

# **10 Skills Every Intermediate Guitarist Should Have**

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# SKILL #1: Clarity

**Why this matters:** Lack of clarity about your goals will keep you a mediocre guitar player.

## The Test:

Do you know how you want to sound in a year or two?

**Your Score:** \_\_\_/10

(1 = I practice random things every day / 10 = Every part of my routine builds the sound I'm aiming for)

## The Fix:

Name 3-5 guitarists you want to sound like and 1-3 core skills from each that you want to become part of your playing.

### Guitarists:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### Skills:

## Action Plan

- Become crystal clear about which guitarists you want to base your sound around
- Write down your desired skills
- Audit your current practice routine - what doesn't serve your vision?
- Restructure your practice around skills you want to develop
- Apply the filter to every new song/technique: "Does this move me closer to my ultimate sound?"

## SKILL #2: Ear

**Why this matters:** If your ears are weak, your development as a guitarist and musician is greatly hindered.

**The Test:** Can you figure out a basic chord progression or simple melody by ear — without looking it up?

**Your Score:** \_\_\_/10

(1 = I need tabs for everything / 10 = I can figure out anything by ear)

**The Fix:** Pick one short musical idea every day (4-chord loop, vocal melody, or short lick — 5-10 seconds max). Loop it. Figure it out by ear.

### Action Plan:

- Stop relying on tabs and YouTube tutorials for everything
- Commit to 5 minutes of daily ear training — no exceptions
- Start with simple material: vocal melodies from pop songs, basic chord progressions
- Focus on absorbing phrasing, dynamics, and feel - not just notes
- When you are ready, start transcribing your favorite guitar solos, riffs and grooves.

## SKILL #3: Fretboard Orientation

**Why this matters:** If you don't have a clear mental map of the fretboard, you can't really master guitar.

**The Test:** Can you find the root note of any key all over the fretboard without thinking?  
Can you play the same lick in multiple spots on the neck?

**Your Score:** \_\_\_/10

(1 = I feel lost as soon as I leave the first pentatonic box / 10 = I can find roots, navigate keys, and connect positions without confusion)

### **The Fix:**

Pick a fretboard orientation system and practice it daily. Choose a system that makes the most sense to you.

### **Action Plan (for 2 Shape System):**

- Learn the two octave shapes if you don't know them already
- Pick one key per day and find all its root notes across the neck
- Watch the full breakdown of 2 Shape System: <https://youtu.be/b-dKiYadmz8>
- Fill octave shapes with your go-to scale (minor pentatonic, major, etc.)
- Practice the same lick in multiple positions so the logic of the fretboard becomes obvious

## SKILL #4: Rhythm

**Why this matters:** Weak rhythm makes you unlistenable — no matter how good everything else is. If your time is shaky, you'll always sound like an amateur.

**The Test:** Record yourself playing a simple groove with a metronome for 1 minute. Can you stay locked in the whole time? Does it feel tight on playback, or do you hear yourself drift?

**Your Score:** \_\_\_/10

(1 = I can't stay locked into a groove for more than a few bars / 10 = I can lock in with a loop or band and stay in the pocket)

**The Fix:** Start paying closer attention to rhythm and groove. Practice locking into tight grooves daily, record yourself and compare to the original.

### Action Plan:

- Pick one song with a tight groove (*Good Times* by Chic, *Cissy Strut* by The Meters, or *Who Did You Think I Was* by John Mayer)
- Loop it and play along — match the \*feel\*, not just the notes
- Focus on accents, muting, timing, and space between notes
- Record yourself and compare to the original
- Groove is like an accent in a foreign language. You don't learn it through drills. You learn it through immersion and imitation.

## SKILL #5: Technique

**Why this matters:** You can't fix sloppy technique just by playing more. You just get better at being sloppy. Bad mechanics become automatic if you don't fix them.

**The Test:** Does your playing feel out of control and unpredictable, or do you have full command over what your hands are doing?

