

Learn ANY Piece of Music In 7 Easy Steps

The Formula to Learn Music Fast



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Learn new music quickly, with fewer fumbles and much better memory.

To learn guitar pieces well, it helps to have a reliable formula. When we make fewer mistakes and more correct repetitions, we learn faster.

This 7-step process will help you understand more of the music you play. You'll play more cleanly because you'll be more familiar with the music, looking at it from different angles.

You can also use this formula to troubleshoot difficult passages in your music. And you can use it to memorize music (more on this later).

As with any new routine, the first couple of times you use it may feel odd and foreign. But soon you'll be comfortable with the process and enjoy a deeper relationship with your pieces. Have fun!



Step 1

1. Make small sections

Many guitarists learn music playing the entire piece through over and over again. But this takes too long, reinforces bad habits, and doesn't fix problems.

Instead, we can practice better by working on small sections.

Step One is to create small sections in your music. These could be just one or two measures. Your small section may be a phrase, or a segment of a phrase.

Bonus Tip: To make this step even more effective, choose sections that sound complete. To do this, always cross the bar-line. This will allow the music to resolve and sound more musical. Over time, your phrasing and musicality will improve, simply by making this small practice habit.

VS.

Tip: cross the barline



Step 2

2. Know all the notes and musical markings

For the small section you're currently working on, look at every dot of ink in the music.

Notice which notes are included. Are there any sharps or flats? Are there any musical symbols or words?

Anything you don't understand, stop and look it up. This is the time to clear any confusion so you go forward with confidence.

At the very beginning, you may also enjoy reading about the musical style, the title, and the composer.

The image shows a musical score snippet on a treble clef staff with a common time signature (C). The tempo marking "Moderato" is written above the staff. The music consists of several notes with fingerings: a quarter note (0), a quarter note (1), a quarter note (2), a quarter note (3), a quarter note (4), a quarter note (0), a quarter note (2), a quarter note (0), a quarter note (3), a quarter note (2), and a quarter note (0). Below the staff, there are dynamic markings: *f* (forte) under the first note, *p* (piano) under the second, third, fourth, and fifth notes, and *simile...* under the sixth note. Red question marks with arrows point to the following elements: the treble clef, the common time signature, the tempo marking "Moderato", the first note, the first *f* marking, the first *p* marking, the second *p* marking, the *simile...* marking, the first note of the second measure, the first note of the third measure, and the first note of the fourth measure.



Step 3

3. Clap and count the rhythm aloud

Before we figure out the positions and fingerings for each note, we can first master the rhythm. This will allow us to practice more accurately when we do move on to the notes.

If there are any unfamiliar rhythms, now is the time to investigate them.

Often in guitar music there are multiple rhythms playing at once. These could be a melody and bass or accompaniment. When we have more than one rhythm we can look at each separately, and then how they all fit together (the complete rhythm).

Warning: You may want to skip this step, but do so at your peril!

Clap:
&
Count: "one" "and" "two" "and"



Step 4

4. Play the right hand alone

Step Four is to play the right hand alone, with no left hand. This may not sound good (just open strings), but it will help you avoid mistakes.

This is the time to either notice or decide on the fingering of every note in the small section. If the fingerings are given, use those. If not, choose your own fingerings and write them in the music (in pencil, so you can change them later should you choose).

Once you have the fingerings, play the section slowly in rhythm while counting aloud. This will reinforce the rhythm and allow you to better understand the right hand's patterns and movements.

This is also a wonderful time to review any form, positioning and movements you may be working on.





Step 5

5. Play the left hand alone

After mastering the right hand, play the left hand alone, counting aloud. This will not make much sound, because the right hand will be on hiatus.

Notice any hops, slides or shifts the fingers will need to make. Note any chords you recognize. Take special care to hold down each note for the full duration.

Move each finger in precise rhythm (continue to count aloud), and mind the placement of each finger on the strings.

You may be tempted to involve the right hand, but be strong!





Step 1

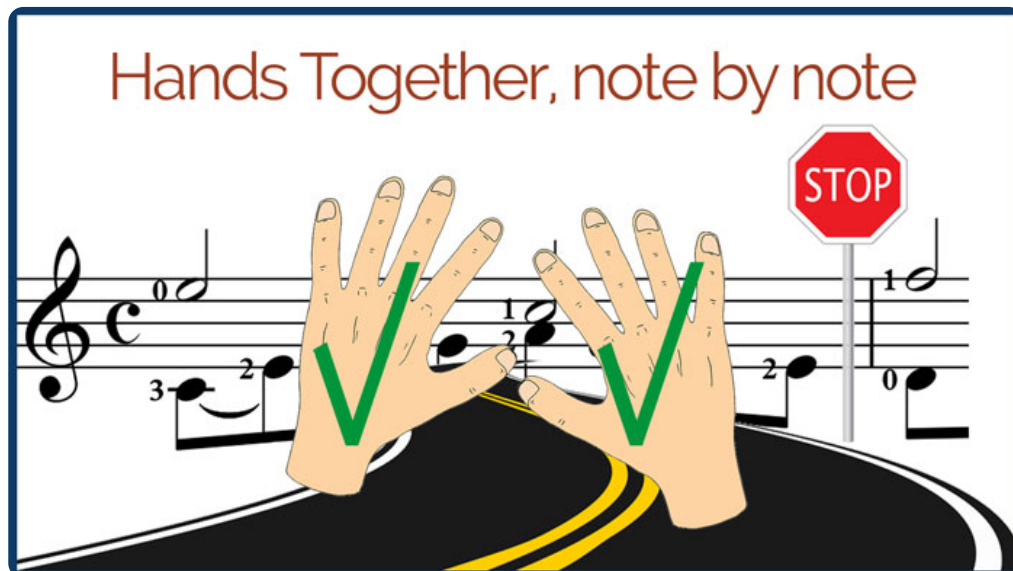
6. Play hands together, using corrective pauses

Once we have worked through the fine details of each hand separately we can put them together.

