How to Warm Up Properly and Improve Your Guitar Practice Routine

by Adam Rafferty

Greets guitar picker! I’d like to give you a real life guitar practice routine that I live by. I actually do this every time I take a guitar out as my warm up before a practice session. So this is not just book advice, it is real life, hands on work that I do.

This printable PDF is to accompany the youtube lesson on warmup & scales.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKDoAD0r-HM

Even though the warmup is simple, I’d like to explain in detail, the thought process behind it. By understanding certain principles you can benefit more from the warmup routine. In the end, the material will appear very simple, but years of training went into the “how and why” behind it.

If you are learning guitar and music from the internet and don’t have formal training from a teacher, you may be missing out on some valuable lessons. Hopefully these pointers will help you in your journey.

The Importance of Warming Up

If you are a fingerstyle guitar player, you are most likely working on pieces or arrangements of songs. Making music of course is the main objective, but keep in mind that a piece is a “compound skill” - an assemblage of techniques.

Like an olympic diver, each move should be practiced separately. Warming up will really enhance your feeling of satisfaction and confidence in performing a piece well. Warming up properly allows you focus on your technique and relaxation without the worry of “playing a piece well”.

All too often players will pick up their guitar and struggle to get to “yesterday’s best” on an arrangement and start out their session by playing an arrangement. This poses so many difficulties! I am suggesting a different way to start your practice session.

Over the years of hanging out in music schools, jazz rehearsals and gigs and show pits (from time to time) I got to see how other musicians warm up and practice. Through watching and hearing others on all instruments, I got essential lessons that my guitar teachers actually never showed me, and it was enlightening.

For more FREE Guitar Tabs sign up at http://www.adamrafferty.com/freetabs
Why Warm Up First?

Warming up is what most athletes, musicians, dancers do. Our muscles, tendons, joints and minds (as well as our musicality) - all need to “be eased into slowly” in your practice sessions. Skills that were maybe fully awakened yesterday by the end of a practice session need to be gently re-awakened and re-discovered every time you practice.

You wouldn’t see basketball players come out cold and play a full court game with full intensity without a warmup. No, they do some jump shots, some layups, maybe a stretch after a light warmup, then play.

Proper warm up and practice in sports, dance and music helps to:

1) prevent injury
2) give structure to your practice routine
3) eliminate energy spent on guess work, which saves time
4) separate skills clearly and makes progress more measurable
5) get centered if you need to play in a stressful or high pressure situation

Warming up is not just Technical, it is Musical and Mental!

I had warmed up for years with a very technical routine that was what I now see as a 2 dimensional solution to a 3 dimensional problem.

It addressed technique, but left groove out of the technique. It was based on classical music warmups, so I was 90% of the way there in actually having a routine in the first place, but it left out the African rhythm concept needed to play jazz, blues and just about any kind of pop music.

How could I fuse groove and technical studies, with a holistic approach? I found that by practicing with a walking bassline blues / jazz groove, I could fall into a better rhythmic “pocket” and still practice technique as well.

Not only did the groove feel better and get me closer to real music, but the slower spacing of the notes allowed the fingers to slowly and naturally wake up.
The New “Groove Scale” Warmup Emerges

I decided to be my own guinea pig and start a new concept for warmup and practice routine. To re-view - the basic ideas involved are:

- The basic foundation of playing any instrument is to play notes, with a good tone, with good rhythm. Let’s just start there.

- If you practice without a deep rhythm, that gives you a 2 dimensional solution to a 3 dimensional problem - yet this is what 99% of musicians do! So...always, always groove.

- Warmup nice and slow, then the speed will come. This way the body and mind can awaken gradually and naturally thus avoiding injury.

- An optimal music making state will be achieved through proper warm up.

Scales are as Musical, Groovy, Fun and Funky as You Make Them!

I decided to boil all these ideas down to a simple idea for a guitar warmup routine. I set out to play scales with a groove like a walking bassline from the lowest note possible to the highest note possible. I mean - groove this into the ground like you need to get the place rockin!

The idea is to play the scales with the “depth of tone and swing” that I’d want from an upright bass player. This is in no means about speed - it’s about tone, groove, technique and musicality. Most guitarists obsess on technical accuracy and speed. I am suggesting a different “zone” and the home base to dedicate to.

