

Practicing [DEPT]

Piece by Piece[HEAD]

Learn a song faster by dividing it into sections

When you have a new song you want to learn, what do you do? You start trying to play the whole thing from beginning to end, right? Unfortunately, our bodies and brains can't always keep up with our enthusiasm. Two days later, you can't even remember the first few lines, let alone the whole song.

But if you learn and practice a song piece by piece, rather than all at once, your fingers will fret the notes more easily, your brain will remember them better, and ultimately, you'll be able to play the song from start to finish—without stopping.

Find (and practice) a phrase. Just as written language is organized in sentences, music is organized in phrases (a riff or strum pattern are two examples). If your song isn't divided into such clear phrases, you need to look for the musical punctuation that, like periods and exclamation points, tells you where to pause and stop in the music.

Look at your sheet music and find the first rest or half note; that probably marks the end of the first phrase. (If you're learning the song by ear, listen for the natural pauses in the licks.) Now play that first phrase; it should be between one and four measures long. Does it feel like a complete musical thought? Keep playing it over and over until you feel comfortable fretting the notes, picking the strings, and playing in the right time.

Once you have the first phrase memorized, follow the same process to find and practice the second phrase.

Link the first two phrases. Learning individual riffs is great, but practicing two or more phrases together will help you ace those transitions when you're playing the complete song. Play the first phrase, then, instead of stopping after the last note, go right into the second phrase. Keep playing these two phrases together until the transition is smooth.

Keep moving through the song. Don't stop there. Move on to the third phrase—learn it by itself, play the second and third phrases together, then play the first, second, and third phrases. Keep moving like this throughout the song. Before you know it, you'll have the whole thing memorized *and* you'll be able to play it without stopping.

—*Nicole Solis*