

Differential Practice

Max Rich — *Hand Mechanics Workshop*

Differential Practice Ideas for Guitar

The only rule: no two reps should ever feel the same.

Left Hand / Fretting Hand

- Play a lick using only two fingers you don't usually lean on.
- Refinger the same run differently on every single pass.
- Vary fretting pressure on purpose — overpress some notes, underpress others right to the edge of buzzing.
- Change fingertip contact point rep to rep — tip on some notes, roll onto the pad on others.
- Shift hand position mid-phrase — classical thumb-behind for the first half, rock thumb-over for the second.
- Slur a lick you always pick. Pick a lick you always slur.
- Play a passage with your eyes closed.

Right Hand / Picking & Plucking

- Play an alternate-picked lick upstrokes only, then downstrokes only.
- Flatpick something you'd normally fingerpick. Fingerpick something you'd normally flatpick.
- Move your pick's contact point every pass — near the bridge, over the pickups, over the neck.
- Change pick angle mid-passage — steep for a few notes, flat for the next few.
- Throw hybrid picking at something you'd normally flatpick start to finish.
- Let attack force wander unpredictably instead of following a planned dynamic shape.

Rhythm & Groove

- Take the same riff and change the feel — swung instead of straight, bossa instead of rock.
- Displace the same riff — start it on beat 1, then the "and" of 2, then beat 4.
- Force a 4/4 riff into 3/4 or 5/4 and see what breaks.
- Click once a bar (or only on 2 and 4) and hold your own time in between.
- Play a normally metronomic passage completely rubato — stretch and compress it on purpose.
- Drop an unpredictable extra rest or hold into a normally continuous phrase.
- Run the same lick over a different feel each day — funk, blues shuffle, straight rock.

Improv Constraints

- Improvise a full chorus on one string only.
- Ban the root note entirely and resolve every phrase without it.
- Restrict yourself to a 4-fret box you never use in that key.
- One chorus of stepwise motion only, next chorus leaps of a fourth or bigger only.
- Improvise using only the top two strings, then only the bottom two.
- Strip it to eighth notes only — no bends, no vibrato.
- Start a lick you know cold from a different scale degree than usual.

Tone, Texture & Attack

- Play a solo or riff using only dead, muted notes — no pitched notes at all.
- Vary vibrato speed and width note to note instead of one signature vibrato.
- Flip palm muting on and off unpredictably through a riff you normally mute consistently or not at all.
- Decide in the moment which notes get a slide, a hammer, or a clean pick attack.
- Play the same phrase at three different volumes back to back — whisper, normal, aggressive.

Physical & Sensory Setup

- Alternate standing and sitting for the same passage.
- Raise or drop the strap so the guitar sits somewhere unfamiliar on your body.
- Run the passage on a different guitar than usual — different neck, different string gauge.
- Capo something you've only ever played in open position.

Cognitive Load

- Sing or hum the melody while your hands play something else underneath, like a bassline.
- Have someone talk to you or ask you questions while you play something you know cold.
- Play a phrase backward — reverse the note order — to break the ingrained sequence.

*The rule that ties all of it together: the moment a rep starts feeling like the last one, it's **stopped being differential practice**.*