

On The Fly Guitar

Applicable Zen for The Intermediate Guitarist

A Guiding Narrative
for Advancing Your Guitar Skills



If you are beyond beginner basics but still somewhat lost on the fingerboard, On The Fly Guitar can help you find an easier path to becoming a more accomplished lead guitarist.

Authors Note



In the frantic pace of modern life, technology provides unprecedented ways to become genuinely creative if we don't become distracted by it.

On The Fly Guitar can help you cut through the clutter, complexity and confusion brought on by the myriad of guitar approaches available to you.

Gain from insights and perspectives drawn from over 50 years of guitar playing experience. Dozens of topics are explored in clear, honest language to help you formulate a thought process that can lead to improved playing.

On The Fly Guitar is an easy read that explains a helpful mindset. It's something that I always hoped to find in my attempts to grow as a guitarist.

Reflecting on the many years that were dedicated to becoming a better player, this is what worked for me. I am convinced that if you continually refer to these pages, you will grow as a guitarist and find great satisfaction in the music you create.

All the best in your musical endeavors,

Lou Camporeale

Just so you know ...

The guidance you find here is centered on lead guitar playing. It was born from my experience as a self-taught player. You may occasionally have a different point of view based on what you've come to learn and believe.

The guitar improv music available on my website demonstrates the application of the approaches described herein.

All the following topics directly relate to the guitar music you will find there.

<https://www.creativemusictracks.com/>

Any new idea that you embrace will have an impact on your playing.

My goal in sharing what I have learned is to enable aspiring guitarists to embrace the instrument in a more personally rewarding way.

To that end,
Peace



The Topics:

<i>What's this all about?</i>	<i>Page 5</i>
<i>Why is learning guitar so hard?</i>	<i>Page 6</i>
<i>Where to start?</i>	<i>Page 7</i>
<i>Approach</i>	<i>Page 8</i>
<i>Connecting the dots on scales</i>	<i>Page 9</i>
<i>Scales, Noodling and Experimentation</i>	<i>Page 10</i>
<i>Mechanical Patterns</i>	<i>Page 11</i>
<i>Meet the relatives</i>	<i>Page 11</i>
<i>Using both hands</i>	<i>Page 12</i>
<i>Breathing room</i>	<i>Page 12</i>
<i>The distance between the notes</i>	<i>Page 13</i>
<i>Why learn some cover tunes?</i>	<i>Page 14</i>
<i>The notion of resolve</i>	<i>Page 14</i>
<i>Modulation</i>	<i>Page 15</i>
<i>On speed</i>	<i>Page 15</i>
<i>Take Notes / Make notes</i>	<i>Page 16</i>
<i>Motifs and Themes</i>	<i>Page 16</i>
<i>So what about tabbed licks?</i>	<i>Page 17</i>
<i>Defining your style</i>	<i>Page 18</i>
<i>Playing with others</i>	<i>Page 18</i>
<i>Un-Caged</i>	<i>Page 19</i>
<i>Arpeggios and Triads</i>	<i>Page 19</i>
<i>Using a hang tone</i>	<i>Page 19</i>
<i>Modal Confusion</i>	<i>Page 20</i>
<i>Building your vocabulary one section at a time</i>	<i>Page 21</i>
<i>Repetition</i>	<i>Page 21</i>
<i>Thoughtful Improv</i>	<i>Page 21</i>
<i>The Magic and Moment of Flow</i>	<i>Page 22</i>
<i>In Conclusion</i>	<i>Page 22</i>

What's this all about?

Learning to play guitar can be both daunting and frustrating. The goal of most aspiring musicians is to play music that they enjoy, which makes the relationship with the instrument much more satisfying and meaningful. Your search for guitar secrets has probably led you here.

Will my help be helpful? Maybe, let me explain. I've had a guitar in my hands for the past 50 years. I just can't seem to put it down or walk away from it for too long. It's been a part of who I am for most of my life. I've played many styles, many guitars, read many books, studied other players, tried all kinds of equipment, took lessons, gigged in local venues, and always pushed myself to reach the next level.

I don't play out often, don't gig with a band or perform covers to entertain others. I don't strum and sing ballads. I don't sight read but I can (slowly). My focus is on honing my craft, still to this day. My relationship with the guitar is mostly private, and for me it is a very wholesome, therapeutic, fun and personally rewarding experience. I record original music, dabble around with new material and enjoy expanding my home studio as I go. Over the years I've created a library of tracks and lessons that are important to me.

