



Technique

IV. Technique Basics 2



Technique

4. Technique Basics Using Scales **Part 2: Developing Speed**

1. Do you have ways to practice speed?

- Are there any exercises or methods you use to develop speed?

2. Were you taught any keys to playing fast?

- If so, what techniques or methods were you taught? Did you find them useful?

3. Do you struggle with tension?

- Have you ever experienced serious fatigue in your hands? Do you have methods for overcoming that?

4. What pieces or passages require great speed to execute?

- Please give some specific examples.

Developing Speed

Developing speed requires your technique to be regulated and in good working order. It's not the result of stubborn will- power, but careful regulation of foundational aspects of your technique. Improve each individual aspect and you will find an increase in your ability to play fast. Improve multiple aspects and your speed will develop at an exponential rate.

1) Soft and Light

“I will conclude... by recommending beginners never to practice forte, but constantly a mezzo voce (half your usual volume). By this means, they will avoid all constraint, stiffness of the arms and wrists, and hardness of touch. The fingers will also acquire more readily that suppleness, agility and varied ninety of touch so requisite for musical accent and expression.”

“The peculiar charm of the guitar is sweetness, delicacy, and flexibility of expression; Force should therefore be resorted to but sparingly, and only by the aid of... octaves and widely extended harmonies; never on single notes or close chords.”

— Giulio Regondi

This quote from one of the greatest guitar virtuosos of all time gives us some clues as to how he might have achieved his great skills of execution. Just looking at his compositions, you will find that any attempt to overuse your energy (i.e. play loud and heavy) will immediately create barriers. If you cannot play the following example from Regondi's 'Introduction et Caprice', just simply imagining it should give you an idea of the kind of virtuosity required to execute it. ([Click here to download Introduction et Caprice](#)).

I'm using an extreme example to make this point as clear as possible. If you played this page of music loud and heavy, then you would struggle to play it. Heed Regondi's advice and practice using at least half of your normal volume. You will avoid constraint, stiffness and hardness of touch. As Regondi points out, the charm of the guitar is sweetness, delicacy, and flexibility of expression - not force, loudness, etc.

When developing speed, practice soft and light. Apply this to scales, arpeggios and fast passages in pieces.

2) Accent

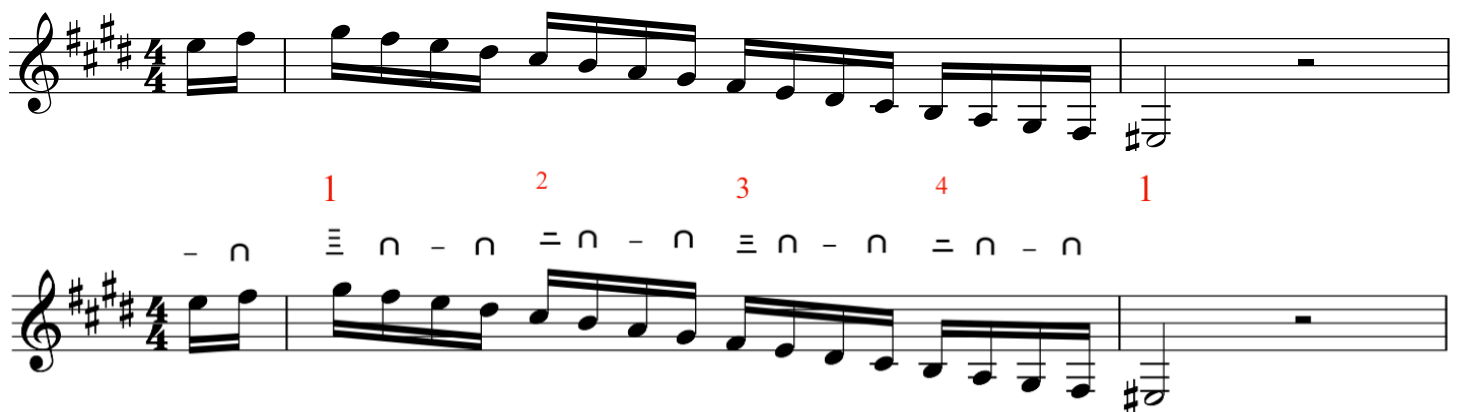
Like volume, accent is another form of energy that needs to be carefully regulated in order to allow for quick playing. If you play every note with an equal accent, then it will present another barrier for playing fast. But limit your accents and the notes will flow and organize themselves logically.