To get this sound on the scales, all DOWNSTROKES are used. Get a nice full sound! Really though - you can use right hand fingers, a thumbpick, a flat pick or a bare thumb. Just stick to one technique for a while though - so that you develop a skill to a degree of depth rather than skip around and only skim the surface with different techniques.
You Are Awakening Both Hemispheres of the Brain

I found that by having the groove as the backbone of this warmup, my full sense of musicality, creativity and intuition became awakened. In learning about the left and right hemispheres of the brain, I learned about what is called a “whole brain state”. That means that the left and right hemispheres are functioning together.

Left brain is the more analytical half, and right brain is the creative half. Often musicians tend towards one or the other, but integrating them is “where it’s at!”.

I am convinced that deep musical concentration and thought comes from a whole brain state. This state is the perfect integration of the “analytical” left brain and creative “right brain”. Groove accesses the right brain and technique accesses the left brain.

By doing these exercises with a “pocket” you slowly awaken this whole brain state - and this is the zone where all works of genius and magical music emerge from. And, the more you make your home base “the groove” anything that falls outside that simply won’t feel right.

The result? Practice becomes fun, easy and joyful.

Technique With Music In Mind

Many people really get turned off at the idea of scales. Remember - you are doing this to make your music making easier and comfortable. After practicing these for weeks, months - your fingers will auto-magically obey your mind, better than ever.

I actually think that scales are fun and relaxing - and when I see how I improve, it is very motivating. I enjoy the groovy way I do it, and enjoy that it warms me up so well. It is far easier for me to play my arrangements if I have done a proper warm up than if I just try to play the arrangements “cold”.

Take Breaks and Take it Easy!

The mind and body work best in a relaxed manner, with breaks for every 15 minutes of practice. Your mind usually retains the beginning and ending of a practice or study session - so the more breaks you take, the more beginnings and endings you’ll have, and the better you will feel.

Musicians who try to do it all and “slay the dragon” in any one practice session can easily hurt themselves. No macho men wanted here! Be gentle.
This leads me to wisdom taught to me by Mike Longo, which I give to you: “Don’t look for results”.

Yes, just put the time in and be gentle. Take breaks and do not over-do. Always aim for comfort. Your results may come in a month or even a few months.

A good goal of yours would be this - to play your scales slowly, groovily, and impeccably with a great tone and no mistakes within the next 6 months. Yes, give it time just like if you were to plant seeds. You wouldn’t dig them up after a day to see if they were growing!

Here’s The Nitty Gritty:
How to Play it on the Guitar
(and it is pretty easy!)

I’d like to get you up and running as fast as possible - and in order to do that, I’d like to separate the “what” from the “how”.

Essentially I have described the “how” thus far - i.e. how to practice the scales. Groove, loose, down-strokes, mental attitude, etc.

Here comes the “what” - i.e. the fingerings and the order in which to do them. Rather than overload you with a million scales, let’s start with one and proceed slowly.

Tips to Make Playing this Easy

Relax in between each note, just a little.

When playing your 1st left hand finger to your 2nd finger, go from the first finger, playing relaxed and in position to the next 2nd finger, relaxed - and leave space between the notes, rather than “stretch” from one to the next.

You may need to shift your ENTIRE left hand during the scale to keep the fingers relaxed.

Major Scale - 3 notes per string
(more will follow in later lessons)

Of course there are a million fingerings one could use, but I like the 3 note per string approach. Why? Because as you learn new scales, you can easily spot the differences between the scales. It’s simple!
Learn this scale starting on the 3rd fret - root note is “G”. Once you have the confidence to play it fairly well in the key of G, we will use what is commonly called the “Circle of 5ths” to practice this scale in all 12 keys.

Actually - I like going up a 4th every time, but it is the same idea. If you have no idea what a 4th or 5th is - don’t worry. I will explain...

Basically to go up a 4th, I am going “backwards” through the circle - (counter clockwise) The “guitar” explanation is - always make your next scale either 5 frets up or 7 frets down, whatever fits best.

For example, if you start on G you’ll play the major scales in the following order. Each note is the root of the scale and you will start on this on the low E string:

G, C, F, Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, B, E, A, D

You can start anywhere as long as you do all 12 keys. I basically start on G or F and go counterclockwise.

Circle of Fifths:

Why the circle? I like it because it sounds musical and immediately gets you all over the neck instead of depressingly crawling up one fret at a time. More fun - that’s why. That’s the best reason of all!!!

