



This guide covers 6 essential steps you can take to start improvising blues on your saxophone.

What you'll need:

- Your saxophone
- Your ears
- Basic fingering ability on sax (if you've passed grade one or two you should be fine)
- A love of music... and willingness to make a few mistakes along the way!

If you need more detail on any of the steps check out our full guide on [How to improvise on saxophone](#).

Step 1: Learn how improvisation works

Improvisation is a topic that confuses a lot of musicians, and it can seem like magic when a skilled pro does it. That's why it's essential that you start out by making sure you understand what improvisation really is and how you do it.

Begin by covering the [3 fundamentals of improvisation](#) and then a [simple process you can use](#) to start experimenting in improvisation yourself.

Step 2: Learn the scale for one key

Now, the most important point:

Don't try to improvise in every key!

Pick just one key to focus on at first. Most beginner improvisers struggle because they're constantly switching keys and scales, making it hard for them to really develop their instinctive understanding of the scale and its notes.

So pick a key. Choose the major, not minor! Learn the key's **scale** up and down, various ways, until the notes and fingerings are second nature. Practice jumping from the root of the scale to each note in turn, playing each of the intervals from the tonic.

Step 3: Learn the arpeggio of the root chord

An *arpeggio* is the first, third and fifth notes of the scale you've been practising. This starts to take you beyond boring scales into more musical phrases and you can probably already start to feel an instinctive urge to make up little melodies and phrases using those notes. Then do the same for the IV chord and the V chord in your key. If you need to learn about the I-IV-V chords [start here](#).

Step 4: Learn Blues Chord Progressions

Now it's time to get bluesy! Most classic blues tracks follow a standard 12-bar blues progression, or a slight variation still using the I, IV and V7 chords. For your solo to sound good it's got to follow those chords.

Learn to recognise these [three-chord progressions](#) and play by ear using [chord tones](#).

Step 5: Branch out into Blues Scales

So far you've been using the basic major scale. Now explore the [minor pentatonic](#) and blues scales and then use the notes of these scales along with the chord progression when choosing what notes to play in your blues sax solo.

Step 6: Throw in some Blues Bends

Now you're playing suitable notes throughout the blues chord progressions, it's time to add more expression to your playing. You can do this with slight pitch bends on your notes by adjusting your embouchure to loosen and tighten slightly. Combine that with "blue notes": notes which are slight pitch variants of the notes of the scale.

So there you have it! How to improvise blues on sax in 6 easy steps. Depending on your theory background and fluency with fingering each step might take you a few days or a few weeks. Take your time and enjoy the experimentation. Remember the lessons from step one about exploring and making mistakes and integrating improvisation practice with your regular instrument practice – and you're sure to succeed. Enjoy!