

I'm having difficulty memorizing. Should I try to memorize the musical score or the finger patterns on the fretboard, or should I think in terms of chords?

The more you understand the language and structure of a piece, the easier it will be to memorize. The same is true with any form of learning that involves complex thought patterns. We've all had the experience at one time or another, for example, of trying to memorize poetry or lines from a play. The ease or difficulty of that process is determined by one's understanding of the emotional, historical, personal, and structural context of what an author is expressing. If you perceive the text as merely unrelated individual words or sentences, or as unintelligible sounds (as in a foreign language), the brain has little incentive to retain it. However, if you understand the words and *integrate them within a logical pattern of thought, memorizing becomes much easier.*

Similarly, one's ability to remember a musical score is enhanced by a clear understanding of the phrasing and the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic structure of the work. Before learning a piece, write out phrasing marks so that the structural units are clear. Indicate both small and large units of phrasing, and outline the large structure as well. Identify important harmonic landmarks and modulations. Add right- and left-hand fingerings that best express the phrasing, voicing, counterpoint, desired articulation, and chosen timbre. Then practice the music phrase by phrase and section by section.

As an example, play the line on page 51, from the Prelude to J.S. Bach's Suite BWV 996 [edited by Rosalyn Tureck, fingering by Sharon Isbin, published by G. Schirmer]. Repeat each larger phrase (indicated by the letters A, B, C, etc.) until you memorize it. Then join the phrases together one by one.

Practice the remaining lines of the Passaggio section of the Prelude in this manner. When you can play it by heart, put away the guitar and visualize the left-hand (and eventually the right-hand) finger patterns, section by section. If you have trouble playing without the score before you've done the mental work, then introduce visualization earlier, alternating it with repeated playings of each phrase. When a finger or fret is not clear, refer to the score. I prefer to visualize the fingers, frets, and strings rather than actual notes, because these are the final images sent by the brain before a sound is produced.

This combined method of analysis, motor repetition, and visualization increases not only the speed of memorization but also its solidity and staying power.

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Passaggio

Tuning: $\frac{1}{2}$ C VII
DADGBE

The score consists of six measures, each with a circled letter label (A-F) and a dashed line indicating a phrase. Measure A starts with a *mf* dynamic. Measure B includes a circled '2' above the staff. Measure C includes a circled '2' above the staff. Measure D includes a circled '2' above the staff. Measure E includes a circled '2' above the staff. Measure F includes a circled '2' above the staff and a 'y' symbol at the end. Chord diagrams are provided above the staff: VII (DADGBE), C IV (C4), (Dominant) V/ (G5), and I (Tonic) (D4). A 'WG' symbol with a wavy line is also present above the staff in measure F.

How do you relax and concentrate before and during a performance? Sometimes I become tense and nervous on stage, and my playing suffers.

In order to be relaxed and confident, it is essential to be well prepared long before the concert. Learn the music fluently and conscientiously as much in advance as possible. Once you have learned a piece, rehearse it from start to finish to explore the full range of musical expression and to develop the requisite physical and mental stamina. You may still need to isolate sections to address specific technical challenges.

Strengthen memory and concentration skills by practicing each of the pieces mentally, without the instrument. To do this, visualize all the left-hand (and eventually all the right-hand) fingering patterns while you hear the music in your mind exactly as you wish it to sound. At first, have the score handy to correct and rehearse any sections that are not clear; you may also have to work fast passages up to tempo gradually. Pace yourself so that you can visualize the entire program flawlessly, without the aid of

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scores, at least ten days before the concert. During the week prior to the concert, continue to rehearse the program with this visualization technique each day. This approach, because it is unhampered by the technical difficulties of an instrument, also allows you to develop and expand your musical goals and vision.

When you feel confident with each piece, practice playing through the entire program. You should do this daily at least ten days before a concert to develop stamina. Work on individual pieces additionally when necessary. And it is an invaluable experience to play through your program informally for others.

It is also helpful to practice some form of relaxation or meditation on a regular basis. I have done transcendental meditation since age 17, and it has been a wonderful way for me to reduce stress, reinforce memory and concentration, and expand musical expression. On the day of a concert, I follow my daily routine of meditating once in the morning for 20 minutes and then again in the afternoon. You can also introduce positive suggestions while in this trancelike state, because the mind is especially receptive. As in autohypnosis, however, only suggest ideas that are believable and realistic, and don't drill. Replacing negative thoughts about performance with positive ones can be as simple as reprogramming a computer. There is no reason to allow irrational demons—conscious or subconscious—to dominate your thinking or undermine your self-confidence.

If you have prepared effectively, there is little more to do the day of a concert than warm up with a few scales and exercises and run through the program very softly, saving your energy for the performance. You might also wish to play fast passages under tempo. Rest and relax after practicing, have a good meal about three hours before, and warm up again just before the performance. Then go for it!

If you have effectively prepared for a performance but still feel tense on stage, you might consider the question of musical and spiritual immersion. Are you really *listening* to the music you play? For the more you are engaged musically, the less time you will have to be nervous or distracted. Are you actively *feeling* the music, emotionally and spiritually? If not, your subconscious could be saying, "This whole process is a big lie, and I don't really care what happens."

After all, you have to believe in what you are doing in order to be effective, and that is possible only when you are giving it your heart and soul. You must be able to identify with and feel the music you are playing. And remember to emote in the practice room, because that is what allows your feelings to be free and open on stage.

If the issue for you is not musical or emotional, then perhaps it is psychological. One can have the best intentions and make excellent preparations but still suffer from irrational fears that block the flow of positive energy. Sometimes these fears were once

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realistic and legitimate and have carried over from earlier days when you didn't really know how to prepare effectively. With effort and determination, you can deprogram these gremlins and replace them with positive, believable thoughts. Self-hypnosis and repetitive writing can be helpful in this quest to be more in control of your conscious and subconscious patterns of thinking.

How should I practice so that I don't trip over single mistakes in a performance? I tend to memorize pieces in phrases, not by remembering notes but by visualizing the position and motion of the left hand. Hence, when I miss a note, I miss the phrase, and the whole song is interrupted.

It seems that you are immersing yourself in individual fragments without getting the big picture. Mentally coordinate the visualization of your left-hand fingers with the sound of the notes, hear the notes within the context of a phrase, and study the relationship of individual phrases to each other and to the rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic structure of the entire piece. In addition to learning individual details of a work, you must unite and integrate them into a continuum of thought that has direction and purpose.

If you form a large frame of reference built solidly on structural components, a single glitch won't derail you, because you'll know exactly where the piece is heading.