If you can establish a routine the first week where you are able to play these 12 major scales on the guitar - you are probably ahead of 90% of the guitarists in the world. Give it 10-15 minutes a day at the opening of your practice session. Congratulations!

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What About All the Minor Scales and Other Fingerings...It’s Endless, Oh Nooo!!!

I am only providing a simple major scale, no more. Why? Because this is about DOING it rather than getting bogged down with endless scales and feeling like there is no end.

This is easy. Learn the one scale, and start using it as a warm up, every day. Get started NOW!

It may take you a little time to work out the fingerings for the first 3 note per string scales so that you can play them smoothly. Once the fingerings are automatic, this is basically a rhythm, tone and technique practice routine. Don’t think scales - think fun groovy stuff. Like I said, this is fun for me because I play around with rhythm as I do these.

Enjoy this and make pretty music for your listeners. I wish someone had given me this lesson long ago! Do this for a month and watch what happens! You’ll be amazed.

The G Major Scale is on the next page... Learn that, and then move it up & down the neck to play it in different keys...
G Major Groove Scale - Adam Rafferty (c) 2010.

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“Thank you so much for all the help you have given me this year and all the years before. You are the greatest. I have been gigging more than ever lately (jazz gigs), and my playing wouldn’t be nearly what it is without the all the things you have taught me. I look forward to learning more in the future and enjoying a wonderful friendship as well.

Take care, - Kurt “
“How To Play The Music of STEVIE WONDER” DVD Video

Grab Your Guitar and Start Playing These Incredible Stevie Wonder Arrangements For Solo Fingerstyle Guitar NOW!

Take a 110 minute lesson with one of the top acoustic fingerstyle guitarists on the scene today.

In his friendly and patient teaching style, Adam Rafferty shows you 4 of his favorite Stevie Wonder fingerstyle arrangements slowly, note for note.

He’ll show YOU how to do his special “pop, click, pick and slap” techniques which help make these solo arrangements some of the funkiest, most grooving versions of these songs available to guitarists today! Also covered are walking basslines, harp-like chords, and how to make the guitar parts “lock up” like a full band.

You’ll be able to play solo guitar versions of 4 classic Stevie Wonder songs, SUPERSTITION, I WISH, OVERJOYED and SIR DUKE. No music reading required, all tablature is included with the printed material!

Here’s Just Some of What You’ll Get:

• You’ll get split screen views which show left and right hand techniques clearly
• You’ll get tips and techniques for playing basslines and melodies at the same time
• You’ll get easy to understand tablature and notation for all the arrangements

Read These Real Life Comments from Youtube Viewers Who Bought the DVD!

“Adam, just got my DVDman..its so much fun..thanks for making it and arranging this wonderful music!. I have bought stuff from Adam before in the past and he always has a great approach to teaching. Some can play and can’t teach, some can teach and can’t play...Adam definitely can do both and makes it fun!”

“I just bought DVD for my son and he is learning guitar for about 3 years. He just completed his middle school concert and played one of this songs with the band. When I saw this I immediately decided to give him an opportunity to learn from masters like you. Hope he enjoys it. - Srini”

“Adam, I started to learn superstition with the existing 2 youtube lessons and acquire the hammer technique but I’m eager to learn more. I will definitely order you DVD as soon as it is available. Thanks so much, you rock ~ Gerald”

“I’m SO excited! I FINALLY ordererd the DVD three days ago. Since I’m only 13, I can’t exactly order it my self. It took 2 weeks of begging and chores for my mom to finally agree to get it for me. I’ve already figured out the bass part and I’m ready to learn more! =] Thanks alot Adam!”

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NEW! How To Play the Music of THE JACKSON FIVE

They’ll love your playing even more when they hear you play the songs that made Michael Jackson famous.

Each one of these well known songs is sure to get you the respect and admiration of your listeners. They’ll “groove” along as you play “I Want You Back”, “ABC”, “I’ll Be There” and “Never Can Say Goodbye”

These great songs are becoming quite popular again amongst the younger generation due to contemporary artists who are performing these covers today (KT Tunstall, Sheryl Crow, John Mayer, Mariah Carey)

Choosing the right songs will surely help you “communicate” musically across several musical generations. (Note - this could very well have a direct financial impact on the life of a working musician...)

