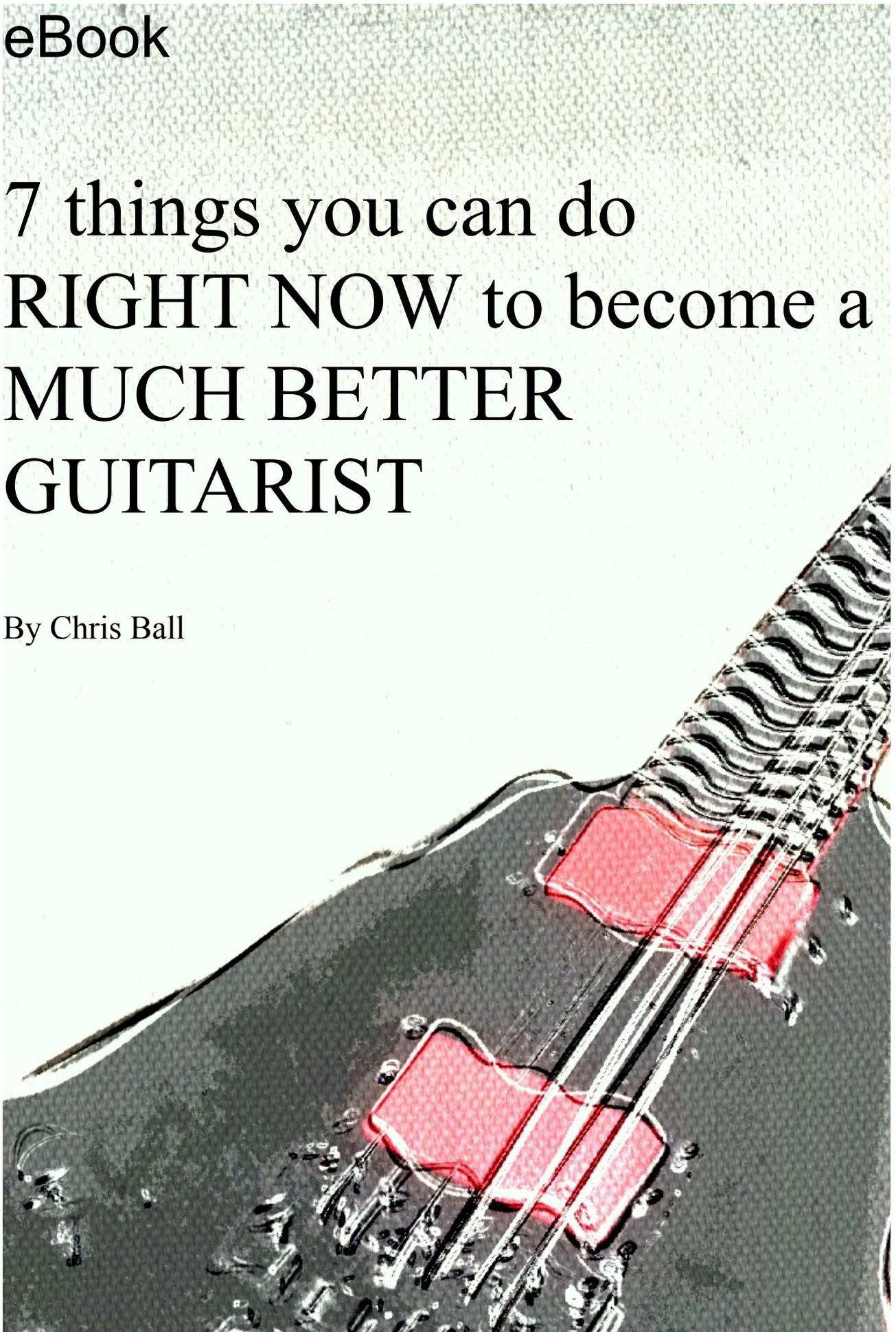


eBook

7 things you can do
RIGHT NOW to become a
MUCH BETTER
GUITARIST

By Chris Ball



I have written this eBook to give you some ULTRA-VALUABLE TIPS which will help you improve your guitar playing for FREE. If you like some of the ideas here, and are situated in the South-East suburbs of Melbourne or on the Mornington Peninsula, and would like to take your guitar playing to a much greater level, call me on 0403 931 724 or email me at chris.anthony.ball@gmail.com and let's talk about how my unique guitar lessons will help reduce the frustration of playing guitar and give you the tools and motivation to become a SUCCESS AT GUITAR.

Ok, here are the 7 FREE tips you've been waiting for...