**Your Score:** \_\_\_/10

(1 = My playing feels out of control and unpredictable / 10 = I have full command over what my hands are doing)

**The Fix:** Sloppy technique has to be fixed one mindful repetition at a time. Watch for extra movements, tension, and poor finger positioning in every rep.

### Action Plan:

- Pick one lick, riff, or chord change that feels messy
- Slow it down and watch/feel both hands — find the tension, extra motion, or sloppy transitions
- Repeat with the intention to improve each rep (even if you can't, the intention matters)
- Don't move on until you can do it cleanly three times in a row
- Add contrast for deeper learning:
  - Play with exaggerated tension, then minimal tension (feel the difference)
  - Alternate slow and fast (keeps your brain engaged)
  - Change the rhythm (forces better sync between picking and fretting)
  - Move it to different positions/strings/keys (solidifies the movement)

## SKILL #6: Personal Repertoire

**Why this matters:** Most intermediate players practice until they get bored, not until things get mastered. Without a repertoire you revisit and refine, your newly built skills have nowhere to live — and you'll lose them.

**The Test:** Do you have 3-5 pieces you keep coming back to and improving over time?

**Your Score:** \_\_\_/10

(1 = I don't have anything I keep coming back to — I just move on / 10 = I'm building a personal repertoire of pieces I revisit regularly and improve over time)

**The Fix:** Build a personal library of pieces that reflect the player you want to become (solos, riffs, grooves — anything that develops your target skills). Revisit them on a spaced schedule to keep improving.

### Action Plan:

- Pick 3-5 pieces that reflect the kind of player you want to become (not full songs necessarily — could be solos, riffs, or grooves you want to absorb)
- Practice each one to the best version you're capable of right now — and record it
- Keep it alive with spaced repetition:
  - First week: every other day
  - Week 2-3: every 3 days
  - After that: once a week
- Each time you revisit, focus on polishing one tiny detail or increasing speed
- Rotate through all your pieces on this schedule — they'll improve over time instead of being forgotten

## SKILL #7: Deliberate Practice

**Why this matters:** Most guitarists never ask "What's the one thing I need to fix today?" Without that question, practice turns into busywork — and you spin your wheels without real progress.

**The Test:** Do you start each practice session with a specific target, or do you just play whatever comes to mind?

**Your Score:** \_\_\_/10

(1 = I just play whatever comes to mind, with no real structure / 10 = Every session has a specific target, and I can clearly see progress week to week)

**The Fix:** Always practice with a clear target. Identify which skill needs work, choose material that develops it, and track your progress. Don't just pick up the guitar and play whatever — have a plan.

### Action Plan

- Before each session make sure you know answers to these questions:
  - "If I could only fix one thing today, what would it be?"
  - "What frustrates me most about my playing right now?"
- Focus your practice time around 1-3 core skills — don't spread yourself too thin
- Choose material that targets your weak skill:
  - Shaky rhythm? → Work on grooves
  - Weak fretboard navigation? → Same lick in multiple positions/2 Shape System
  - Underdeveloped ear? → Transcribe by ear for 10 minutes
- Make the session about SOMETHING — not warming up for 20 minutes, then scales, then noodling
- Track your progress:
  - Write down what you worked on
  - What improved
  - What still needs work
- Be honest: record yourself, compare to last week — trust the playback, not your feelings

## SKILL #8: Mindset

**Why this matters:** When you expect too much, too soon, you're always frustrated with where you are. That mindset wrecks your motivation, ruins your focus, and makes practice feel like it's not even worth it.

**The Test:** Are you constantly beating yourself up for not being good enough, or can you show up consistently and trust the process?

**Your Score:** \_\_\_/10

(1 = I constantly beat myself up for not being good enough / 10 = I show up consistently and trust the process — without needing instant results)

**The Fix:** Stop expecting to fix everything today. Practice patience by being patient. Practice discipline by showing up when you don't feel like it. Show up without judgment and accept whatever level you're at.