How well you play your instrument comes down to the relationship you have with it and being confident with the approach you take. You never need to feel stuck when you have the right perspective. Improvement takes work and it takes time. Yet done the right way it can be immensely rewarding while you're in the process of honing your skills.

I realize now that learning guitar is a lifelong journey. The biggest realization is that there is no imaginary time when it all comes together. New revelations happen when you play with intention. Don't call it practice. Just play. There is no endpoint and you don't have to wait for one to play with a level of mastery.

Developing the ability to simply play as you feel is a gift to yourself. If you are passionate about guitar, allow yourself the opportunity to grow by being open, patient and calm. The music within you will always be there to guide you as you go. It's what you are reaching for. Every tasty little lick you learn & earn is a gift you can put in your treasure box.

Why is learning guitar so hard?

Learning to play guitar can be very confusing, which is what makes it so very hard. It's the mental pain more so than the finger pain in my estimation. The correction needed is how you approach combining all the necessary pieces together without getting tripped up in the letters, numbers and formulas mankind has built into the instruction side of things. Making music is personal. We don't all learn it one way, there is no one way.

Guitar lessons tend to focus on one facet of playing at a time. Frustration sets in early because you are learning one facet of guitar playing and trying to get good at it ... yet the material you are working on doesn't seem to be making you that much more of a complete player. Becoming a well-rounded player requires that you are comfortable with many facets and aspects of playing, no one lesson gets you there.

My approach is to stick with the things that appeal to me. One example is when I studied solo classical guitar. The simplicity of the pieces taught me the beauty of using intervals to create a lead line.

The combination of techniques that you develop over time are the key elements that get you to where you want to be. Each aspect of playing that you work on is developed enough at the moment you can recall it and comfortably use it. Its one part of the puzzle. The puzzle piece it connects to is simply another aspect of your playing. The fun begins when you can play several aspects, connect them, and then re-connect them interchangeably in new ways as you advance. This is critically important to remember.

There's an ocean of material available out in the commercial market that lacks context and can be very confusing. There are tips and tricks both free and for sale everywhere you look. I never had the patience to struggle thru a lesson that didn't seem to be working for me. After skimming a few pages in any new book, it all too often got quickly thrown on the pile of everything else that came before it and not looked at much if ever again.

If you think of it as being hard, it will be. Avoid complicated learnings that are way beyond your reach. Instead, take stock of what you know, appreciate it, then work on simple steps and practices that help build your skills in steps – think incrementally – about what you want to develop next. Steps that are easily accomplishable ... even if there's a lot of them ahead of you. This is the necessary work.

Where to start?

Everyone that comes to this page will come with a different set of personal thoughts and experiences. My assumption is that you have attained some level of proficiency and want to make progress in a more fun and less frustrating way.

I strongly recommend building a library of backing tracks. For starters, pick some that please you in some fashion without being overly complex. Having some variety is very helpful. Variety keeps it interesting and will lead you to new ideas.

Perspective on backing tracks:

They are one of the best learning tools in modern times. The background music is instantly ready for you to jam to, and you're free to experiment with them. It will not be terribly hard to find backing tracks that excite you. Having a variety of backing tracks will seriously lengthen your playing time and lead to improvement.

And the axe itself?

Playing different guitars will allow you to do different things that enable you in new ways. Pick up any guitar that is available to you and experience the difference. You probably already do this every visit to the music store. When it comes to instruments, the different sounds they each create will have a different influence on you. It's hard to find dedicated players that don't have several guitars for this reason.

You should have at least one guitar that you feel connected with. If the string and sound vibrations of an instrument make you smile, you found one that works.

Approach ...

So what is the approach? Let's change "**the**" approach to "**your**" approach. Don't fear what you may be missing by relying on yourself to figure it out. Only you know what works for you. Often enough, trying to incorporate someone else's method can leave you stranded in the same place you are right now. There's a reason that Jimi Hendrix sounded nothing at all like Jimmy Page. They each did it their own way, on their own.

The problem with guitar instruction in general is that it is likely to focus on something that may not necessarily tie into what you already know how to do. New material doesn't always fit your stuff in a way you can build on. Its like finding a few new words to insert into your book, but the problem is where to place them if they don't seem useful as a connectable next step. Occasionally you may learn a trick that you like. Searching for tricks and licks can burn a lot of time and keep you from actually doing the most important thing, which is playing. Be cautious not to overuse new tricks, the redundancy will be obvious.

