

Learn ANY Piece in 7 Easy Steps

The Famous
Formula to
Learn Music Fast

Classical
Guitar Shed
play beautifully



Learn new music quickly, with fewer fumbles and much better memory.

To learn guitar pieces well, it helps to have a reliable formula. When we make fewer mistakes and more correct repetitions, we learn faster.

This 7-step process will help you understand more of the music you play. You'll play more cleanly because you'll be more familiar with the music, looking at it from different angles.

You can also use this formula to troubleshoot difficult passages in your music. And you can use it to memorize music (more on this later).

As with any new routine, the first couple of times you use it may feel odd and foreign. But soon you'll be comfortable with the process and enjoy a deeper relationship with your pieces. Have fun!



Step 1

1. Make small sections

Many guitarists learn music by playing the entire piece over and over again. But this takes too long, reinforces bad habits, and doesn't fix problems.

Instead, we can practice better by working on small sections.

Step One is to create small sections in your music. These could be just one or two measures. Your small section may be a phrase or a segment of a phrase.

Bonus Tip: To make this step even more effective, choose sections that sound complete. To do this, always cross the bar-line. This will allow the music to resolve and sound more musical. Over time, your phrasing and musicality will improve, simply by adopting this small practice habit.

VS.

f *p* *p* *p* *p* *simile...*

T
A
B

Tip: cross the barline



Step 2

2. Know all the notes and musical markings

For the small section you're currently working on, look at every dot of ink in the music.

Notice which notes are included. Are there any sharps or flats? Are there any musical symbols or words?

Anything you don't understand, stop and look it up. This is the time to clear any confusion so you go forward with confidence.

At the very beginning, you may also enjoy reading about the musical style, the title, and the composer.

The image shows a snippet of musical notation for guitar on a treble clef staff. The tempo marking **Moderato** is written above the staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The notation includes a treble clef, a common time signature (C), and a series of notes with fingerings: 0, 3, 2, 4, 0, 2, 0, 3, 2, 0. Dynamic markings **f** and **p** are present, along with the instruction *simile...*. Several red arrows point to various elements with question marks: the treble clef, the tempo marking, the first note, the **f** dynamic, the first **p** dynamic, the *simile...* instruction, and the final note.

Step 3

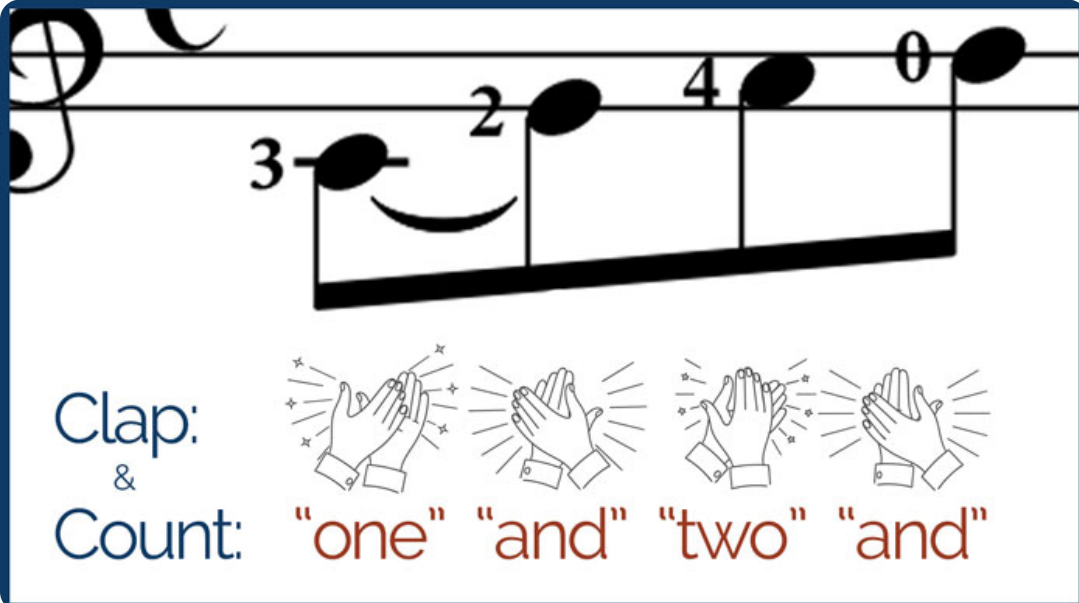
3. Clap and count the rhythm aloud

Before we figure out the positions and fingerings for each note, we can first master the rhythm. This will allow us to practice more accurately when we do move on to the notes.