### Action Plan

- Accept the paradox: "The problem with patience and discipline is that developing each of them requires both of them." — Thomas M. Sterner
- You can't force yourself to be patient — you build patience by being patient in the process
- Real discipline is built when you don't feel like it — and you still do the work
- Stop beating yourself up — mastering guitar is a never-ending process (you'll always be a student). You are exactly where you need to be.
- Remember Kenny Werner's mindset: "Approach every practice session like brushing your teeth. No matter how well you do it today, you have to do it again tomorrow."
- Just for today: pick up the guitar, get to work, and enjoy getting better

## SKILL #9: Musical Intelligence

**Why this matters:** If you lack musical intelligence, your musicianship will forever stay capped. No matter how much you practice.

**The Test:** Can you explain why a lick works over a chord progression? Can you hear when the harmony changes and resolves? Do you understand the connection between harmony and melody?

**Your Score:** \_\_\_/10

(1 = I'm just memorizing patterns. I don't understand what I'm playing / 10 = I understand how melody, harmony, and rhythm work together)

**The Fix:** Stop just learning songs and licks. Start analyzing and understanding them.

### Action Plan

- Pick one song or solo you already know well
- Listen again and analyze:
  - What's the chord progression doing? Where does it resolve? Is there a modulation?
  - How does the melody work with the chords? Which notes are chord tones? Which are passing tones?
  - What makes the rhythm groove? Where are the accents?
- If this doesn't make sense yet, start with the basics:
  - Watch basic music theory lessons on YouTube (intervals, scales, how chords are built)
  - Look for musical analysis videos of your favorite songs and solos
- The goal: understand how great players create music that moves you
- Once you understand it, you can start applying it to your own playing

## SKILL #10: Composition

**Why this matters:** Creating your own music solidifies what you know and reveals the gaps in your technique and knowledge. It is one of the best tools to improve your musicianship.

**The Test:** Do you create any music of your own, or do you just repeat what other people composed?

**Your Score:** \_\_\_/10

(1 = I don't create any music — I just repeat what other people composed / 10 = I regularly create licks, grooves, and arrangements to solidify my knowledge)

**The Fix:** Start creating music. Don't wait for inspiration or to be "ready." Just start. Create licks, solos, riffs, grooves — anything that's yours.

### Action Plan

- Stop waiting for permission — you already have enough to start
- Create anything that interests you:
  - Work on other people's solos? Try extending them.
  - Learning licks? Create your own licks to develop vocabulary and technique
  - In a band? Compose riffs or grooves
- Don't worry about being good or original — just create something YOU like
- Start small:
  - Create a 2-bar lick in the style you're working on
  - Or a 4-bar groove that has balls
- Record it. Keep it. Build on it.
- Remember: The only way to get good at creating music is to create more music.

## What's Next?

You've scored yourself on all 10 skills. Now you know exactly where you stand.

Here's what to do:

1. **Circle your 2-3 lowest scores** - these are your biggest gaps. This is where your focus goes first.
2. **Use the action plans** - build your practice routine around suggested exercises
3. **Be honest about your progress** - come back to this PDF in 3 months and score yourself again

Remember: Developing even one of these skills will move you further than jumping around with no plan.

### Need personalized feedback on your playing?

Can't figure out what's holding you back? That's perfectly normal. We all have our own blindspots. But after working with hundreds of students exactly like you, I can figure out what the problem is in a matter of minutes.

I am offering a **Guitar playing feedback (€47)**

#### Here's how it works:

- You send me your scores + a short video of you playing
- I watch it before our call
- We meet for 45 minutes
- I tell you exactly what is not working and how to fix it
- You get a concrete practice plan

### [Book here](#)

After you pay, you'll get the form for your scores/video and the link to book your time.

Limited spots: I only do 3-4 of these per week.

Now stop reading and get to work.

You've got this.

-Lukk