In my quest for the magic instruction book, or online course, or local instructor (aka "the new hope for making progress") ... I have found that most only add to the struggle and slow me down. The key is to grab something quick if you can, try it out, and move on. If it sticks, it sticks. Don't let it become the center of everything else you do. Do let it add to your musical vocabulary. I spent years learning chord melodies that I never play.

Here's a guiding principle:

If you want to make the most out of your learning time, you have to be comfortable with the environment you are practicing in. If being in the presence of others or if any other kind of distraction is likely to throw you off ... try to correct that first. Your guitar time is relationship time with your instrument. Your inner voice appears when you become one with it ... or better said when it becomes an extension of you. Building skills and technique via your own approach reduces stress. You're not trying to figure out something overly foreign, you're in the process of connecting with your inner creativity by exploring possibilities and building on what you already know. You have to get into the moment. This is how you put feel into your playing. Practice should be fun, not agony.

Be patient. The guitar reveals its secrets slowly over time. You build skill in baby steps.

Connecting the dots on scales ...

Mastery comes with comfort on a section of the neck. The A minor pentatonic in the 5th position is a mainstay that most guitarists master quickly. In the 3rd position, its G minor, in the 7th position its B minor. Master it once and you can play in any minor key by simply shifting positions. The pentatonic is easily applied to blues, jazz, rock and country. It's a very worthy learning investment. Avoid diagrams that include the whole neck if possible. You want to deliberately focus on a four to five fret section of the neck when learning a new pattern.

Once you have comfort with a pentatonic pattern in a certain position, there are four other pentatonic finger patterns that give you access to the same scale on different neck positions. Teach yourself one position at a time, then eventually all five. The second position you learn should be just above or below the position you already know well. Diagrams can be easily found via the internet. Don't rush through the patterns .

Playing a scale in different positions allows you to move up and down the neck more fluidly. When you move to a different position, the position of the notes are different enabling you to draw new and different sounds from the scale. This is vitally important to understand. Get very comfortable with two adjacent positions, then move between them. This will add to your confidence very quickly. You will find notes and phrases that you've heard some of the greats play. The greats don't own these notes, add subtle changes that make them yours. We all draw from the same twelve notes. That's all there are.

Keep in mind that you may wind up favoring some positions over others. That's okay. Your comfort with a pattern position depends on how much time you spend with it and how easily you can tie it to another position. Position jumping is okay too. Moving to a non-adjacent position gives you more flexibility over the complete tonal register.

Perspective on pentatonic scales:

Pentatonics have a bit of a stigma in that they are fairly easy to learn and everyone plays them. In the early years, I avoided pentatonics. I wanted a more sophisticated sound, yet never realized how important the pentatonic was in finding "my" sound. Playing it as a scale will soon be boring. Playing it with technique can make it sing. Give it time to come alive. Pentatonics are a good foundation that can be easily expanded upon by including a targeted note outside the structure. If you never tried an A minor pentatonic over an A minor blues track, it should be the very next thing you do. Then move it to other minor keys.

Scales, Noodling and Experimentation ...

We all noodle on scales. That's how we experiment and learn. Noodling is exploration. You might be running up and down a new scale to get comfortable with it or skipping around a familiar scale trying to tease something new out of it. Both are valid and worthy. Experimentation turns part of a scale into a new lick. Never stop experimenting.

When you noodle, you might also tend to be playing non-stop notes. The truth is that you're training yourself to play non-stop and at the same time impeding your "musical" progress. Try to catch yourself doing this, then hit the pause button in your head.

Playing non-stop, no matter how impressive or unimpressive, rarely leads to a good outcome. There may be some great phrases and skill inherent in what you are doing, but there needs to be some space too. Hence, noodling can be counter productive.

Shorter phrases are much easier to work with. Experiment with a slight bend or slide. Finding a blue note that works will add sophistication to your playing. Repeating a phrase helps you develop a hook. Slightly altering a phrase will help you experiment and develop more vocabulary.

There are only twelve notes in all of music. The first twelve frets of a guitar provide seventy-two different options for playing them. A key starting point is to lock into one position and get comfortable with it. Then expand from there.

When in practice, experimentation is your best teacher. During practice, don't hold yourself to the "perfection" standard. Learning is about making mistakes while you go, and then learning how to avoid them.

