

The following is a suggested method of practicing. My goal is to teach students how to think in regards to preparing guitar music. I believe both the things in this list and the order they are given will help students prepare for any assignment, quiz, or test. If you pay attention to and execute the following things throughout my course in the order presented here, you will likely always be prepared for any test or quiz.

Analysis: these things should all be observed in writing, mentally, or both by the student before practicing:

- Mood/style/genre.
- Written measure numbers in the music.
- Have a final tempo goal for performance.
- Note changes of meter (3/4 versus 4/4).
- Note any key changes.
- Have chords written in or if they are already there know what they are. Be able to play the chords either way.
- Be aware of and chord progressions (II V I, IV V I, etc).
- Note how fast the chords typically move and any significant changes (harmonic rhythm).
- Where are the phrases based on your previous analysis and how many measures long are they (phrase rhythm).
- Have an idea of the basic form as a result of the previous analysis (Song Form, ABA, etc).
- Know what dynamics/articulation/tone color you will likely do.

Preparation/Practice

- Can you answer identify all the points of analysis above?
- Can you clap the rhythms the with the metronome set at whole notes per minute? This exercise usually creates phrases by giving strong and weak accents at the level of whole notes per minute and half notes per minute, which I believe is ultimately the definition of phrasing. It has been my experience that the students start phrasing as a result of this exercise.
- Do you know all the notes and chords in the music (solfege and letter names)?
- Are all your LH and/or RH fingerings written in the music?
- Visualization: can you tell me what the left hand and/or right hand will be doing without the guitar in your hands while looking at the music?
- Can you play the piece at a very slow practice tempo (16th on the metronome = 40-80 beats per minute.
- Can you sing the melody with fixed DO syllables at a slow tempo while playing the part at the same time. Can you do this with the metronome set at whole notes per minute?

For a music student, I believe fingering should take place after the student has learned to sing the piece without the instrument and has done visualization. Those steps are the preparation for fingering. It is during the singing that you develop your interpretation of the piece (phrasing and articulation).

However, I want this process to work for students who have less sight singing and solfège experience. Thus I place it last and have it done only while playing at the same time. In either case, it is best to sing first, and then later sing while playing. This process develops a habit of putting the music on the guitar, not the guitar on the music.

Performance

-Can you sing using fixed DO solfège with the guitar, while strumming the chords, and without the guitar (I think singing without the guitar is perhaps too much for non majors, perhaps singing with the chords is also too difficult depending on the experience of the students)?

-Can you play in time not necessarily perfectly clean but with few time or rhythm mistakes at the assigned tempo?

-Are your notes connected?

-Is it memorized? Most assignments will not require memorization in guitar 101 courses for non majors.

How to solve problems technical problems (you can do this with both hands):

“After making a mistake, the top performers would play the passage again, but slow down or hesitate – without stopping – right before the place where they made a mistake the previous time.”