1. Stop learning guitar in a LINEAR fashion

First, let me explain what I mean by a LINEAR fashion.

Learning guitar is a different process to other achievements we may undertake in life, such as learning maths or building a coffee table. The latter two examples require a logical, step-by-step approach whereas learning guitar, which is an art, requires a non-linear approach which demands that multiple skills are developed simultaneously, as opposed to sequentially. This is called a geometric approach to learning as we need to grow as a musician in multiple areas at once rather than in one area at a time.

To learn guitar like this, you must understand how to practice effectively so you are developing many skills at once.

An example of the difference between a linear method of learning guitar and a geometric method of learning guitar, would be as follows:

Linear:

1. Learn how to play and master every open chord.
2. Learn how to play all rhythms and strumming patterns in time.
3. Learn how to play and master the major scale in every key.
4. Learn how to play all barre chords in every key
5. Learn music theory
6. Learn how to play a solo
7. Learn how to write a solo
8. Learn how to improvise

Geometric:

- Learn a few basic chords and a couple of strumming patterns
- Learn one basic pattern of the major scale and learn how to play a simple melody
- Learn a basic pattern of the minor scale and learn how to create a simple melody
- Understand how a chord is constructed and begin learning a few extended chords
- Write a basic chord progression and practice improvising over it using another scale pattern, based on the minor-pentatonic scale.
- Understand the differences between how major, minor and pentatonic scales are constructed so you can easily learn more shapes and begin to transpose to other keys.

On the surface, there may not seem to be a big difference between the above two methods, but let's analyse them carefully. Firstly, the Linear list has been numbered whereas the Geometric list is simply bullet points.

This is not an accident. I am intentionally highlighting the difference that the linear process has a definite step-by-step process whereas the Geometric process contains elements which aren't necessarily always practiced in the order shown. The Linear process implies that one must master one skill before moving on to the next whereas this is not the case for the Geometric process in most cases.

You will also note that skills and techniques have often been combined into one step of the process in the Geometric method, whereas in the Linear process they are distinct and separate.

For example, instead of waiting to learn and master a large number of chords before there is any consideration given to timing and rhythm in how these chords are played, these two skills are combined in the first step by only learning a small number of chords before they are applied to a rhythm with a strumming pattern and attempted to be played in time. This illustrates the core difference between the Linear and Geometric learning process, which is simply: We should not wait to master one skill before we move onto another. This doesn't mean we will be 'leaving skills behind', we will definitely need to revisit them as required, it just means once we have satisfied a set number of requirements in one area, we will then expand and enhance our abilities by adding another area of focus.

To reiterate the above example, learn a few chords and then you are ready to start applying different rhythms to them. As another example, learn a few scale patterns and then you are ready to start improvising and writing solos. You are not waiting to master one skill before you start developing another.

Many instructional method books are written in a linear and logical way, and this is why they have proven to be much less effective in getting quick results in a student's progress than if the student were taught in a Geometric fashion. While these books often present some valid and good ideas, the ORDER in which these ideas should be learned is VERY IMPORTANT and is usually not addressed correctly.

If you haven't already, stop learning in a Linear fashion and start learning Geometrically. If you do this you will SAVE YEARS AND EVEN DECADES in reaching a great level of ability on guitar.

2. Set musical goals and start PLANNING your practice sessions

Most people have no plan of attack when it comes to practicing guitar, and as a result can often spend far too much time working on things that won't even help them progress to where they ultimately want to go. In order to improve faster as a guitarist, it is critical to divide each practice session into smaller chunks of time so you can focus on several pre-planned aspects of your guitar playing without getting distracted or carried away with something that will have little or no bearing on the results you ultimately want to achieve. Before you can effectively plan your practice sessions, it is important you first define your musical goals in terms of the guitar player you want to become. Visualize that person now. What can he or she do on guitar? What style do they play in? What techniques would they require in order to play that particular style? What types of scales and chord progressions would they use? What type of tone and texture would they achieve with their instrument?

These are some of the questions you should be asking yourself so you can define what is important for you to learn on guitar and therefore, what is important for you to practice. Once you can identify which scales, modes, techniques, chords and other concepts are important to you, you should divide your practice time into a schedule covering several of

these components in order to get the most out of the session, as you will want to be developing multiple skills concurrently. Refer to my #1 tip above as to why this is very important.

