



This guide covers 12 ways you can become a better improviser.

If you need more detail on any of the steps check out the full guide [Twelve Tips for Learning to Improvise Music](#).

1. Start From the Beginning

Many musicians begin improvising using a particular exercise or by trying to make up their own way by instinct. You can save yourself some time by learning the [basics of musical improvisation](#) and taking these [6 simple steps](#) to begin improvising. It's also a good idea to learn basic [music theory](#) so that you understand what notes, chords and chord progressions you can use.

2. Nurture an Attitude of Fun

Improvisation is a mind game. You need to have the right attitude if you are to succeed. You can't just think about the technicalities of which notes to play, you need to cultivate your inner musicality and be able to express it freely.

If you view improvisation as a necessary skill or a chore, you will never get very far. Improvising is about **fun and freedom in music** and if you remember this, you will be able to stay on track, even when facing challenges later on.

3. Focus on Fundamentals

Improvisation can quickly become complicated, especially in jazz. Don't let yourself get carried away in sophisticated theory and complex riffs.

Often the simplest musical phrases sound the best, and actually the complicated ones are based on those same fundamentals.

Master your keys, scales and chords to know clearly which notes are available to you in your improvisation and get to know these inside-out. You can go beyond them later, but time spent working on fundamentals is never time wasted.

4. Redefine "Mistake"

Improvisation can be scary because there's a bigger risk of playing wrong notes than when you play a pre-written piece of music.

The thing is, it's exactly that risk which makes improvisation exciting, for the musician and for the listener. To become a good improviser you need to embrace that risk and learn to be comfortable with the possibility of playing wrong notes.

There is a strategy you can use to make it more comfortable though: **redefine "mistake"**.

There aren't really any "wrong" notes when you improvise: even a note which sounds terrible can be made to sound intentional and musically interesting, depending on how you continue playing after it.

Treat each "mistake" as an opportunity to develop your ability to recover musically from unintended notes, and you will transform into a versatile and confident improviser.

5. Hear It *Before* You Play It

It is possible to improvise purely according to rules, following scale or fingering patterns and moving between notes essentially at random.

However, if you want to sound good and keep your improvisation interesting for yourself and the listener, you need to learn to audiate.

Audiation means imagining music in your head, and the best improvisers use it to create their solo in their mind *before* they play it on their instrument. It requires a well-developed musical ear and practice, but will be the key to true creativity in your improvising.

6. Listen Back

Improvisation happens in the moment, and it can seem like each improvisation is gone the moment after you play it.

If you want to improve quickly as an improviser you need to learn from each solo you play. The easiest way to do that is to simply record your performance and listen back afterwards. Give it careful attention and try to be constructively critical. Take these lessons into your next improvisation session.

7. Play Slower to Improve Faster

It's a common mistake to think that faster playing means more skill. It's true that it may require more technically proficient fingerwork, but when it comes to improvisation often it's harder to play a good solo slower than lightning-fast.

Try practicing improvisation at *half* your normal speed and you'll be surprised how much *more* care and precision is required to sound good, especially on the rhythm side of things.

8. Play the Long Game

To reach your improvisational potential you will need to be patient. Even the best improvisers took years to become so good.

Instead of being in a rush to be a great improviser a.s.a.p., try to keep a mindset of "continual improvement". Aim to be better today than you were yesterday and better this week than last week. Pretty soon those days and weeks add up and you will look back and see how far your patient practice has taken you.

9. Make Improvising a Game

Improvisation requires a creative and playful spirit - so why not take it a step further and literally treat it as a game?

You can create your own games or buy [books](#) packed with music improvisation games. You can even get sets of improvisation [cards](#) and dice.

Get together with friends and challenge each other to improvise in new ways. Make up new games each time you meet - improvising new ways to improvise!

10. Blank Slate Not Required

It's fun to be able to sit down and improvise music from a totally blank slate. But when you're learning it can actually be helpful to give yourself a starting point.

Try taking the start of the melody of the piece you're soloing over, or even just a few of its notes. Or you can apply [improvisational rules](#) to give yourself a flexible framework for improvising.

Using starting points like this can help you get past "improviser's block" and also give you a shortcut to an improvisation which sounds nicely musical.

11. Avoid Isolation (Sometimes)

Improvisation requires practice, and sometimes that's best done in private where you can feel fully relaxed and able to experiment. You can use recording to give yourself feedback.

Despite its name though, "soloing" doesn't have to be done solo, and you'll improve fastest if you collaborate with other musicians occasionally.

Find opportunities to get together with a friend or join a jam session to try improvising live with other musicians. You'll be surprised how welcoming they are and how useful the feedback from a "new set of ears" can be to improve your improvisation.

12. Be Brave

Improvising is risky by nature and it requires musical courage to do it. After you master the basics it's all too easy to get comfortable and just play the same simple kinds of solo each time you need to improvise.

Push yourself to keep going beyond your comfort zone. It's the only way to keep improving as an improviser. Find new pieces to solo over, new keys to play in, new genres to improvise for, new musicians to collaborate with.

It's good to be confident in your improvisation - but any time you start feeling too confident it's a sign that you haven't been pushing yourself to continue to improve.

Learn more: <http://eartra.in/12impcsfull>