For this step, it's important to take it slow and not allow any mistakes. We can use "corrective pauses" to keep on track.

A "corrective pause" is when we stop and suspend the rhythm. Stopping when we need to will help us to avoid practicing the wrong the fingerings in one or both hands. (It's usually the right hand that goes away, so awareness in this step is key.)

The goal of this step is to combine the hands while eliminating any confusion as to how they work together. As usual, continue to count aloud (even if it's not steady, because of the pauses).





Step 2

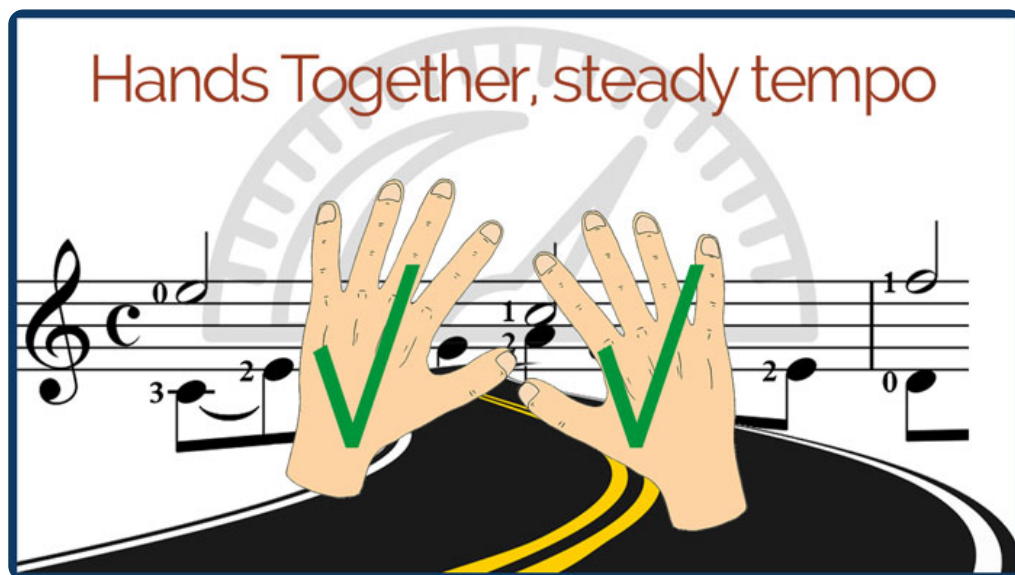
7. Play the hands together, in rhythm

At last, we come to play the small section with both hands, in rhythm.

For the first few times at this step, we should stay slow and make sure all fingerings are consistent. We can continue to count the rhythm aloud.

In this step, we should still have zero mistakes. If there is a mistake, we can go back to previous steps.

Once we can play through with both hands in rhythm, counting aloud, we can begin to pick up the speed, with or without a metronome. This should be at such a rate that we continue to play the correct fingerings and rhythms without error.





Step 3

Optional Bonus Step (3B): Decide on phrasing

As we clap and count the rhythm we can optionally begin to decide on our phrasing. These are our swells and fades, lounds and softs, and connected or separated notes.

Without the distraction of fingerings and technical difficulties, we can count aloud using the volumes we choose. We can simulate these rises and falls, notes that pop out, and those that stay in the background.

We can always change these decisions later if we choose to. But making musical choices here will allow us to bring them into each step. This will more deeply ingrain the music in our memory. And it will reveal new physical (technical) challenges within the music.

The image shows a musical staff in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The melody consists of quarter notes and eighth notes. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 below the notes. A large orange slur covers the first two measures, and a smaller orange slur covers the last two notes of the second measure. Orange wedge-shaped annotations above and below the staff indicate dynamic changes, with the word *mf* written in orange below the first measure.



Step 4

How to use the 7 Steps to memorize music

We can also use this formula to memorize music more easily.

After each step, simply look away from the music and play the small section from memory. Then look back to make sure you got everything right. Then do it again.

Often, just using the formula will allow us to mostly memorize new music. But this added step of forcing recall will even more deeply embed the music in our minds and bodies. The more often we do this, the easier it becomes.

And in our ongoing practice of the piece, we can choose a section and step and perform it from memory. This will keep each element of the music crisp in our awareness.

Step 1:  then 

Step 2:  then 

Step 3:  then 

Step 4:  then 

etc. etc.

How to Learn Any New Piece, in 7 Easy Steps

- As you complete one step for a section, write the step number over that section, then next time move directly to the next step.
- Once you complete a step, move on to the next.
- You can start new sections before finishing all the steps for the previous section.
- If it's too difficult, your section is too big.
- You can also use this process to clean up tricky spots.

Have fun and keep it interesting!

| | |
|------------|--|
| Step One | Decide on a small, manageable section |
| Step Two | Know and understand all the notes and musical markings (all the ink!) |
| Step Three | Clap the rhythm in time, counting aloud (optional: add phrasing and dynamics!) |
| Step Four | Play the right hand only, in rhythm (no left hand, keep counting) |
| Step Five | Play the left hand notes only, in rhythm (no right hand, keep counting) |
| Step Six | Play the hands together, using corrective pauses (slow, no mistakes, counting) |
| Step Seven | Play the hands together, in rhythm. (counting, test yourself with a metronome) |



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