- You’ll get complete tablature and notation included in an accompanying booklet (30 + pages)
- You’ll get in-depth video performances and lessons of each song
- You’ll get split screen views to see right and left hand techniques clearly
- You’ll get move by move, note by note explanations of how to play the songs so you can learn at your own pace
- You’ll get clear explanations and demonstrations of slaps, pops and special groove techniques
- You’ll get tips on effective practicing and maximizing your practice time
- You’ll get encouraging and inspiring words of wisdom to keep you on track in your practice sessions
- You’ll get instruction to songs that will make people will recognize and appreciate
- You’ll get a higher degree of audience attention and admiration than ever before

DR Dave Walker Had this to Say..

“Adam Rafferty has produced an amazing educational DVD that combines brilliant arrangements of classic songs, note-perfect performances, and the most meticulous instruction you will find anywhere. I highly recommend this DVD to all guitarists. Even if you don’t think you are a Jackson Five fan, this DVD might just prove you wrong!”

“While Adam has been garnering a large fan base across the globe for his playing and arranging, he has made equally huge steps in his teaching. Watching him teach these arrangements on the DVD inspired me to dub him “The World’s Most Patient Guitar Teacher.” His note-by-note breakdown of each song will ensure that anyone with the drive to learn any of these songs will be successful.”

“Beyond the four songs, Adam shares a great variety of tips and techniques that only a master guitarist would know. You will be able to use these right away, to improve your playing of songs you already know.”

For Quick and Easy Ordering 24 hrs / 7 Days a Week, Visit http://www.adamrafferty.com/store
“How To Solo Over II-V-I Changes” DVD Video

Jazz Guitar Made Simple.

Take a 90 minute lesson with one of the top jazz & blues guitarists on the scene today! Boost your bebop vocabulary quickly and easily.

In his friendly and patient teaching style, Adam Rafferty shows you 14 of his favorite II-V-I lines slowly, note for note. No music reading required!

You’ll see clearly how jazz lines fit against chord changes. Split screen views allow clear views of right and left hand techniques.

Here’s What YOU’LL GET:

- 14 II-V-I Lines
- harmonic vs non-harmonic tones
- tips on picking speed and technique
- soloing over minor II-V-I
- how to get the lines into your real-life playing
- how lines fit on tunes like “Satin Doll” (examples given)
- wes montgomery octave style

A comprehensive booklet with all the tablature, fingerings and examples from this Jazz Guitar Instructional DVD can be downloaded as a FREE pdf file.

“Adam,

Just got the video today, and just finished watching it all the way through. Fantastic!! I can’t get over how good it is! Very professional look, polished, easy to follow, etc, etc.. It really inspired me to pick up the guitar and play along.

The close-up on the hands and inset of picking is great, and makes it all very easy to follow. I watched while you spoon fed the lines to me and it worked perfectly. No problem keeping up with what was happening. Has that relaxed feel like you are there in the same room.

It is really cool the way you play the lines with different feels. The ad lib stuff (here’s something Wes would do, how to play 3/4, etc.) was great. I could go on and on, but the bottom line is this a really great video!!!

This is as good as any video in my collection, if not the best. I can’t wait to start really working on these lines. I have a gig tonight, and feel really inspired to play, and try to apply these lines and the feel. I would absolutely recommend this video to friends. Thanks so much - I’ll get a lot of use out of it. Like I said before, can’t wait to spend so more time working through the material. Thanks, -Kurt”

Kurt Bittner, Sacramento CA
Have you been wanting to improve your guitar technique but just didn’t know how to go about it?

Do you find yourself “digging in” too hard and getting stuck in the middle of fast passages?

Do you ever feel unsure of the proper fingerings that enable you to execute a musical idea?

Well, jazz guitarist Adam Rafferty has completely solved these problems for you along with many others encountered by most guitarists playing today.

Your Problem is Solved...

Adam’s amazing new manual called “How to Develop Virtuoso Single Line Technique for Jazz Guitar” with exercises and diagrams including complete fingerings will provide you with a daily 15 minute routine enabling you to develop a “touch” that will have you gliding through lightning fast solo passages easier than you could ever imagine!

And what’s more this easy to follow, step by step approach is so simple that even a child could do it!

“Dear Adam,

With the time I spent working on Exercise one, it has already paid off. I have been going through the Hanon exercises and working on just playing at fast tempos.