If there are any unfamiliar rhythms, now is the time to investigate them.

Often in guitar music there are multiple rhythms playing at once. These could be a melody and bass or accompaniment. When we have more than one rhythm we can look at each separately, and then how they all fit together (the complete rhythm).

Warning: You may want to skip this step, but do so at your peril!



The diagram shows a musical staff with a treble clef. Four notes are placed on the staff: the first is on the third line (F4), the second on the second line (D4), the third on the fourth line (A4), and the fourth on the first space (C5). A bracket underneath the first two notes is labeled '3', and a bracket underneath the last two notes is labeled '4'. Below the staff, there are four illustrations of hands clapping, each with a starburst effect. To the left of these illustrations, the text 'Clap:' is written in blue, followed by an ampersand '&' in blue. Below that, the text 'Count:' is written in blue, followed by the words 'one', 'and', 'two', and 'and' in red, each corresponding to one of the clapping illustrations.

Clap:
&
Count: "one" "and" "two" "and"

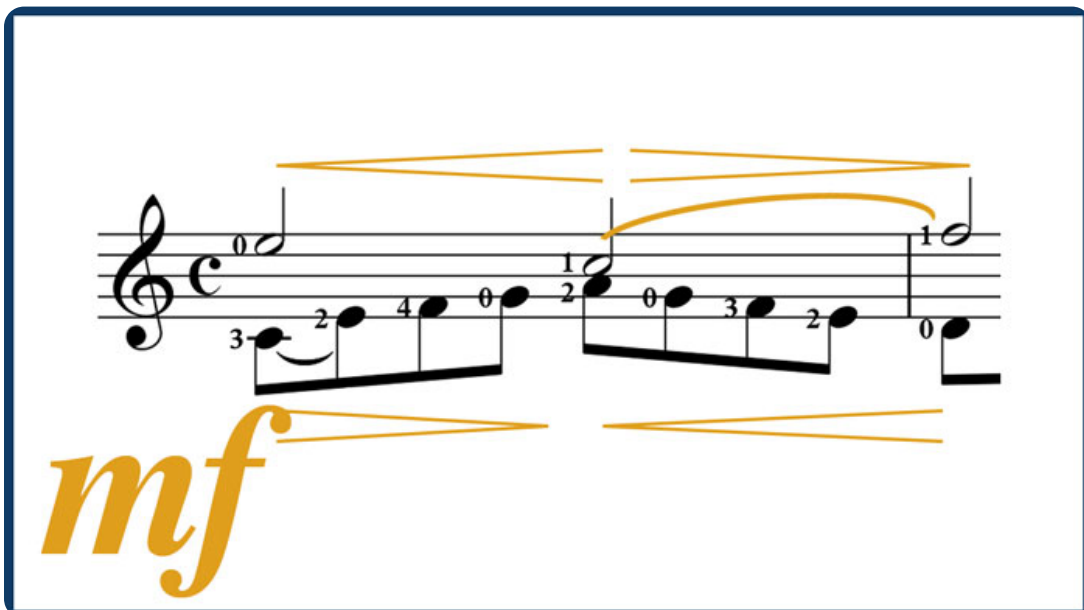
□ Step 3b

Optional Bonus Step (3B): Decide on phrasing

As we clap and count the rhythm we can optionally begin to decide on our phrasing. These are our swells and fades, lounds and softs, and connected or separated notes.

Without the distraction of fingerings and technical difficulties, we can count aloud using the volumes we choose. We can simulate these rises and falls, notes that pop out, and those that stay in the background.

We can always change these decisions later if we choose to. And making musical choices here will allow us to bring them into each progressive step. This will more deeply ingrain the music in our memory. And it will reveal new physical (technical) challenges within the music.





Step 4

4. Play the right hand alone

Step Four is to play the right hand alone, with no left hand. This may not sound good (just open strings), but it will help you avoid mistakes.

This is the time to either notice or decide on the fingering of every note in the small section. If the fingerings are given, use those. If not, choose your own fingerings and write them in the music (in pencil, so you can change them later should you choose).

Once you have the fingerings, play the section slowly in rhythm while counting aloud. This will reinforce the rhythm and allow you to better understand the right hand's patterns and movements.