When others are present or appear during practice, you may tighten up for fear of sounding bad in front of them. It's best that practice time be private time alone. Progress comes thru experimentation. You have to be comfortable in your practice environment and willing to make mistakes without getting frustrated. It is unrealistic to believe that you will ever walk out of a practice session without hitting a few bad notes. Expect that it will happen. If it doesn't, you're not experimenting.

Ultimately, your playing will become more polished through this practicing experience, which in turn builds your confidence as a player.

Mechanical Patterns ...

There are some very gimmicky techniques such as the 3 note per string concept. It diagrams out a pattern in which 3 notes per string are played horizontally and vertically, moving down and across the fingerboard. These patterns are meant to aid playing across the entire fretboard quickly while maintaining some musical sense. Advocates extend the idea with 4 notes per string, then 5 and so on.

I call these mechanical patterns because they are just that, mechanical versus musical. The fingerboard is next to impossible to grasp in its totality all at once. The mechanical pattern provides a path that can be memorized by your “visual” memory. This is why they have some level of popularity. I am personally not an advocate. After decades of playing I still find it hard to grasp musically. The concept is good for training muscle memory which can ultimately work against you when exploring new ideas on a single string or any other note not in the pattern. Mechanical playing can make you fast and flashy, but it can limit you in other more musically important ways.

I do advocate moving up and down vertically on a single string such that it helps me connect horizontal patterns within my grasp. I like to know where any one particular string can bring me. Exploring single string ideas can quickly lead to advancement, especially when you start to connect single string ideas to other horizontal ideas.

Meet the relatives ...

Major and minor scales relate to each other. They are “relatives”. The 6th tone of any major scale represents its relative minor scale. In the key of C major, A minor would be the relative. In the key of G major, E minor would be the relative and so on. This means that they can be used interchangeably. If you are playing in the key of A minor, you can move to a C major scale position and it would work just fine.

In regard to owning a section of the neck, the C major scale in the 7th position is an essential scale to learn if you don't already know it. It lends itself very nicely as a connection to the A minor pentatonic in the 5th position. By becoming very proficient on these two scales alone, you can become very fluent in the whole mid section of the fretboard. The combined pattern can then be moved up two frets to play in G minor or down two frets to play in B minor providing a fast-easy structure to play in 3 keys and move between two very important positions. Additionally, the C Major scale in the 7th position has a very natural fingering and can be moved to play in any major scale when you change its position based on the root note. Slight alterations of this scale will lead you to more exotic sounds and modal playing.

Using both hands ...

As lead guitar players, we spend a lot of time focusing on what the fretboard hand is doing. As you start to build technique, the picking hand becomes your best friend. How so? Rhythm. We tend to think of rhythm in regard to the strumming of strings. Rhythm is a pattern of movement that also applies to lead.

Your picking hand allows you to syncopate the notes. Just as you wouldn't strum a single backing rhythm throughout an entire piece, variation in your picking rhythm is equally important. Muting the string with the palm is a favorite picking technique that allows me to syncopate against the background rhythm. It's a great way to practice rhythmic picking. Try it on a single note. If your body starts to move when you do this, it's a really good sign that you're getting it.

Another picking hand technique is being conscious of "run on" sentences. The sound starts with the pick. Always be deliberate about limiting the notes of a phrase. Remember that your listeners are trying to follow along. Don't wear them out.

After a period of silence, coming back in on beat 1 of a measure is natural. Stretch the pause a little longer and come in on 2, 3 or 4. This isn't easy at first because it feels off. Yet it makes a big difference in how your lead will sound. Force your ear to hear a new possibility. Beat 4 is always great for a grace note that leads to the following bar's 1. Starting a phrase on beat 2 is ideal for shorter phrasing.

Breathing room ...

Breathing room is just that. As aspiring lead players we tend to play lots of lead from start to finish. When a piece of music is starting to play, try not to jump in immediately. Give it a few measures to set the mood. This will help you "hear" a starting point for the lead to break in more elegantly. Listen for other points in the tune where the background can carry itself. These are opportunities to pause the lead and contemplate where and how to come back in.

If you are recording music, at some point you will be drawn to play multiple lead lines simultaneously. This is great fun as you weave lines that talk to each other or play over each other to get more complex sounds. In the excitement and energy of all this playing, it is easy to overplay and create confusing note congestion. When you are skilled at editing tracks in your DAW, find places to back off and cut notes when the dual lead lines seem to be shouting at each other.

The distance between the notes ...

Theoretically, the distance between two notes in a key is called an interval. All the different intervals have names. Understanding the names and distances for a study in theory is common in many guitar courses you can find online or on the shelf. Do, Re, Me, etc. are examples of intervals. Sound out the difference between Do to Re and Do to Me (these are not their formal names).

