

# Soloing Pt. 1

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Soloing up and down the fretboard is a goal towards which many guitarists strive. To some, it can seem nearly impossible to do but the root of the problem is most likely a lack of knowledge and experience. Any budding guitarist can develop the skills to become a great soloist if they follow the steps outlined below. Keep track of your work and follow a daily practice regimen. Pretty soon you'll be playing circles around your friends.

A guitarist must develop a good ear, know the notes on the fretboard, as well as the notes in important scales and the patterns used to play these scales, but that's not enough. You also need to learn phrases, or licks, from recordings and jam along to progressions and songs. Building these skills simultaneously will help you become a better soloist.

Things you can do right now:

Learn every note on the fretboard. If you can't find, for example, a G# on the high E string past the 12<sup>th</sup> fret in a nanosecond, or every D note on every string without getting an aneurysm then you're going to be limited in your soloing. If you can't identify every note then get cracking on some homework. Print out some tabs of solos and write in the name of every single note. Do this for a pile of tabs and chances are you'll learn the fretboard. By the way, have your guitar in hand, find, and actually PLAY the notes on the fretboard itself. You'll have to use the chromatic scale and obviously not a fretboard note chart. Also, for bends, write the starting note and the target note. Everyday, do a couple of pages.

Complimentary to the above task, you should work towards identifying individual notes up and down the fretboard. Potentially, this can benefit the guitarist in a very short time. Target, for example, the E notes. Find every E note up and down the neck and you'll be able to spot D (2 frets down), D#/Eb (1 fret down), F (1 fret up), F# (2 frets up), G (3 frets up). We'll call it the proximity effect. Even if you do this for just the natural notes (A, B, C, D, E, F, G) you will gain a visual advantage when looking at the fretboard. Imagine soloing in E and all the E's just pop out at you. To do this, simply work through all the natural notes with your guitar in hand. Simply find and play all the A's, then all the B's, etc. This is an accelerated learning no-brainer and will greatly enhance your understanding of the fretboard.

Most good rock soloists use the pentatonic scale and pentatonic scale patterns. Of course, there's always that one chord that the scale won't work with, but you can get a lot of mileage out of a few pentatonic scales. Write out the notes of some pentatonic scales everyday, 10x each. You'll eventually learn these scales just like you'd learn to spell a list of vocabulary words. Plus, pentatonic scales only have 5 notes, so that makes things a little easier. And guess what. If you know the notes for the scales, and you know the notes on the fretboard, then you'll be able to play these scales up and down the fretboard. An organized approach would be to work with one scale per week or month. Move on to the next scale but keep working in scales you've learned. And, don't try to learn all the

scales at once as you'll retain more if you study less information more thoroughly. Start with the most common scales you might encounter when jamming with friends. And, save time by learning the relative major/minor pentatonic scales.

Try these to start:

C major / A minor pentatonic

G major / E minor pentatonic

D major / B minor pentatonic

A major / F# minor pentatonic

E major / C# minor pentatonic

Memorize the repeatable patterns you can use for these scales. This will allow you to solo immediately while you work on the slower, more thorough process of memorizing scales. If you learned the Let It Be solo, then you'll see the use of the C major pentatonic scale pattern in three positions. This is also A minor pentatonic and will work over pieces in A minor. More on patterns in a later section.

Next, learn to extend pentatonic boxes so that you can play in key up and down the neck. Start small and extend the box by a few frets. Work out some licks and play these all the time so that you can recall them instantly.

Learn other patterns to add to your pentatonic bag of tricks. Even though these notes may not be found in the pentatonic scale they can add another dimension to your playing. For example, try adding a B and F# to an A minor pentatonic scale or an E and a B to a D minor pentatonic scale.

Unison bends are a common trick on the guitar. You should practice unison bends on the B and E strings as well as the G and B strings.

Space. Great solos have a little space in them. Leaving space enables you to listen to the rest of the band, and developing good listening skills is a great way to improve your phrasing, timing, note choice, and overall groove. And, don't freak out when you have to improvise. A lot of folks tense up and psych themselves out when attempting to solo. Take a breath and relax, leave some space, and try peppering your solo with a few great licks rather than jamming in a billion notes. Obviously, doing all the aforementioned steps will help someone to relax when soloing. To be honest, if I didn't know the notes in the scales or on the fretboard, I'd freak out too.