This is also a wonderful time to review any form, positioning and movements you may be working on.





Step 5

5. Play the left hand alone

After mastering the right hand, play the left hand alone, counting aloud. This will not make much sound, because the right hand will be on hiatus.

Notice any hops, slides or shifts the fingers will need to make. Note any chords you recognize. Take special care to hold down each note for the full duration.

Move each finger in precise rhythm (continue to count aloud), and mind the placement of each finger on the strings.

You may be tempted to involve the right hand, but be strong!





Step 6

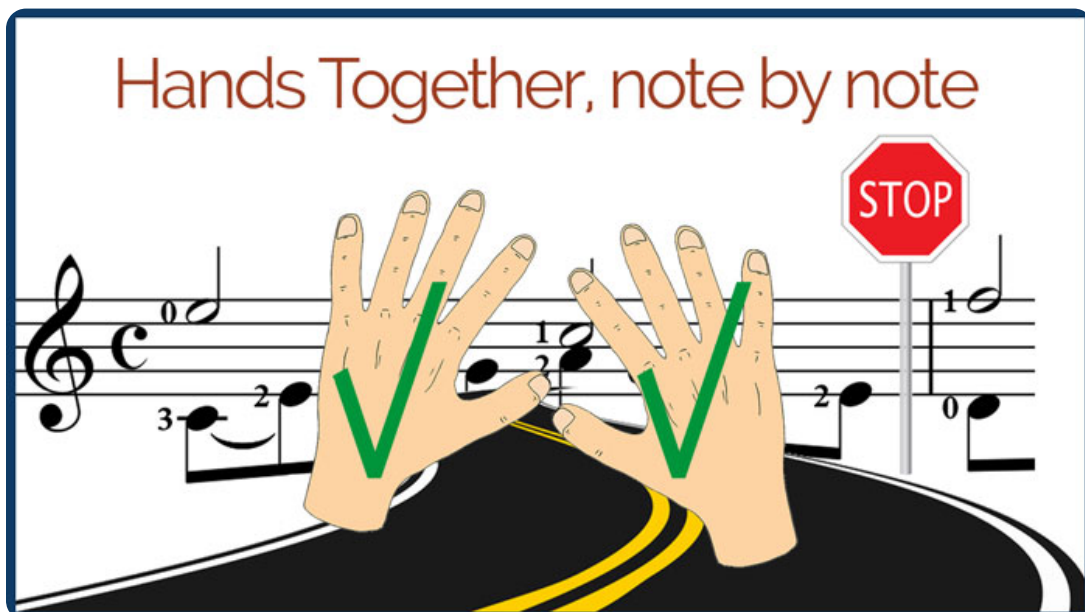
6. Play hands together, using corrective pauses

Once we have worked through the fine details of each hand separately we can put them together.

For this step, it's important to take it slow and not allow any mistakes. We can use "corrective pauses" to keep on track.

A "corrective pause" is when we stop and suspend the rhythm. Stopping when we need to will help us to avoid practicing the wrong fingerings in one or both hands. (It's usually the right hand that goes awry, so awareness in this step is key.)

The goal of this step is to combine the hands while eliminating any confusion as to how they work together. As usual, continue to count aloud (even if it's not steady, because of the pauses).





Step 7

7. Play the hands together, in rhythm

At last, we come to play the small section with both hands, in rhythm.

For the first few times at this step, we should stay slow and make sure all fingerings are consistent. And we can continue to count the rhythm aloud.

In this step, we should still have zero mistakes. If there is a mistake, we can go back to the previous steps.

Once we can play through with both hands in rhythm counting aloud, we can begin to pick up the speed, with or without a metronome. This should be at such a rate that we continue to play the correct fingerings and rhythms without error.





How to use the 7 Steps to memorize music

We can also use this formula to memorize music more easily.

After each step, simply look away from the music and play the small section from memory. Then look back to make sure you got everything right. Then do it again.

Often, just using the formula will allow us to mostly memorize new music. But this added step of forcing recall will even more deeply embed the music in our minds and bodies. The more often we do this, the easier it becomes.

And in our ongoing practice of the piece, we can choose a section and step in this process. We can then perform that step from memory. This will keep each element of the music crisp in our awareness.

Step 1:  then 
Step 2:  then 
Step 3:  then 
Step 4:  then 
etc. etc.



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