The practicality on guitar is awareness that an interval is useful in several ways. If you play two notes simultaneously (aka a “double stop”), you are playing an interval. Most guitarists start by playing octaves since they are easy to find.

Intervals have finger patterns which can be found online. I suggest starting with 3rds for easy fingering on two adjacent strings. 6ths are widely used and will sound very familiar when you start using them. Octaves are very common in jazz. You Tube is a great resource for getting familiar with intervals. Adding ascending or descending intervals to a short phrase can really spice things up. Plus, they get you moving up and down the neck.

I also use the concept of intervals in another way. I put them to work as a rut buster. The idea is to reach for a note in the scale you don't typically go to next. Skip over a string, experiment, go for a different distance and reach for something new to see where it leads you. Start slow, pick your intervals for impact. Syncopate between them. Keep in mind that you can play intervals simultaneously (two notes together) or in tandem (one note after the other).

Sensitivity ...

Playing with sensitivity adds a level of elegance to your playing. I approach sensitivity in two ways. First, it comes down to how hard or soft I pick a note to change between playing louder or lower (the attack). Varying your loudness or softness keeps the listener dynamically engaged. Slide into notes, then let them ring to a fade ... this will help you create short, more impactful bursts.

Sensitivity also comes down to note selection and space. If you are listening to a backing track, listen for a spot to play one note that sounds really good. This is the beginning of sensitive playing. Next listen for a spot to play that note again (perhaps more loudly or more softly) ... then follow it with an interval that sounds great. Experiment and you will soon latch on to the idea. Keep it simple.

Why learn some cover tunes?

Cover tunes are often timeless and loved by the masses. They all seem to have unique magical components that have great appeal.

Learning a few cover tunes will help you in many ways. First, learning the tune will add to your skill as you search to find the notes that make up the melody. This will add new bits and pieces to your vocabulary that can be used elsewhere. Being familiar with the tune will allow your ear to better guide you on the fretboard.

Cover tunes are great learning tools because you already know the vibe and the path the tune takes. You're already prepared to expect changes in the tune, allowing you to contemplate a response to that change.

A big advantage of playing lead against a familiar background starts with the melody that's already available to you. Instead of constantly repeating it throughout the song the way a vocal would, start to improvise off the melody after it has had a chance to establish itself in the early measures. This is easily done by picking a few notes in the melody and adding notes that extend it out a little further. It's highly likely you can find a backing track for most cover tunes. Start with one you love.

Before the Beatles became famous, they were each experienced cover tune musicians. They had a strong foundation in well crafted society music that enabled them to ultimately create sounds of their own that changed the world of music forever.

The notion of resolve ...

Resolve simply means winding up somewhere. Music ultimately wants to resolve. Dominant 7th chords always want to resolve to either a major or minor chord. The progression wants to find home. Resolve also can imply moving from dissonance to consonance.

The same is true for lead playing. The final note in a run should leave the listener in a place where the emotion is complete and can rest. You will easily hear this in cover tune melodies. Resolve is one of the many reasons these pieces are famous.

Lack of resolve in a phrase is not always bad. It creates tension and energy, which then can be resolved. Repetitious phrases can be used to create tension. Ultimately, it's the resolution that makes the entire passage complete.

Modulation ...

Modulation simply means that a section of a tune shifts to another key. If you're not aware that it's coming you might suddenly feel lost.

Many tunes, including covers, use modulation to keep the music interesting. Quite often, the background arrangement doesn't change structurally. Typically, the same chord movement is just played up or down a half step, although no rule dictates that it should be a half step. A half step on the guitar is one fret.

For example, if the A minor pentatonic is working just fine in the early part of the piece and a modulation comes into play, your lead fingering pattern doesn't have to change. You just have to find the position where it starts to work again. Start by moving down the neck one fret, it could possibly be a tried and true modulation that moves in this fashion.

There are other instances when a modulation can shift between major and minor keys. In George Harrison's classic rock hit "While My Guitar Gently Weeps", the tune starts out in A minor. When the change comes, he moves it to A major. It's a brilliant shift of key that opens the B section of the tune.

On speed ...

Is speed important? Is speed impressive? If done well, sure. Watch Tommy Emmanuel play a fast blues on You Tube. The richness of his playing is truly outstanding. Hendrix, Benson and so many others developed the ability to go airborne if they wanted to. They no doubt have followers that equate speed with musical quality.

