

Don't Panic - It's Normal

Every guitarist, no matter what their style, knows the feeling. One day you realize that you've been playing the same old thing for the last eight weeks, and it's not improving. On top of that, you're not trying to learn other things. What's going on? You've hit the wall, reached your plateau, you're blocked, doomed never to progress and reach your goal, which is to become the greatest guitarist ever to draw breath.

Is There Anything I can Do?

Well, yes there is. That's to say, I can give you some idea of what works for me. As you can probably guess, most of it is psychological, unless you are just playing so much that you are physically fed up of doing it! Some great guitarists, such as BB King', don't practice at all, and just perform. In passing, he's also said that he gets stage fright every single time, thinking that 'this time it won't work' and 'I'm just not good enough'.

Tip #1 - Leave It Alone

This is a tough one for us guitarists. All the greatest guitarists indicate that they practiced riffs and pieces a million times to get so good (and I believe them), so we need to practice until we are blue in the face, right? Right and wrong.

It's true that we are developing and training our motor skills by putting our fingers in the right places again and again, but if we do this out of a sense of duty, without the passion behind it, then it's not productive. Get your mind right first - why are you doing it? Because you love it.

Relax for a few days. Forget that difficult song you've been trying to learn. After several days away from it, you'll probably find that it just comes more naturally.

Tip #2 - Back To Basics

Inevitably, as we progress in our playing, basic techniques are taken for granted as we improve our skills. Now and again, we get a little slack in our basic techniques,

which have a beauty all of their own. Go back to them and re-learn them. Listen to the old masters and hear again how their unique styles were grounded in rock-solid basic techniques.

Play very simple stuff for a few days, but play it with feeling and attention to the smallest detail.

Tip #3 - Get Comfortable!

When you are contented with your music, then it flows and comes naturally. Every one can improve, but it's true that every one has their limit of capability. Recognition of this and acceptance, will help you relax. Just say to yourself "maybe I won't improve anymore - let's make the music I do play the very best it can be." Once you get into this state of mind, you will improve! It's like magic!

There are many levels of playing guitar, and not everyone can be the best. As one man put it "if only the best birds sang in the forest, it would be a be very quiet place indeed". Know your place and be content with it. We are all unique and can make unique music. Eric Clapton is revered as a super [blues guitar](#) player, but on the acoustic guitar, Tommy Emmanuel makes him seem merely adequate.

Tip #4 - It's Mostly Psychological

I'm not sure where I'm going with this tip, but here's the story. When I was a young man, I played along with a friend of mine, who was always less proficient than I was. I think I played much more than he did at that time. I loved 'Police Dog Blues' by Blind Blake but always found it too difficult to play.

My friend moved abroad and about a year later, while talking on the telephone, he casually informed me that he had learned 'Police Dog'. The idea that a lesser guitarist had learned this tune was more than I could bare. I picked up the guitar and mastered the tune in about three days. This is not a testimony to my skills, but rather a comment on my psychological make up. Good guitarists have a significant amount of arrogance, and quite a big ego. This needs to be understood, controlled and channeled to the good side of the Force!

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Tip #5 - Jam With Other Musicians

It's good to jam with other guitarists from a couple of points of view. For one thing, it's enjoyable. There's nothing quite like swinging along with like minded people, even if it brings along a feeling of competition. This competition is motivating. Even while playing together, guitarists are aware of each others capabilities. We all have strong and weak points, and the wise player counter points your strength with his own. He can also cover your own weakness, and the overall sound is a great example of synergy - which means that the result is greater than the sum of all it's parts.

If the guitarists are better than you are, then this will gently stretch you, giving you new ideas and helping you to improve.

Tip #6 - Play Outside Your Style

I like this idea, as it's a lot of fun. If you normally play classical, then learn some jazz. If you [play blues guitar](#), go folk or country. If you are a picker, then strum. You get the idea. Sometimes we get stuck in a rut and call ourselves this or that kind of musician. We just play guitar and learning a variety of musical styles can only help us to play better music

Take It Easy

Finally - relax. It's no big deal; You won't play great guitar by being tense or too serious. Some of the modern blues men seem particularly intense and I'm not sure why. Maybe it's because we want to be like the old blues legends and that kind of outlook goes with the territory. Don't bother with that kind of thinking. You can't be that old blues man, as our modern lives are completely different. Be yourself, that's all - the rest will come.