



This guide covers 5 steps you can take to improvise jazz on your saxophone.

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

1. Master the Blues

"If a guy's playing blues, he's in high school. When he starts playing jazz he's going to college."

– B. B. King

The blues was the genesis of jazz and it still provides the perfect entryway. Before getting caught up in the complexities of jazz improvisation make sure you can improvise a decent solo over a 12-bar blues progression in a variety of keys and styles.

See our previous guide for details of [learning blues saxophone improvisation](#).

2. Follow the Changes

The simplest starting point for a good-sounding jazz solo is to make sure the notes you choose follow the changes – meaning they match up with the chords in the progression you are playing over.

Look up the lead sheet to see what the chord changes are in the song you're trying to solo on. Begin by simply playing the arpeggio of each chord up and down. Then experiment with creating licks from those same notes. From there you can branch out into other scales which match the chords.

3. Transcribe the Greats

As jazz experts Dr. Ed Byrne, William Flynn and Mike Lebrun recommended in our [Jazz Improv Experts Guide](#), transcribing solos you admire is a great way to train your ears, develop your inner musical instinct, and build up your own “vocabulary” for jazz.

Here are two great resources as you learn by transcribing great jazz sax solos:

[9 Classic Saxophone Solos for Transcription Newbies](#)

[Saxopedia's List of Transcriptions](#)

4. Get Rhythm

Hot rhythms and syncopation are hallmarks of jazz and if you want to play smokin' sax solos you can't overlook learning to swing and having a good sense of rhythm.

One easy way to push yourself rhythmically is to keep your note choices limited, for example by playing just two or three notes in your solo. Challenge yourself to create an interesting solo using rhythmic variations instead.

5. Speed it Up

Gradually increase the tempo you try to improvise at. When you start out, don't be embarrassed to choose slow standards and even set your metronome at half the intended tempo. Give yourself a chance to choose the notes to play.

As you improve, you can gradually speed up that tempo, becoming more proficient and more able to sit in with bands and keep up when soloing.

This has a side benefit: playing to a faster beat can force you to really choose carefully which notes to play and help remind you to give your lines space to breath.

Above all: Trust Your Ears

Don't get lost in jazz theory. Remember to spend as much time listening to great jazz improvisation as you do trying to play it yourself. Learn the “rules” and then trust your ears to let you go beyond them.

Ultimately if it sounds good, it is good.

Learn more: <http://eartra.in/sji>