Here is where I discern the difference. As a life long aspiring musician, the music I am capable of playing and the artistry comes first. I believe that variation in speed is important, moving from slow to fast (or fast to slow) is an important element of playing. To practice playing very fast for the sake of playing very fast to impress others, its just not my thing. Nor does it have to be yours if you think along the same lines. Nevertheless, if rapid fire playing is a skill you long desire, then by all means you should pursue it. And do it well.

In defense of all the aspiring shredders out there ... if you can make fast playing sound musical versus just very fast, then you are a very impressive player.

Take notes / Make notes ...

Considering that this is a summary document that includes thousands of words, it goes without saying that the amount of information regarding guitar playing is beyond what most of us can think about in a day or remember to ultimately get to.

When a topic grabs your attention, there are bits and pieces of information trying to guide you. Make notes by jotting down a thought or an idea you want to try. An example of this might be how to alter a pentatonic scale to become a blues scale or a mode. Another thought may be to jot down a reminder on the next position pattern you want to try out such as going from two pentatonic patterns to three, then four, then ultimately all five.

Why is this important? It builds your skill base and technique in a methodical way that makes sense to you.

Stevie Ray Vaughn mastered how to play both major and minor pentatonics over the same major blues arrangement. Both work for major blues. So does the Mixolydian mode combined with the blues scale. These combined patterns lend themselves to more fluidity on the fretboard. Interested? Make a note of this.

Motifs & Themes ...

This is actually a tip I learned from a Larry Carlton video course. A motif is nothing more than a very short phrase, typically five notes or less. Motifs are considered very valuable when improvising during the beginning of jam tune. The idea is that the motif is used to give the other players and audience a sense of where you are at and where you might be going. It establishes an early groove. It's the starting point.

Motifs are typically repeated, then extended upon to keep things interesting. Through the course of the tune, motifs and their variations create the theme of the piece, which provides the foundation that both players and listeners can center on.

The value of this concept is that it keeps you from being all over the place. It keeps the path of the music from getting confused or lost. In summary, a motif is a lead line made up of a few notes that can be used as your center of gravity during the piece. It's there for you to go back to and extend upon.

So what about tabbed licks?

Spending time learning a lick that someone else created probably has more downside than upside. The upside is that you might visualize a new way to create a phrase previously not within your grasp. Perhaps you can alter it in a way to call it your own.

The downside is greater. Learning someone else's lick is often slow and painful. Despite all the instruction, your version of it is likely not to be exactly the same. Your skills, technique and gear are simply different as will be your interpretation.

The exercise of learning predetermined licks from a tab is difficult. Trying to perfectly execute the timing, bends and position movements from a chart takes on a whole new discipline.

Think of it this way. If you ultimately learn licks from some method that helps you piece them together, are you playing music from your soul? Or are you reciting pre-constructed lines from rote for the sake of playing something that works?

Licks are often written against specific chords. What happens when the chord changes that you're playing against start changing? You might find yourself lost as to where to go next. I have literally given away dozens of lick books. I find it too hard to make these licks mine and too exciting when I make genuine, authentic progress without them.

In the early days of learning guitar, it is indeed an accomplishment to learn a famous guitar phrase that we can play in front of others. Take the intro to Stairway to Heaven for example. I'm sure there aren't too many players who haven't taken a stab at it, it's beautiful and fairly easy. But then there's the mind blowing solo in the middle of the tune. Over the decades, I don't believe I've ever heard anyone capture it the way its recorded on the album. For all the hours spent attempting to do so, what has one accomplished? If sounding almost like the original is good enough, that's probably as good as it will get. In the process of all that, finding your own voice isn't given the attention it requires.

For all the above reasons, I have dropped tabbed licks from my course of ongoing study.

Defining your own style ...

There's such an amazing array of musical styles. Blues, Rock, Classic Rock, Metal, Funk, Jazz, Smooth Jazz, Ambient, Chill, House, Electronic, Gypsy, Praise & Worship, Country, Classical, Punk, Hip Hop, New Age, Bluegrass, Indie, Swing, Afro-Cuban, Latin, Flamenco, World, Celtic, Folk and Fusion ... to name a few.

Many players center on a style and lock into it. Clapton and the blues go together. A particular genre may have great appeal to you and locking into it may help you advance more quickly within its borders. Your style is defined. This is perfectly fine.