An example of a daily practice schedule might look like:

Scales: D minor scale at 5 th position. Ascending sequence.	10 mins
Chords: Chord progression C#m to E. Play 3 different ways.	15 mins
Rhythm: 16 th note strumming patterns	10 mins
Music theory: Learn and practice chords in the key of G major	15 mins
Improvisation: Use E minor pentatonic scale at 7 th position	20 mins
Arpeggios: Learn and practice arpeggio shapes of E major	20 mins
Total practice time	90 mins

Having a structured practice schedule like this means you would effectively work on skills covering scales, chords, rhythm, improvisation, arpeggios and music theory in one planned 90 min practice schedule. This is so much more beneficial to your progress and will lead to greater enjoyment than simply picking up the guitar with no plan and wasting time playing the same things you always play or spending too long on one item. Many guitarists do this and this is one of the big reasons why they are not yet great players.

Notice the language I used above. I referred to a 90 min PRACTICE session vs a 90 min PLAYING session. Putting the planning aspect aside, there is still a big difference in how quickly you will progress if you practice your guitar rather than simply play your guitar.

Having clarity in the above areas, and USING IT TO CONSISTENTLY CONSTRUCT practice schedules for each practice session will MASSIVELY REDUCE THE TIME it would otherwise take to reach a certain level or goal on guitar.

3. Remember to practice with a METRONOME

It's amazing how many guitarists there are who underestimate the importance of practicing with a metronome. You should be using a metronome nearly all of the time when practicing, as it is critical in order for your playing to be consistent and tight in terms of timing and rhythm.

It is also a great tool for developing technique, as one can measure the speed at which they can play a particular musical piece, phrase, riff or exercise and monitor how they are progressing with it over the course of weeks, months or even years. A metronome gives us feedback by providing measurable results in terms of our playing ability.

In order to effectively monitor your progress from a technical point of view, it is a great idea to keep a log of your metronome speeds in BPM vs date you achieved that speed. You should do this for each exercise or piece you are working on. It is also critical that you write down a goal which represents the speed at which you desire to be able to play that particular exercise or piece. It is much more likely you will succeed in playing at your desired level of speed if you set a goal and keep track of your BPM over time, as described above.

I can't overemphasize how important practicing with a metronome is. There will be a few occasions when you don't need to be using it, such as when you are first learning and memorising a new scale, arpeggio, solo or song, for example, as at that point your main focus is the cognitive aspects of learning the notes. But once you have the 'notes down',

so to speak, you should make sure you're reaching for that metronome!

If you've never used one in practice before, it may be a little frustrating getting used to, but persevere with it and before long you will see MASSIVE IMPROVEMENT in your timing, technique and overall guitar playing.

If you already use it consistently, ask yourself: Am I keeping track of my BPM and heading towards a goal which reflects my desired speed? Or am I just setting it to a random or comfortable speed? If you start doing the former over the latter, you will also start to see MASSIVE improvement as a guitarist.

One final note about metronomes: If you play in a band, or have a desire to play in a band, everyone will expect you to play in time, and there will certainly be problems if you can't. Practicing with a metronome or drum machine is the best way to prepare yourself to minimise this issue. If you want to be ready for the stage or the recording studio, you better be used to playing with a metronome.

4. Get setup to RECORD

A study was once conducted to determine the main differences between amateur and professional guitarists in terms of how they develop their musicianship. The study found that one of the major differences was that professional guitarists record themselves on a regular basis, whereas many amateur guitarists have never even heard themselves on a recording.

If you are not recording yourself on a regular basis, as a musician, you are missing out on a list of benefits, including:

- A recording provides an accurate reflection of your playing ability allowing you to self-assess strengths and weaknesses and identify areas in which you should improve.
- There are many things you may fail to notice when playing, that you will hear when listening back to a recording. These include: timing, tone, technique, vibrato, note sustain, unwanted string noise, dynamics, pitch problems, tuning problems, articulation of notes and chords and others. When you are playing or practicing guitar, your attention is focused on this, and you won't be able to concentrate on listening critically to your playing.
- Recording can be used as a great songwriting tool. There are limitless possibilities in how you can construct a song using techniques such as layering with multi-track recordings. It can also allow you to lay a foundation and then experiment with ideas over the top. For example, you can record a bass line, riff or chord progression and experiment with various melodies until you find something you like. Or you could lay down a drum beat and experiment with different rhythmic ideas on the guitar until you come up with a groove you are happy with.
- Recording is a great tool to use if you are in a band and you wish to communicate a new song idea to other band members. This can save you many hours in teaching individual members how to play the parts in your song, as instead, you can simply send them a recording and ask them to learn it.

Besides the above list, there are many other benefits that come with recording yourself.

