practical application of all I discussed previously.

Practicing shouldn't be a chore and if you follow the things I've mentioned then this will help you tremendously. It really comes down to how you practice and how consistent you are in practicing.

For practice to be effective, it can't be aimless playing around on your guitar. For practice to take root, you must be consistent.

There is much about practicing and great concepts that I won't get into in this e-book. It would be exhaustive and you would probably not want to read it all right now. It is also much easier to be trained by a teacher. This book is designed to give you a good foundation and right perspective about playing guitar. Like I mentioned earlier it's 80% mental and 20% physical. The physical practice does need to happen. I know that's common sense, but I don't want to mislead anyone who may be very young or completely oblivious to learning an instrument.

The best advice I can give is this: Remember that everyday you practice you will be one step closer to your goal and everyday you don't practice is gone forever. You will never get that day back. I know that probably sounds pretty extreme, but it is truth and it is a motivating thought. Let's get to it. There is no time to waste.

Listed on the next page is the summary of the 5 steps to take your guitar playing to the next level. These steps are listed in order that I discussed them, but they do not have to be used in that order. Use them whenever you need them. Sometimes you will use more than one at once. The point is to step up and whichever one will help you move forward right now is the one to use.

## Summary: The 5 Steps To The Next Level

### Step 1 - Set yourself up for improvement

Keep your guitar out of its case. Warm up. Write out a plan. Keep records of your achievements. You can add to this list as you think of things that will help you personally.

### Step 2 - Cultivate desire

This could be part of step 1, but it's so important it needs to be acknowledged separately. Picture yourself doing what you want and think about how good it will feel to do that.

### Step 3 - Remember "perfect" doesn't exist

Perfectionism will undermine the cultivation of desire. The great thing is the positive reinforcement of desire will wash away the distraction of perfectionism.

### Step 4 - Deal with negative emotions

Negative emotions like anger and inadequacy will creep in from time to time and they need to be dealt with immediately. They're kind of like weeds, they will unexpectedly pop up, but are also easy to unroot if dealt with fast.

### Step 5 - Practice

Be consistent and little by little you will improve.

## About the Author

Ryan Duke is a musician, songwriter, and guitar teacher. He plays progressive metal with a positive message and strives to encourage fellow musicians and students to never give up and press-on towards their dreams.