Then there's a host of us who dabble in a variety of genres with the playing not being quite pure to any one of them. If this is you, don't fret over it. This is me as well. I always felt that I lean more toward the jazz side of things ... yet I find bebop scales annoying and I never gained an ear for pure traditional jazz. I enjoy smooth jazz if it has artistry, but not at all if it's over polished for commercial use. I was once addicted to the bossa nova, then found swing to be fun. I most certainly can't deny that a level of blues is evident in my playing. It's the one that flows out most naturally.

I was never too much of a Country fan (apologies if you are, just personal preference). Yet I was totally intrigued by Marshall Tucker's use of acoustic lead that was very non-traditional in that it had jazz elements to it. Their lead player had a big influence on me. I listened, loved it and learned from it. And they added some super tasty sax to their work in a very natural way. That's the key. Follow what you love.

The moral of the story is that being a cross over stylist is absolutely fine. We're not forced to put a label on what we do. Don't feel compelled to fit in a box.

Playing with others ...

Playing with others can be a blessing or a curse. On the optimistic side, players who are well suited to play together create an energy and vibe between them that can be quite profound. They can become connected through the music, intently in tune and communicating musically with each other on an entirely different plane. They can each add their own unique element to the message as they come together in a common theme and in subtle ways. It's an amazing experience.

On the other hand, just jamming with others who are at different levels of playing can often be painful. The more limited players are often not capable of creating a setting where musical magic can happen. The key is to go into the session with the right expectations. This is not a ding on newer players. It's just the reality of the setting.

Un-Caged ...

The CAGED system is a note pattern system based on the open chords that create its name. Its value is highly debated. I personally have made several attempts at it only to find myself more comfortable without it. I find it hard to find an open chord elsewhere on the neck by barring it and then translating it to note choices on the fly. It's not a recommendation that I would make.

Arpeggios and Triads ...

Arpeggios are simply chord tones played in short phrases. If you are jamming over a chord and need a few sweet notes, pluck tones from the chord itself. Arpeggios are safe in that they will always sound good, and they can help break up or connect other phrases to avoid a scale like sound.

If you already read the section on intervals (the distance between the notes), you already have an understanding of triads. A triad is a three-note chord. Hence, a triad can be used as an arpeggio either strummed or plucked as a sequence of notes. For example, if a C major chord is being played, the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the chord make up the major triad, namely the notes C, E and G. Triads can be inverted, meaning you can play C, E then G (called the root triad) or E, G, then C (the first inversion) or finally G, C then E (the second inversion). By flattening the 3rd (in this case E to E flat), the triad becomes a minor triad which is applied to the Cm chord. Minor triads can also be inverted in the same manner. Look for online patterns and experiment.

Using a hang tone ...

An easy and interesting technique is to let a note hang. What do I mean by that? When you are in the midst of playing a run, stop on a note that makes it an interesting place to stop. Just stop and let it continue to ring out and fade. This will either be a tension note or a resolve note. It doesn't matter, you are experimenting.

Several things happen when you do this. First, you create the all-important space. You might hear a new direction that the note is trying to take you. It can also just create a longer moment for that note to shine on its own, while possibly creating suspense as to what comes next. It can be played by itself as a statement where the lead might otherwise be resting. It doesn't have to hang for too long to have an impact. Hang tones are great for adding emphasis to a line.

Modal Confusion ...

Most people struggle with the modes (which are also called the church modes). They are often very poorly explained and are made even more confusing by the Greek names they were given. There are two important revelations concerning the modes. First, they are scales. The C Major scale in the 7th position is the same as the C Ionian mode, no difference in regard to the note make up. So what is the difference? The background chords. Certain modes apply very well to certain chords. If a tune has a particular section that is very modal by virtue of its chord changes, playing notes from an appropriate mode can provide notes you may not have previously considered or reached for.

If you are inclined to try a mode, start with a single chord. A great mode for starters is the Mixolydian, which has a very bluesy sound to it. Mixolydian is best used over dominant 7th chords. Find or create a C7 background, then play the C Major scale in the 7th position ... except be sure to flat the B note. C Major with a flatted B is the C Mixolydian scale. Flattening the 7th note of any major scale gives you its Mixolydian counterpart. The altered note, in this case B flat, is the note you want to emphasize while playing over the chord. It's the note that gives you the Mixolydian sound. It's also an arpeggio note.

Modes are deemed either major or minor. The C Major scale in the 7th position is also the A minor natural scale. It's also called the A Aeolian mode. Aeolian is a minor mode. Feel free to call it what you want. Just be sure to connect it to your A minor pentatonic positions.