Play along with lots of songs. Look up the chord changes and solo over the verses, choruses, even the solos themselves. Try to mimic the soloist when playing along and you'll develop your ear and your response time while training yourself to think on your feet. Learning the vocal melody and using it is a sure fire way to play a memorable solo.

Repetition. Repetition along with the use of a strong melody is one of those things that make music memorable and enjoyable. You should repeat certain phrases in your solos rather than play a long string of random notes.

Learn a bunch of solos. Great solos are packed with tasty note choices, licks, and phrasing and are textbook examples of what you should incorporate into your own solos. You need to steal every lick you can get your hands on and use them over and over so that they become second nature. Also, you should always be working on copying a great solo, note for note. Study the phrases and the chords over which they are played. Transpose these phrases by moving up or down the fretboard and use these phrases during jam sessions. This is exactly how the really accomplished players did it. Everyone from Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, Eddie Van Halen, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and many, many others mimicked great solos note for note. Here's probably the best piece of advice for a guitarist. You'll get more mileage from a few phrases painstakingly picked from a recording and learned by ear than you will by learning a bunch of licks from a book or tabs. This is not to say that books are bad, good Lord I'm not saying that. However, learning licks from a recording gives you a connection to music that you can only get by listening. Unfortunately, with the advent of online tabs many guitarists can simply look up tabs instead of learning by ear. Sounds harmless enough but there are consequences and rarely learning things by ear will impede your musical sensibilities. One of the biggest advantages guitarists possess is a fine tuned ear. This is because in the past a lot of rock, blues, and jazz guitarists could not find accurate transcriptions for songs and more specifically solos they wished to learn. So, they used their own ears, slowed down records, and literally wore records out deciphering every chord, riff, lick, inflection, bend, etc, on those records. I've done this myself but used a magic box to digitally slow music down. Before that I found a way to slow down tapes by using high speed dubbing on one boom box to record the normal speed playback from another. Complicated, but the result was a tape that played the songs at half speed. Same result as slowing down a record. The point is this, you can not possibly develop your ear if you always have the tabs or sheet music to help you out. Sometimes you have to take the long road. You have to study the recordings of great guitarists in the style you wish to pursue. Plus, it develops your ear, timing, and phrasing. And it's not just for rock, blues, and jazz as even the great flamenco guitarist Grisha Goryachev, for example, learned many of the performances of flamenco legends Sabicas and Paco De Lucia by listening to the recordings. Also, you'll get so good at learning by ear that you'll spot the incredible amount of mistakes made in online tabs and even some major sheet music publications. There are even Apps available that will slow down and loop music right on your phone. Of course, these use mp3's which are a considerable downgrade in sound quality from compact discs, which are in turn a downgrade from an analog sources such as tapes and records. A really good record player with a high quality needle connected to an all tube stereo with great speakers will sound vastly superior to an mp3 player with a pair of earbuds. There's no comparison and you owe it to yourself to listen to some great albums on records played through a great stereo. You'll will be amazed at what you've been missing.

To review these are some important steps to get you started..

- Go back and polish up any solos you've worked on.
- Print out some tabs and write in the notes.
- Write out the notes to the pentatonic scales you want to work on.
- Pick a lick to master and play it constantly over making it fit over a variety of songs.

To start off, try using the D minor pentatonic scale to solo over Another Brick in the Wall Pt. II and Sunshine of Your Love. Move it up and down the neck and try to find phrases you can repeat. You have to do a lot of this everyday to see any improvement. Stick with it and remember to jam to songs every day.

D minor pentatonic scale: D F G A C try adding E and B to this scale.

David Gilmour adds the E note in the Another Brick in the Wall Pt. II solo.

You have to work through the tough spots. If you can't play the D minor pentatonic scale everywhere on the fretboard, then you simply either do not know the notes in the scale or the notes on the fretboard. Keep working.