

A Fast Way to Teach Improvised Solos

At Stars & Catz, we strive to provide our teachers with the best teaching material possible. So we asked our guitar teachers the question... what's the fastest, easiest way to learn to solo, to an intermediate level, over almost any style of music? The following method was the collective answer... we've named it:

The Pentatonic Foundation Method

1. Give the student the **Pentatonic Scale** printout and introduce them to the simple joy of the pentatonic. Get them to run up and down the scale as homework and once they're ready, give them the **Flourish Drill** printout to really get them used to moving their fingers across the pattern. Next teach them tricks such as slides, bending, hammers etc. Get the student to begin simple improvisation of solos and riffs while you play backing. Play your backing so that the student is sometimes in the minor pentatonic 1st position and sometimes the major pentatonic 5th position (which are, obviously, exactly the same pattern). Once the student is fairly competent with this scale, move to step 2.
2. Give the student the **Pentatonic Scale + Blues** printout and open up the a'wailing and a'crying world of the blues! Essentially this will only be an additional 2 frets on top of the minor pentatonic scale. Point out some of the features of the blues scale like bending onto the blue notes etc. Get the student to improvise with the blues scale until they are competent with it then proceed to step 3.
3. Give the student the **Extended Pentatonic Scale** printout. The 'extended pentatonic' is simply the name we've given to 5 notes of the minor pentatonic 2nd position that can easily be added on top of the student's current knowledge to produce amazing results. Down the track you can fill the student in on the entire 2nd position but to begin with, the 5 highest notes are enough to open a whole new dimension of playing. Once the student can move seamlessly between the pentatonic or blues scale and the 'extended pentatonic', use tricks competently, understand which frets to bend and how far, and not make any mistakes with the scales... continue to step 4.
4. Give the student the **Pentatonic Scale + Major & Minor** printout. The natural minor scale amounts to 5 new frets on top of the minor pentatonic scale. Now it's the time to fill the student in on the fact that the natural minor scale is also a version of the major scale (5th position) as is the minor pentatonic for the major pentatonic. Now you can drop the bombshell... they already know 5 scales and, once they've mastered these new notes and know where to place the scales for specific keys / songs, they'll be able to solo over practically anything! (Wide-eyed surprise.) Keep getting them to improvise solos and riffs until they've explored the possibilities of this scale and are proficient across the newly added frets. Proceed to step 5.
5. Give them the **How to Place the Scales** and **Notes on the Top String** printouts. 'How to Place the Scales' is a step-by-step guide to working out a song's key and therefore where to place the scales for a solo. This knowledge needs to be memorised, so lots of on-the-spot testing, examples and scenarios should be posed until the student has it down.

Now we've reached our goal... the student can solo over practically anything and doesn't need any kind of reference material to do it... freedom!