I am seeing some excellent progress in my playing. Last Saturday night I played a gig with my regular top 40 (oldies top 40) band and not only did I feel that I was more relaxed on the up tempos pieces but that my playing in general was more relaxed.

Speed wasn’t an issue that night.

If I had been the only one to notice it would have been good but the whole band really commented. The Bass player, who is very critical, commented that it was like I was ‘On Fire’.

I know that I will keep it up and it will really pay off. I work a 50 hour a week job and have a family so I get in a little over an hour a day on average practicing and this is now part of my routine.”

Frank Markovich (Guitarist)
Belmont, CA
“How To Create Single Note Jazz Guitar Lines That Outline Chord Changes”

Do YOU want to expand YOUR jazz vocabulary?
Do YOU want to play solo lines over “tricky changes” with ease and fluidity?
Do YOU want to play music YOUR OWN WAY, rather than through imitation?
Do YOU want to feel more confident in various playing situations?
Do YOU want to be able to digest new tunes more quickly and easily?
Do YOU want to feel comfortable when you “jam” with new people?
Do YOU want to have a “jump start” on tunes like “Giant Steps” and “Rhythm Changes?”

This in-depth manual shows you how to build your own creative melodies on II-V-I changes, and even shows you how to cut through “Rhythm Changes” and “Giant Steps” like a hot knife through butter!

Here’s What You’ll Get:

You’ll get a 104 + page spiral bound book (lays flat on your music stand)
You’ll get 2 CD Roms - with 189 of the books musical examples - you can hear them at the touch of a button!
You’ll get a step by step method, included with Homework assignments at the end of each chapter
You’ll get example solos with full explanations for Coltrane’s “Giant Steps”
You’ll get example solos with full explanations for “Rhythm Changes”
You’ll get several II-V-I lines in both major and minor keys
You’ll get practice chord progressions to “plug your lines” into
You’ll get to see how pianistic, choir like harmonies fits on guitar
You’ll get loads of personal insights throughout the course
You’ll get solid practice techniques - so that you can get the most out of even a short practice session
You’ll get a full-blown explanation of when to use notes outside the harmony vs. notes inside the harmony in creating solo lines
You’ll get “absorption techniques” which “force” you ears, eyes, fingers and brain to absorb new harmonic material - at warp speed!
“Adam, Thank you for another great workshop and an AWESOME new Book on how to ‘create single lines that outline chord changes’!

I really admire your abilities not only as a guitar player but as a teacher. You just get to the guys. You seem to have no insecurities about any of it and you are so encouraging.

I’ve been working on the new book and can already see something happening. My Dad, who was a great piano player, told me before he died “really, everything you need is in here.” Of course I never understood how to get piano concepts onto the guitar.

It is so great that you put it together in a usable form for guitar guys. I think you are really on to something. Thank you for unlocking some new, awesome territory for me. You are the best Adam, thank you.

Your faithful student,
Lewis”

Lewis Mock, Colorado Springs

Order Now!  Click link below...

http://www.adamrafferty.com/store
Greetings Fellow Guitar Player!

It gives me great pleasure and joy to teach you the guitar and musical concepts and secrets I have learned over the years.

I have been very lucky to have the opportunity to study and play with some of the greatest musicians on the planet, from classical music to blues to jazz, and I look forward to passing as much on to you as I can.

Two things that my great teachers taught me are that 1) there are no shortcuts, but 2) it’s easy when you get the right information!

I made a “pact” with myself anytime I’d feel the “elation and delight” of unraveling musical mysteries, that I’d pass the knowledge on as best I can. This is the process of how music and learning evolve. Each generation builds on the information from the previous one and this continually raises the standard of excellence.

I also made a pact that I’d be a teacher (for you) that the “proof would be in the pudding”. I.E. - you’d want to learn from me because you actually love the music you hear come out of my fingers!

No matter what anyone’s level of talent is, we all need teachers and people who have seen things we haven’t, and basically “been around the block” more than we ourseelves have.

Your excellence matters to me. Your level of joy and creativity matters to me. Your happiness matters to me! And I thank you for entrusting me to share my knowledge with you.

I am here to coach you, teach you, kick your butt and show you how excellent you can be. Feel free to call or email me anytime for lessons, coaching, questions or just to say “Hi!” As well, if you have any questions about any of my online lessons or guitar educational products, call me.

I am here to help YOU realize your true excellence on the guitar, in music and in life!

With Warmest Regards,

Adam Rafferty