In today's digital age there are dozens of affordable recording solutions which allow one to easily track or multi-track their instrument with very little setup time, inconvenience or expensive training and equipment. If you have a smartphone, there are basic apps which

can provide single and multitrack recording facilities that are easy to use anywhere, right there on your phone! If you are serious about developing as a musician, there should be no excuses as to why you aren't recording and listening back to yourself on a regular basis!

5. Centre your goals around the music you love the most

Many guitarists falsely believe that to be a great guitar player they must be proficient in all styles of music. This is simply not true. While a guitarist may choose to be proficient in more than one style, it is by no means a prerequisite. Moreover, unless there is a strong desire to play in many styles, it will only hold a player back thinking they need to be great at all styles as they will spread themselves too thin as they develop various skills needed by each style, and it will be much more difficult to achieve a level of excellence or mastery in any style.

Many of the great guitar players of our time have been very specific in the style of music at which they excel. Stevie Ray Vaughan was an amazing blues player and he seldom moved outside this genre. That did not stop him from being recognized as one of the all-time great blues-rock guitar players.

Yngwie Malmsteen was obsessed with the baroque and classical music of composers such as Paganini, Bach, Beethoven and Vivaldi, and as such, developed a style of neoclassical which was heavily influenced by them. He combined this with the hard rock and early heavy metal sound of bands such as Deep Purple and Queen. He did not feel the need to learn Jazz, Pop, Rock, Country as he was very focused on the type of music he loved. As a result he became a master in his own style of neoclassical hard rock without ever deviating far from that. (Occasionally he would incorporate blues rock influences such as Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton into his playing, but it still sounded very much like 'Yngwie', not the former.)

Remember, focus on developing only the skills that will allow you to play the music you love. Keep your practicing relevant to your goals, without diluting your results by spending time on things that aren't relevant to your goals.

If you do like multiple styles of music, which is quite common, as a priority, identify your favourite artist, band, song and focus on being able to integrate elements of their style into your own. For the same reasons that it is more valuable to be an expert in a particular field, rather than a jack-of-all-trades, with few exceptions, it is better to make it a priority to learn your favourite style of music over learning many styles of music.

6. Practice is repetition and repetition is practice

The great jazz guitar virtuoso Joe Pass once said, "if you can't play something twice, then it's not worth anything".

Hearing this years ago was a great lesson for me, as when soloing or improvising, I would often jump from one lick to another and another and before I knew it, I had forgotten or left behind everything I played. The other more important problem with jumping around like this too quickly is that it is more difficult to be expressive and it can often result in a series of random, senseless licks, and I think that is what Joe was cautioning players to avoid in his words of wisdom.

Instead of thinking you will learn faster by trying to squeeze as many thoughtless licks into the smallest amount of time possible, on the contrary, you will become a better player in a shorter amount of time by mastering a smaller number of more expressive licks, before moving on to more.

By repeating what you are playing, two things are happening:

1. You are developing the necessary technical skill to perform that particular phrase or piece correctly and consistently (provided you ensure the repetitions are played correctly).
2. You are more likely to have memorised the phrase or piece and be able to recall it in an improvisational or compositional situation.

7. Play from your heart, not with your fingers

Last, but certainly not least, this may be the most important lesson here.

As many scale patterns, chord shapes, arpeggios, modes, rhythms and theory that you learn and acquire, always remember, no one in a single lifetime can do everything that is possible in music, even if they spend 24 hours a day, 365 days a year practicing and playing music. Why am I telling you this?

I am telling you this because I do not want you to wait until you have learned every scale imaginable, every chord imaginable, every strumming pattern imaginable, every lick imaginable before you start playing music that is honest with who you are. Develop your AURAL SKILLS and listen to your inner ear and play what it wants to hear. This is what sets apart great players from amateurs. An amateur may have great technical skills and knowledge, but they will often neglect investing the time to explore playing the music that really expresses who they are. When they play it does not sound convincing, or it may be lacking passion or meaning. It might sound cool but it doesn't speak to the listener about who that person is. Think about your favourite guitarist. I bet when they play it sounds like THEM and only THEM. It sounds like they are speaking to the listener in their own way.

I am not suggesting you neglect the technical and theoretical aspects of learning guitar, in fact, the opposite is true. I am a strong advocate for becoming proficient in those areas, but they must be backed up by PURPOSE. What is the purpose you are learning them? I imagine it's not simply to IMPRESS people with dazzling skills. Although that can be appealing and cool to have, what I have found is audiences will always look past those players who are IMPRESSIVE in favour of those players THAT SPEAK TO THEM AND PLAY FROM THE HEART.

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