And lastly for now, move the C Major scale in the 7th position to the second position (you may recognize it as the G scale). It is also called the C Lydian scale. Lydian is a major mode. Guitarists use it to create a happy sound and it works best against Lydian rhythms (such as G to C vamps). Sharp a scale's 4th degree (in this case the F note in the C scale becomes F#) and you have C Lydian which is the same as G Major. Academics will argue that the notes are ordered differently from first to last, yet the notes are the same and we don't have to play them in order.

I find the modes to be great if I am playing against a tried and true background where I know the mode will work and the changes are simple. I find it easier to occasionally add the emphasis note without overthinking the whole modal structure. The limitation is that you need to know the chord changes hands down to get it right. **Any questions on why modes are so confusing?**

Building your vocabulary one section at a time ...

What separates great guitarists from everyone else is the level of musical vocabulary they have developed on the guitar. Building vocabulary doesn't necessarily mean that you work to have hundreds of licks at your command at any given time.

Building vocabulary starts with being comfortable with note choices in a certain area of the neck. When you "own" a section of the neck, you are able to play notes from it that work well together. As you begin to own new sections of the neck and start connecting them to other sections that you own ... you start adding more to your vocabulary. This approach allows you to explore your creativity while building on your own signature style. A section of the neck can be horizontal and across the strings, or it can be vertical going up and down the strings. Either horizontal or vertical playing can start with just one string or two. You decide on the section you want to master by defining an area that is not too difficult for you to grasp. Noodling on different note combinations allows you to decide what works and what to keep.

Repetition ...

There was a time in my studies that I was totally against note repetition. I thought it was gimmicky until I listened to other players use it very effectively. The key is to use repetition tastefully so that:

- 1) It doesn't become too predictable or boring
- 2) It does restate a motif or theme
- 3) It makes the best use of a catchy short phrase when repeated

Thoughtful Improv ...

Improvisation always seems to be a bit of a mystery for many. How does one improvise randomly and get all the notes to sound good? The answer is thoughtful improv. It's not as random as most think. Successful improvisation requires a framework. You need a sense of the background you are playing against. A modal vamp can lead you to keeping the improv contained within a mode, a minor key for a sad background, major for happy, etc. Improv is attractive because there are no rules per se. Yet to sound good, the ear training and fretboard skills you develop during practice enable you to create on the fly. Improv is more than a wild, thoughtless run at the guitar. It requires listening for nuance in the background and responding to it musically with the skills you have already developed.

The Magic and Moment of Flow ...

The moment of flow happens when your playing comes from the unconscious mind. You are watching yourself play in a way that you had always hoped for, yet you may not be sure of exactly what it is you are doing ... But it sounds great anyway. It just seems to be happening in the moment. You've become one with the music erupting from your soul without thinking about "how to play guitar". It's a magical, inspiring moment that doesn't happen often enough, but when it does happen it is sure to be memorable.

The moment of flow can happen when you are playing with others or alone. The magic is that you are instantly transformed as a musician by realizing exactly what you are capable of playing. It is the essence of playing on the fly. It will create a musical joy in your heart. It is so worth the work to get there. And that's all it is. Work. Work hard. Play hard.

In Conclusion ...

This course has always been intended to be a level of "experience" sharing that can help you progress more quickly without getting mired in the clutter of guitar help. As you have seen, there is no specific instruction as to precisely what you might practice. That depends on your exploration of topics and choosing those that appeal to you. From there you can take the deeper dive.

You have probably noticed that I've referenced pentatonic scales throughout the various topics. This doesn't suggest that they are the "be all - end all" of great guitar playing. They are however one of the best ways to create a structural foundation and roadmap on the neck from which you can build on. Once you have mastery of the pentatonic shapes, they easily transform into more sophisticated patterns enabling you to experiment in any style. In addition, online material regarding pentatonics is vast ... and for good reason. Pentatonics are easily learned and very visual. They are easy to "see" on the fretboard as a cohesive set of notes to draw from. They always sound good, and the sounds you can draw from them are endless. If you were ever a fan of Pink Floyd, their guitarist David Gilmour is a pentatonic player. Listen to the sounds he can create. He's mastered how to draw deep emotion from them without ever sounding like a scale.

If you walk away from this with one thought only ... I hope that thought is about playing as much as you can. If you want to be a better player, then you must play and play long. Experience and time are the best teachers!