The dashes represent accented notes and the U represents unaccented notes. Note that there is a hierarchy of accents in each bar:

- Beat 1 receives the strongest accent (4 dashes)
- Beat 3 receives the second strongest accent (3 dashes)
- Beats 2 and 4 receive weaker accents than beats 1 and 3 (2 dashes)
- Offbeats (i.e. notes that fall halfway between the main beats) are slightly accented (1 dash)



Apply these accents to scales and the passages below.



3) Tension and Relaxation

Regulating tension and relaxation is important for your playing in general. But even more so when you want to develop your speed to new heights.

Relaxation = Freedom = Speed

Think of tension as a force that restricts freedom.

Think of relaxation as a force that enables freedom.

We often miss many opportunities to add relaxation into our playing and instead hold tension when it's not needed.

Think of there being a choreography between tension and relaxation; a sophisticated series of movements and commands that will lessen the amount of tension you use and increase the amount of relaxation. Because this is quite sophisticated, let's see how this choreography works when applied to just three notes (the first three notes of a C Major scale).

The image contains two musical staves in 4/4 time. The first staff shows the first three notes of a C Major scale: C4 (second line), D4 (second space), and E4 (third line). Fingerings are indicated as 5, 4, and 1 respectively. A bracket spans the first two notes. The second staff shows the same notes with red annotations: '1. Left Hand frets note' (pointing to the first note), '2. Right Hand plucks note' (pointing to the first note), '3. Right Hand relaxes' (pointing to the second note), and '4. Left Hand relaxes' (pointing to the second note). A bracket spans the first two notes with the text 'Repeat Process' below it.

Play the above example and pay very close attention to your treatment of tension and relaxation. Try to hone in on your individual hands - is your left hand holding tension the entire time? Your right hand too?

Here is the sequence:

1. Left Hand frets note (tension)
2. Right Hand immediately plucks note (tension)
3. Right Hand immediately relaxes (relaxation)
4. Left Hand lifts to get to the next note (relaxation)

You can apply this sequence to any piece, study, passage or exercise. Every action of tension is balanced out with an action of relaxation.

Practicing this sequence requires a very slow tempo but gives you great results for developing speed.

It's interesting to note that the right hand's actions occur rapidly, while the left hand's occur comparably slower.

4) Economy of movement

Regulating your movements is yet another foundational aspect of playing that should be addressed even without concern for developing speed.

Unnecessary movements

Movements that are unnecessary can negatively affect your musicality by adding all kinds of pauses, hiccups and delays. Obviously these movements will also hinder your ability to play fast!

- Pay careful attention to the muscle groups (as discussed earlier) that are not required to play. Are they moving? If so, to what degree can you minimize those movements?
- Generally, you only need to move your hands, wrists and arms in special circumstances (for example, when shifting).

Large movements

Large movements result in slow playing. The larger the movement, the slower the playing.

- Pay careful attention to the muscle groups that are required to play. Could those parts move more efficiently?
- Each action of the finger involves a backwards and forwards movement. Ensure that the back swing and forward swing are carefully regulated to not move more than needed.

Practice scales with careful attention to your economy of movement
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5) Chunks and bursts

Chunks refer to breaking down rapid passages into smaller pieces.

Bursts refer to practicing fast for short periods of time.

Combining these together makes for a powerful way to develop speed:

- 1) Chunk out pieces or scales into small bits
- 2) Practice those small bits in fast bursts

Play the chunks:

- Soft and light
- With a regulated hierarchy of accents
- With a careful choreography of tension and relaxation
- With refined economy of movement

The image shows a musical score for the right and left hands. The right hand part is written in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a sequence of notes with accents (*i*, *m*, *i*, *m*, *i*, *m*) and fingerings (3, 0, 2, 3, 0, 2, 0, 1). The left hand part is written in bass clef and includes four distinct bursts, each marked with a red vertical line. Burst 1 has fingerings 3, 0, 2, 3, 0, 2, 0, 1. Burst 2 has fingerings 3, 0, 1, 3, 1, 3, 4. Burst 3 has fingerings 3, 1, 3, 1, 0, 3. Burst 4 has fingerings 0, 2, 0, 3, 2, 0. The piece concludes with a repeat sign.

Apply these burst rhythms to scales

Four scale exercises are presented, each on a single staff in treble clef. Exercise a) shows a scale with a fermata at the end. Exercise b) shows a scale with a fermata at the end. Exercise c) shows a scale with triplets (3) and a fermata at the end. Exercise d) shows a scale with triplets (3) and a fermata at the end.



Task 1

Record one video and:

1. Play one scale and apply the principles that you're weakest at.
2. Think of ways that these principles apply to the pieces you're playing. Give examples and a demonstration in your video.